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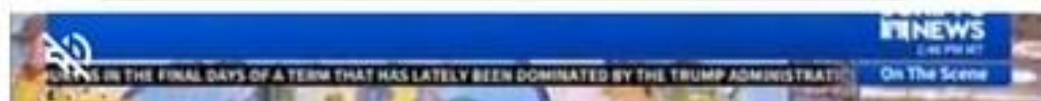


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Dance more dances: S.Ga. dancer writes memoir

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By Dean Poling



Eric Brandt Nielsen, best known for his choreography work in South Georgia, has penned a memoir, 'Showboy to Showman.' (Submitted photo)

VALDOSTA – Eric Brandt Nielsen is known in South Georgia as a dancer, choreographer and a key figure in developing a dance degree program at Valdosta State University.

Some area readers may be surprised that his work at VSU is only one part of Nielsen's recently published memoir, "Showboy to Showman: A Lifetime in the Performing Arts."

"I wrote the book for friends and family," Nielsen said in a recent interview with The Valdosta Daily Times. "... You realize how vulnerable you are when you write and publish a book like this. You reveal things you don't normally reveal."

In the book, Nielsen writes about his love of dance and being creative at an early age. But his joy for dance briefly ended.

"When my family moved to Reno in 1964, I stopped dance training after being teased and bullied by peers," Nielsen writes in the book. "It wasn't 'cool' for a boy in junior high to be taking dance classes. I eventually returned to dancing in high school, when a drama teacher assured me that male dancers were highly valued in musical theater."

Nielsen forged a career in dance. He worked professionally in dance productions such as "Hello Hollywood, Hello," a massive stage show billed as "the largest show in the world, on the largest stage in the world, in 'the biggest little city in the world'" at the MGM Grand Hotel in Reno, Nevada.

The book is filled with Nielsen's adventures on stage, in teaching and in traveling. He shares stories, insights and life lessons learned along the way. He's lived a diverse and complex life.

"The performer's life is really short lived," Nielsen said. "You have to be open to changes in your career, especially if you want to stay close to the arts. I know so many people who left the arts when they could no longer perform. ... A career in the performing arts is really tough. Being in the right place at the right time is part of that and so is getting to know people who can help you move onto the next phase of your career."

Nielsen said the non-stop grind of preparing dance productions and teaching classes led to his retirement from VSU and, in many ways, his retirement from dance. He returns to dance performance each year with a supporting role in the Dance Arts "Nutcracker" production but he said he has no interest in returning to choreography.

"I haven't had the desire," he said.

As for writing "Showboy to Showman," Nielsen said, "retirement did it. You have the time to think how fortunate you've been. You reflect on the people who have allowed you to do what you've done. The mentors who directed and guided me. It took retirement to sit back and reflect.

"I wanted to remember a lot of the things that happened in my life and thanks to the book I've heard from a lot of people that I haven't heard from in years. ... I hope the book encourages positive affirmations."

"Showboy to Showman" can be found on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Nielsen said he plans to attend a local book fair in September, participate in South Georgia Regional Library's Bookfellows and an additional library event to be scheduled.