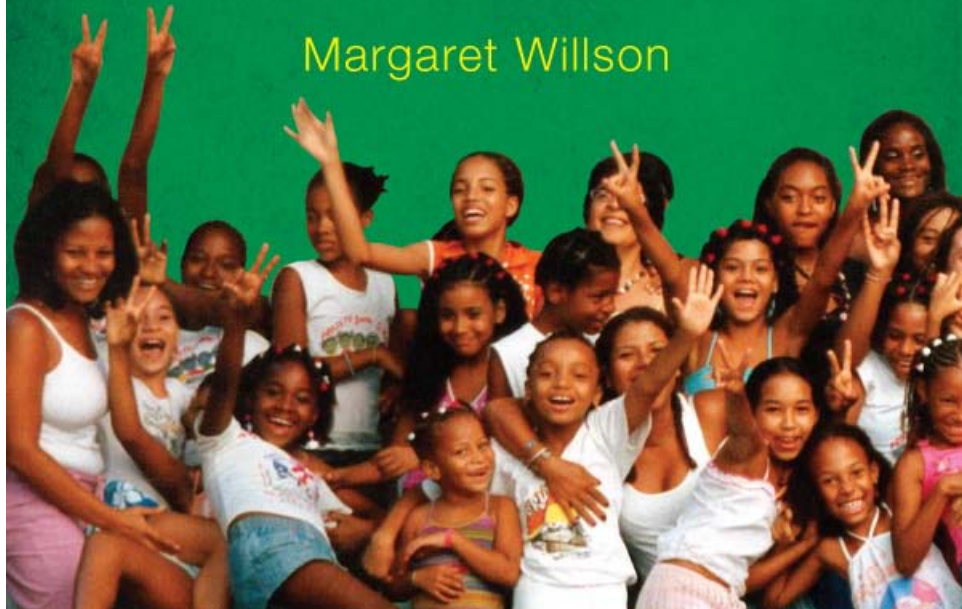


BOOK CLUB READING GUIDE

DANCE
LEST
WE ALL
FALL
DOWN

BREAKING CYCLES OF POVERTY IN BRAZIL AND BEYOND

Margaret Willson



Dance Lest We All Fall Down is available through University of Washington Press
<http://www.washington.edu/uwpress/>

Reading Guide Contents

About <i>Dance Lest We All Fall Down</i>	3
About the Author and Co-Director	4
About the Co-Director	5
A Conversation with Margaret Willson	6
<i>Dance Lest We All Fall Down</i> Discussion Questions	7-8
Suggested Viewing and Reading List	9-10
About Bahia Street	11
What You Can Do	12



ABOUT THE BOOK: DANCE LEST WE ALL FALL DOWN

Every now and then an unintended detour becomes so meaningful that it changes one's entire journey. This is a story of how one stopover in a Brazilian shantytown forever changed the life of the author and led to a global community working to end poverty for some of our world's most disadvantaged people, impoverished African-Brazilian girls.

A China scholar on a professorial track, Willson is persuaded by a Brazilian friend to take advantage of a cheap layover between Europe and Australia in Bahia, Brazil. Known for its white sand beaches and enchanting culture, Bahia is also home to vast shantytowns, grinding poverty, and unparalleled inequality. Willson, an anthropologist, lives for one month amongst this poverty and vows to return at the end of her stay. She returns to spend over three years living in the shantytowns, where she befriends Rita Conceição, an African-Brazilian activist. Together, Margaret and Rita set out to change the violence and despair they see around them.

It is a story that takes us to a world of drug dealers, street urchins, capoeiristas, English socialites, power-hungry 'do-gooders' and wise teachers from surprising corners of society. The end result is a learning center that supports African-Brazilian girls as they go from illiteracy to university. Through her well-told story of one community's effort to alleviate poverty, Willson inspires everyone working to make a difference in our world to start small, be open to learning, and not be afraid to take the journey wherever it leads you.

Written with passion and knowledge, *Dance Lest We All Fall Down* won a Silver Medal for Multicultural Literature in the 2008 Independent Book Awards. The author tells the story through dramatic interwoven episodes taken from detailed anthropological notes made at the time the events unfolded. Willson takes the reader through life-transforming encounters tinged with violence, sexuality, greed, love, betrayal and a stubborn will to survive. Readers become a part of the unique friendship between the author and her African-Brazilian activist partner and share the rise and fall of their turbulent journey from dreaming of a better world to making it a reality.



Archive pictures available on-line.

Visit the Bahia Street webpage for a PowerPoint of pictures that show Bahia Street's early beginnings and images of shantytowns:
<http://www.bahiastreet.org/bahia-street-book>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: MARGARET WILLSON

Margaret Willson is an award-winning author who has lived in diverse communities around the world. *Dance Lest We All Fall Down* brings together her experience writing for popular and academic audiences and makes her work as an anthropologist accessible to a broad cross-section of readers.

Margaret Willson left the United States at age 18 and spent five years working her way around the world in such jobs as fishing deckhand, abalone diver, farmhand, community development officer, and outdoor guide. She eventually returned to the United States where she completed an Anthropology B.A. and M.A. at Western Washington University in Washington State, focusing on Chinese and Mongolian studies. She studied creative writing with Pulitzer Prize Winner Annie Dillard and published a few short stories and a poem in literary journals, winning First Prize for Poetry in the Jeopardy Literary Contest.

In 1984, Willson left the U.S. again to do a PhD in Anthropology at the London School of Economics. Her thesis was on concepts of negotiation among Chinese traders of Papua New Guinea. She worked for the Royal Anthropological Institute as their Film Director and later worked in London (and overseas) as an anthropologist and associate producer of documentaries for British Channel Four. She received a fellowship to return to Papua New Guinea for research on the effects of media on non-literate societies. A visit to Brazil en route to this fellowship changed the focus of her research field – and her life.

Willson's experiences in Brazil, chronicled in *Dance Lest We All Fall Down*, led to her co-found Bahia Street, a non-profit organization now based in three countries (Brazil, U.S., and U.K.) dedicated to breaking the cycles of poverty through education for impoverished girls. The project began with one orphaned girl and a borrowed room in 1998 and now has its own center in Brazil, serving sixty girls and their extended communities. Bahia Street's programs include health and reproduction, nutrition, academic education, violence counseling, arts therapy, community literacy projects and microcredit lending. Six girls from the program, who were illiterate when they joined Bahia Street, have now entered university and one has graduated.

Willson has recently been recognized for her work with Bahia Street. In 2007 she received the Thomas C. Wales Award for Passionate Citizenship and in 2008 she was given the Jefferson Award for achievement and contributions through public and community service.

Willson currently lives and works in Seattle.

ABOUT BAHIA STREET'S CO-DIRECTOR: RITA CONCEIÇÃO

Rita Conceição was born in 1959 in a shantytown in Salvador, Brazil – a life of poverty few are ever able to escape. She also grew up in a turbulent time of military dictatorship that increased inequality among Brazilians. In the midst of oppression, Rita began her intellectual and political exploration. At age nine she began listening to those brave enough to speak out, befriending Salvador's leading intellectuals and joining protests.

The people she met through these experiences encouraged her to study, and she eventually won a scholarship to a quality public school (a now discontinued program). As a teenager, someone gave her a camera and she began capturing the shantytowns she knew so well. Rita also took political photos as proof to others of the resistance movement.

She decided she wanted to attend university and entered the Federal University of Bahia only after four attempts at the entrance exam. Rita studied sociology and anthropology and continued her political photography, becoming the unofficial photographer for Lula, a union labor leader who fought for workers rights and equality. Rita became the official documentarian in a project involving the Church of the Blacks, which has advocated for African Brazilian rights and equality since before abolition in 1888. She also became known as one of the only skilled female *capoeira angola* (an African Brazilian martial art) players and one of the only women to play lead instruments in *capoeira* gatherings.

In the mid 1990s, Bahia elected a governor who fired nearly all city workers, replacing those in lower level jobs with others at much lower wages. Rita was the only person in her department fired in this sweep. She was also the only African Brazilian woman with a middle management position; consequently, she sued the city for racial discrimination and won.

In Brazil, the tiny number of African Brazilians who escape poverty move to predominantly white middle class neighborhoods. Although equipped with nearly all the means to do so, Rita has remained in the shantytown of her birth despite increasing violence and health dangers. When once asked why she stayed, Rita replied, “No one is going to change our communities for us. If I don't care enough to stay, how can I expect activism from anyone else?”

In 1997 with Dr. Margaret Willson, Rita founded Bahia Street. With almost no initial money and only the support of local shantytown residents, they created a program to provide quality education for young women and girls from Salvador's shantytowns. For the first two years, Rita dedicated herself to this project with no salary at all. After two years, the project was able to pay US\$100 a month but over the next two years she only accepted \$250 of this – for a new camera. In addition to running the Center, Rita has also overseen its reconstruction.

Rita has worked for equality for African-Brazilians her whole life, giving particular attention to the children who live in the shantytowns of Salvador. Her work has inspired projects well beyond Bahia Street extending to other parts of the world. In 2008 she received the World of Children Humanitarian Award in recognition of her life's work.

A CONVERSATION WITH MARGARET WILLSON

***Dance Lest We All Fall Down* focuses on programs provided to impoverished girls in Salvador. Why did you choose to focus on girls?**

We created Bahia Street with ideas and suggestions from the shantytown community. The community decided that the focus of Bahia Street should be on educating young girls because they saw education as the only way out. Sadly, they said boys can at least sell drugs or get low paying jobs as porters and street cleaners while those aren't options for girls. In addition, girls and women are more likely to reinvest in their society and communities with the skills and opportunities they receive than are men. Since Bahia Street was founded with the idea of fostering long lasting change in order to break the cycles of violence and poverty, we want to focus our attention on the most effective means of impacting the community, so making an investment in girls' education makes sense.

The model for Bahia Street is much different than the models for most organizations for international development. Why did you develop Bahia Street in this way?

We specifically developed Bahia Street as an organization run by the community and by the residents of the shantytowns, not by white outsiders who think they know what is best for the locals. This idea contrasts sharply with the way we are accustomed to delivering aid from the developed world as it is often done according to the ideas and suggestions of people who do not fully grasp the situation at the ground level. In order to deliver to the residents of the community what they truly want and feel is most important, in this case education, the power must remain in the hands of the community itself. Because of this, the US and UK based Bahia Street organizations do not have power over the operations of Bahia Street Brazil. They act as fundraising and support for the operations in Salvador which are then run by the local director, Rita Conceição.

In the book you tell the story of your love for Salvador and the development of Bahia Street. What do you hope readers will take away from this story?

I wanted to share with others the insights I have gained, what I have learned from the people I have met, how through the struggles and hardship people can find joy and strength. I also wanted to show people how, if we reach out to others, we can all make a difference in our own communities and around the world.

Will Bahia Street expand to serve more girls or other communities?

Bahia Street's growth model is based on keeping the project central and building from the core. We have no plans to increase the number of girls that we serve, and we would never create a new Bahia Street Center in another city given our belief that leadership for social change best comes from local communities. We do, however, plan to extend our reach to more groups within Salvador and support them as they address their most pressing needs. Rita aspires to make the Center a Women's Center to help local women address a variety of issues, from domestic violence to the need for adult literacy classes. And we devote considerable effort to supporting, training, and responding to people beyond Brazil with an interest in starting or sustaining their own projects in other parts of the world. By inspiring people to get involved in social change, we are expanding Bahia Street well beyond the girls that we currently serve.

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What brings Margaret to Brazil? What keeps her there?
2. How does her study and practice of *capoeira* help lead her to her further involvement with the people of Salvador?
3. We meet a number of characters in Salvador, Seattle, and London during the course of this book. Who do you find most interesting or compelling and why?
4. Margaret is an anthropologist, and the book was written based on her extensive field notes. How do you think this training informed her relationships with the various people she meets along the way?
5. Discuss some of the different perceptions of women in Brazil compared to the United States with regards to sexuality, beauty, strength, and rights.
6. Both Margaret and Rita face difficulties in setting up Bahia Street. They both wanted it to be community based and operated. How does this make the program stronger? How does this also contribute to the difficulties in getting it established and in its continuing operation?
7. How are the girls chosen for inclusion in the program? What did the directors learn that would help the girls succeed, and how did that lead to changes in the selection process?
8. The directors quickly discovered they needed to provide more than tutoring. What else was needed? How did the directors change their approach?
9. Discussions and perceptions of race permeate the book. How is racism manifested in Brazil? How does this compare with the U.S.?
10. The African-Americans described visiting the program held assumptions about race. What were they? Discuss race in the U.S. vs. Brazil.
11. Explore the religious practices of the African-Brazilians in Salvador. How did Margaret discover her *orixa*?
12. Margaret had to face her self-described inadequacies in setting up the organization. Many times she questioned what she had gotten into. Have you experienced something similar when you felt you had “bitten off more than you could chew”? How did her inexperience help or hurt the establishment of Bahia Street?
13. At one point Margaret realizes, “I would always be a stranger in Salvador. I wanted to go home. I just wasn’t sure where that was.” Why would she say this? What role does culture play in one’s identification of home?

14. Although Margaret always stands out as a foreigner in Bahia, many locals recognize that her spirit makes her one of them. What factors affect how you are perceived and accepted (or not accepted) in a different cultural setting?
15. Discuss the title. Why was it chosen? What references are made to dancing throughout the book?
16. Some people might describe Bahia Street as a development project because it is a “first world” funded entity operating in a “developing” country. What does the term “development” mean, and how is Bahia Street different from how most non-profits address poverty?
17. Margaret and Rita quickly realize that power plays a role in working for social change. What is the role of power and how do they use power to their advantage?
18. Margaret has been asked several times to replicate Bahia Street in other communities in Brazil and elsewhere. Based on what you know about Bahia Street’s model for addressing poverty, how would you respond to these requests?
19. Many people read this book and want to do something to help, either within Brazil or elsewhere in the world. Does this feeling resonate with you? If so, what are you thinking about doing?

SUGGESTED READING AND VIEWING LIST

Movies

Orfeu Negro (Black Orpheus), Director Marcel Camus, 1959.

A retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, set during the time of the Carnaval in Rio de Janeiro.

Central Station, Director Walter Salles, 1998.

He was looking for the father he never knew. She was looking for a second chance. An emotive journey of a former school teacher, who write letters for illiterate people, and a young boy, whose mother has just died, in search for the father he never knew.

City of God, Director Fernando Meirelles, 2002.

Two boys growing up in a violent neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro take different paths: one becomes a photographer, the other a drug dealer.

Favela Rising, Director Jeff Zimbalist, Matt Mochary, 2005.

A man emerges from the slums of Rio to lead the nonviolent cultural movement known as Afro-reggae.

Madame Satã, Director. Karim Ainouz, 2002.

Based on a true story, Madam Satã was the infamous drag performer and capoeirista from Pernambuco. He was known as an outlaw, a homosexual, a hustler, and an artist who represented an expression against the stereotypes of black, poor, and other outcasts during the post-abolitionist era in Brazil.

O Pai O, Director Monique Gardenberg, 2007.

A comedic and refreshing film, shot right in Salvador, follows various inhabitants around Pelourinho on the last day of Carnaval.

Tropa de Elite, The Elite Squad, 2007. The movie is a semi-fictional account of the BOPE (Portuguese: *Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais*), the Special Policial Operations Battalion of the Rio de Janeiro Military Police.

Books - Fiction

Tieta. Jorge Amado, 2003. *Tieta* is the story of a rich and powerful widow of from São Paulo who returns to Agreste after 26 years. She needs to call upon her past to save the town's beaches from developments.

War of the Saints. Jorge Amado, 1995. Jorge Amado beautifully captures the mysticism and liveliness of Salvador in this book where a religious statue comes to life (and at one point runs near Bahia Street's present day location!)

Oxford Anthology of the Brazilian Short Story. K. David Jacksen, 2006. A compilation of stories, which spans four major historical periods in Brazil, they all embody the struggles and ideals of Brazilians during those time periods.

Gender; Discourse, and Desire in Twentieth-Century Brazilian Women's Literature. Cristina Ferreira-Pinto, 2004. This study explores the poetic and narrative strategies twentieth-century women use to achieve new forms of representation of the female body sexuality and desire.

Xuxa, The Mega-Marketing of Gender, Race and Modernity. Amelia Simpson, 1993. The author explores how the blond sex symbol emerged in the 1980's to become a cultural icon of extraordinary authority throughout the Americas.

The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas, Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, 1998. *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* is written as an autobiography, a chronicle of the erotic misadventures of its narrator, Brás Cubas--who happens to be dead. In pursuit of love and progeny, Cubas rejects the women who want him and aspires to the ones who reject him. In the end, he dies unloved and without heirs, yet he somehow manages to turn this bitter pill into a victory of sorts.

Family Ties, Clarice Lispector, 1984. Here are collected thirteen of the Brazilian writer's most brilliantly conceived stories, where mysterious and unexpected moments of crisis propel characters to self-discovery or keenly felt intuitions about the human condition.

Mario de Andrade: Poetry, Novel, Musicology, Art History, Literature of Brazil. 2009. Andrade was the central figure in the avant-garde movement of São Paulo for twenty years. Trained as a musician and best known as a poet and novelist, Andrade was personally involved in virtually every discipline that was connected with São Paulo modernism, and became Brazil's national polymath.

Industrial Park, Latin American Woman Writers, Patricia Galvao, 1993. This powerful volume by Galvao vividly portrays the turbulent life of workers in Brazil in the 1930s.

First World, Third Class, and other tales of the Global Mix. Regina Rheda, 2005. The stories, like the Brazilian apartment complexes in which they are set, are a microcosm of modern-day urban Brazil. They are witty, consistently caustic, and never predictable.

The Celebration, Ivan Angelo, 1992. Ivan Ângelo's remarkable novel connects and implicates the lives of a complex of characters, spanning three decades of tumultuous social and political history in twentieth-century Brazil.

The Vampire of Curitiba and other Stories, Dalton Trevisan. 1972.

Conceicao Evaristo. Poncia Vicencio, Paloma Martinez Cruz, 2007. This novel describes the protagonist's paths, dreams, and losses, from childhood to adulthood. Poncia's memory takes us, readers, to her universe, revealing to us and to herself emotions related to her present and past, and her family.

The Brothers, Milton Hatoum, 2002. Set in a Lebanese immigrant community in the Brazilian port town of Manaus, this is the story of identical twins, Yaqub and Omar, whose lives take radically different paths: one toward professional success in Brazil's metropolis Sao Paulo, the other to drunken dissipation in the lowly port of his birth.

The Five Seasons of Love, Joao Almino. 2008. Set amidst the chaos of contemporary Brasilia, a place where even the most basic human affairs - love, friendship, sex, and work - can take unlikely shapes, Ana's story is both relentlessly modern and profoundly timeless

An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry. Elizabeth Bishop & Emanuel Brasil. 1972

The Centaur in the Garden, Moacyr Scliar, 2003. A masterpiece of magical realism by one of Brazil's most celebrated novelists.

Non-Fiction

Travesti, Sex Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes, Don Kulick, 1998. In this dramatic and compelling narrative, anthropologist Don Kulick follows the lives of a group of transgendered prostitutes (called *travestis* in Portuguese) in the Brazilian city Salvador.

Waiting for Rain. Nicholas Arons, 2004. Droughts that hit northeastern Brazil made many Brazilians go in search of work in the cities. Arons use of his experience in addition to that of Brazilian poets and authors illustrates human endurance, in the face of corruption and "drought politics."

Racial Politics in Contemporary Brazil. Michael Hanchard, 1999. Combining U.S. and Brazilian scholars, the book discusses the racial complexities in Brazil in comparison to the U.S.

Behaving Brazilian. Phyllis A. Harrison-Brose, 1991. Harrison studies Brazilian nonverbal communication (i.e. gestures, body and eye contact, posture, dress etc.) in contrast to that of the U.S.

Shock Doctrine. Naomi Klein, 2007. Canadian journalist, Naomi Klein, argues that free market policies are not democratically popular but were passed because citizens were occupied with other upheavals and disasters.

City of Women. Ruth Landes, 1994. A study of *Candomblé*, *City of Women*, examines the role of women in *Candomblé* and what that means within Brazilian society.

Negotiating National Identity. Jeffrey Lesser, 1999. Through the histories of various immigrant populations, Lesser discusses the Brazilian national identity outside of the typical black-white continuum.

Confessions of an Economic Hit Man. John Perkins, 2005. Perkins draws from his experience as an economic planner for an international consulting firm to state that wealthy corporations exploit developing nations.

Race in another America, The significance of skin color in Brazil, Edward E. Telles 2004. In this sociological and demographic study, Edward Telles seeks to understand the reality of race in Brazil and how well it squares with the traditional and revisionist views of race relations.

Dreaming Equality, Color, Race and Racism in Urban Brazil, Robin E. Sheriff, 2001. The myth of racial democracy contrasts starkly with the realities of a pernicious racial inequality that permeates Brazilian culture and social structure. The author lived in a primarily black shantytown in Rio de Janeiro, where she explored the inhabitants' views of race and racism firsthand.

Looking for God in Brazil, The Progressive Catholic Church in Urban Brazil's Religious Area. John Burdick, 1993. An introduction to the shifting religious area in Latin American in the 1990's, a sensitive study of how the several forms of religion in Brazil deal with issues of gender, race and politics in a particular urban community.

An Afro-Brazilian Woman's Story of Politics and Love, Benedita da Silva, 1997. An excellent introduction to Brazil, and to one of the most exciting new political leaders to emerge from that country.

Brazilian Women Speak, Contemporary Life Stories. Daphne Patai, 1993. A vivid and authoritative picture of contemporary life in Brazil, a work of both passionate humanity and exquisite scholarship.

Death is a Festival, Funeral Rites and Rebellion in Nineteenth-Century Brazil, 1991. Joao Jose Reis. This book will appeal to students of Brazil but also to anyone interested in the profound changes in human sensitivity and rituals of death that took place from the colonial to the modern period.

A Discontented Diaspora, Japanese Brazilians and the Meanings of Ethnic Militancy, 1960-1980. Jeffery Lesser, 2007. Two books in one: a lively and engaging examination of Brazil's 'model minority', and a probing analysis of the ambiguities and complexities of Brazilian 'racial democracy'.

Violence in the City of Women, Police and Batterers in Bahia, Brazil, Sarah J. Hautzinger, 2007. Accessibly written study that explores the reality of all-female police stations in Brazil as a window onto the shifting relationship between violence and gendered power struggles.

Hidden Heads of Households, Child Labor in Urban Northeast Brazil. Mary Lorena Kenny, 2007. An ethnographic analysis of labor across the generation in a globalizing urban population: Kenny treats the often taboo subject of child labor with clear-eyed perception.

Laughter out of Place, Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown, Donne M. Goldstein, 2003. Drawing on more than a decade of experience, the author challenges much of what we think we know about the idea of a 'culture of poverty'.

Another Arabesque, Syrian-Lebanese Ethnicity in Neoliberal Brazil. John Tofik Karam, 2007. This book explores both the ways the nation-state exports its ethnicities within neoliberal markets, and the ways Arab-Brazilians regard their own Brazilian-ness and Arab-ness in light of the official ideology racial hybridity.

ABOUT BAHIA STREET

Bahia Street's mission is to break cycles of poverty violence through quality educational opportunities economically impoverished young women and girls



Bahia Street's primary goals are to allow the students to reach their highest academic potential, including attending university if that is their aspiration; to support the girls' physical health and wellbeing, including medical care and good nutrition; to build each student's sense of identity and self-esteem, and foster creativity; and to support the families of the students and the communities in which they live.

Bahia Street Brazil now employs a staff of fourteen, all former residents of Salvador's shantytowns, all African-Brazilians who have managed to graduate from university. Sixty girls are now enrolled in a program that rivals the best academic education available in Salvador.

Bahia Street's work outside of Brazil is grounded in its experience addressing poverty in Salvador. Bahia Street offers education and volunteer programs for community members, civic leaders, students, and development workers interested in collaborative international development.

Bahia Street programs provide practical, engaging, hands-on experiences. Participants come away with a deeper understanding of ways to provide non-intrusive program support to projects in the developing world.

CONTACT US

There are many ways to stay in touch with Bahia Street and find out about upcoming events and study trips. Email Bahia Street if you would like to be added to the organization's mailing list (not shared with anyone!) to receive updates from Salvador and Bahia Street news. Visit our blog on the Bahia Street webpage for stories related to our work in Salvador. We also maintain several groups on Facebook for those who would like to join us that way.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO

If reading *Dance Lest We All Fall Down* inspired you there are many ways you can get involved. Bahia Street's success is dependent on the help of people just like you, located all over the world. There are many ways you can help us in our mission from fundraising to volunteering or even by buying a t-shirt. Our supporters are all over the world, so whether you are in Saskatchewan or Seoul, just drop us a line and let us know how you'd like to help.

Donate

Any amount is appreciated — you can give a one-time gift or a monthly donation by credit card or check. You can also donate to celebrate a wedding, a birthday or an anniversary or in memory of a loved one. Please visit our online donation page for additional information.

Volunteer

We need volunteers at all of our locations. However, we have limited opportunities that engage volunteers in Brazil. Send us an e-mail or give us a call to see how you can help.

Visit the Center

Bahia Street organizes an annual educational trip to Bahia. See our work in action while having a life changing experience. Trips are led by co-founder Rita Conceição.

Spread the word

Many of our supporters say that Bahia Street inspires them. Please tell your friends and family about Bahia Street, or send them a link to our home page. If you're heading to a class reunion or a party with like-minded friends, give us a call or an e-mail so we can mail you brochures and donor cards to distribute. You can also download a PDF to print the brochures yourself.

Share your ideas

If you have any ideas, thoughts, talents, or skills that you think could help Bahia Street grow in its mission to help girls, contact us.

Host a book club

Many readers of *Dance Lest We All Fall Down* have been inspired to share the story with their friends and neighbors by hosting a book club. This is a great way to help spread the word about Bahia Street while having fun with friends.

Have a party

People all over the world are helping raise money for Bahia Street programs by hosting fundraising parties. Visit our fundraising page for more information about what you can do to support Bahia Street.

Buy Bahia Street products

Bahia Street has teamed up with Zazzle to offer a whole line of Bahia Street products, from hats and t-shirts to note cards and postage stamps. Each item you buy benefits Bahia Street.