

Perseverance brings ‘Magic Pajamas’ to life

“The Magic Pajamas” is a children’s story set in rhyme about a brother and sister who go on an extraordinary adventure through the power of their PJs, but the real magic, says Turlock author Steve Olsen, is how the book made it to fruition.

“It was a journey marked by not giving up and always following your dreams,” Olsen said. “Even things that are meant to be are still going to need a lot of hard work to get done.”

Olsen can surely testify to the hard work part. The journey from concept to finished product has taken six years and included more ups and downs than a roller coaster ride.

The inspiration for the book was born out of Olsen’s own experiences of trying to get his children to bed.

“Every parent knows how it’s always hard to get your kids to bed because they’ve always got some excuse to put it off,” he said. “I was on a business trip from Sacramento to Las Vegas, when the idea of magic pajamas came to me and I thought it would be a great story.”

Right there in the airport, Olsen started putting pen to paper and by the time the plane landed in Las Vegas, he had a completed manuscript.

“It all just came to me, like everything was clicking,” he recalled.

It tells the story of two children who get to live out their dreams through the magic pajamas made by their grandmothers.

Olsen sent the story out to every publisher of children’s stories he could find and in return he accumulated a large stack of rejection letters. He

did some re-vamping and sent the story out again, only to see his rejection pile doubled in size.

“It was rejected not once, but twice by every children’s book publisher,” Olsen recalls with a laugh. “But I loved the story and believed in it.”

It was on another business trip that Olsen found a new avenue for his story.

“I read an article while on the plane about self-publishing and I thought that I could do it on my own,” Olsen said.

Olsen was embarking on a venture that he said put his patience and perseverance to the test.

“It was a million times harder than I ever imagined,” he said.

Since Olsen says he can’t draw a stick figure, the first item on his list was to find an illustrator and he credits his wife’s craving for Starbucks mochas for leading him to his future collaborator.

At the time Kristin Showalter was studying art at California State University, Stanislaus and working as a barista at the coffeehouse. A casual conversation between the two revealed Showalter’s pension for drawing and soon thereafter she had drawn up a few illustrations for Olsen to consider.

“When I saw the pictures she had drawn, my jaw dropped,” Olsen said. “She nailed it. She completely got the concept.”

Olsen credits Showalter with helping to keep his enthusiasm for the project up, especially during those times when it seemed easier to just set it aside, like when he had to deal with his father’s death.

“So many times along the way I thought about just throwing my hands up and walking away from it,” Olsen said. “But I just couldn’t do that. My father never quit on anything and he wouldn’t have wanted me to quit on this.”

Through a myriad of trials and tribulations associated with the self-publishing industry, Olsen kept moving his story along and finally a few months ago he got his hands on the finished product.

“It was surreal to see it as a completed book,” Olsen said. “It was better than I could have imagined.”

The experience has not dampened Olsen’s desire to write. He has two more children’s stories in the works, both sequels to “The Magic Pajamas.”

“The Magic Pajamas” (ISBN 978-1439276716) is available through www.themagicpajamas.com or through the Amazon Web site.

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