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'The Land of Reverse' weaves a beautiful bedtime tale

By *Sophie Braccini*



Image provided

Dave Manousos is a happy man: He is able to continue to live his life and enjoy himself as a child, although he is already a grandfather. He does this through his two major occupations: as a hitting coach for the Moraga Baseball Association, and as a writer and illustrator of children's books. His latest work, "The Land of Reverse: Where Sleep is Just a Matter of Letting Yourself Go ..." is now available at local bookstores.

In the land of reverse, finless fish walk around and birds fly backward, your feet are your hands and your head is upside down, and wherever you are going, you are not. Everything rhymes in the land of reverse and your imagination can go wild. This is Sam's story: the 9-year-old child who cannot get to sleep, who one night enters the reversed world and finds his way back home after he finally lets go.

The book features Manousos' beautiful illustrations, sometimes spread across the entire double page, with soft coloring in blues, purples and browns as Sam enters the world of reverse. The little boy finds himself in a kind of Alice in Wonderland world - Manousos' favorite book - just dreamier and sometimes a bit scary, as dreams can be. When Sam finally lets go, he is back in his room. Did he dream? Did he imagine all this? Did he really go through the mirror where everything can be seen in reverse? Young readers can decide.

Manousos says that some 30 years ago, while his daughter was playing with a Rainbow Brite doll in the living room, rhymes came to him that became the weft of this story's fabric. "There is a strange place, the land of reverse, where first is last and last is first, where children work and parents play, people grow younger day by day, up is down and down is up, round is square and square is round ..." The many lines of rhythmic words stayed with him until last year when he finally sat down and constructed Sam's story.

Will "Land of Reverse" help restless kids to go to sleep? A 1994 study published by Salkovskis & Campbell titled "Research and Therapy imagery distraction" noted that an interesting and engaging imagery task before bed can help children fall asleep more quickly. This imaginative story will also delight children's sense of silliness.

This is not Manousos' first children's book. He wrote "Sophia's Turn," about his niece, Sophia Lucia, who is the holder of a Guinness World Record for pirouettes; "Life is Good and Other Reasons for Rhyme," a poetry collection; and he has many more stories in his desk drawers, including sequels of Sam's adventures.

Manousos says he has been rhyming since he was 16 years old. The other big part of his life, the one that took him to corporate America for over a decade, is illustration. The author explains that sometimes he starts with the drawings and composes the rhythms to go with them - like for "Life is Good" - and sometimes it is the other way around.

Growing up, Manousos was one of 11 siblings, including seven sisters. His grandmother lived with them and had her artist studio in the back of the house. He remembers that it was there, in the middle of his grandmother's easels and canvases that he learned to draw and paint. Today he continues to paint almost every day. He has also been using a Wacom tablet and Photoshop since the '90s.

This latest book is also a community project. It was laid out with the help of Lynn Champagne, owner of Champagne Design, and it can be found at Orinda Books. Manousos will also participate in the first Moraga Got Chalked event on Sept. 23. This event, which is a part of the traditional Pear and Wine Festival, will challenge kids to create chalk art using their imagination around the sculptures that are now on display in Moraga. The event will also feature local published children's authors who will read and share their work (more on this event in our next edition).

"Land of Reverse" can also be found online at Amazon.com or on these other websites: thelandofreverse.com and www.daydreambooks.com.

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