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Moraga dad utilizes AI to write book to help kids overcome fears

By Diane Claytor



Moraga dad and author Kendell Haynes and his daughter, Mina, who inspired his book, "Goodnight Mira: Overcoming Fear of the Dark." Photo provided

In 2017, Kendell Haynes crossed an item off his bucket list. "It had always been a dream of mine to drive across the country," he recalls. "So I got into my little Honda Civic and drove from my home in New Jersey to California."

He was working as a United Airlines flight attendant but once in the Bay Area, he met his now-wife, had a family and moved to Moraga. Suddenly he didn't want to travel and be away from home anymore.

A current stay-at-home dad to two children, Haynes recently released his debut children's book, an enchanting, magical story inspired by his young daughter, Mina, and the struggles faced when transitioning her to a "big girl bed."

"She had the normal fears of shadows and the dark," Haynes explains "and didn't want to sleep in the new bed. I was trying to find ways to make the transition easier for her." At the same time, he was looking for ways to contribute financially to the family while staying home and had been seriously thinking about writing a book. "Suddenly, I had the subject right in front of me," he says, and "Goodnight, Mira: Overcoming Fear of the Dark" was born.

In this empowering book, Mira goes on a courageous journey to conquer her fear of the dark with the help of a very special fairy. It's the perfect story to end a child's day on an uplifting, positive note.

When beginning to write, Haynes spent a considerable amount of time researching how best to accomplish his goals. His research drew him to online videos showing artificial intelligence (AI) helping to both write and illustrate books, so Haynes, a self-described techie, started "playing around with it."

As he explains it, Haynes gave Chat GPT the basic storyline he wanted and they provided the copy. Haynes then edited and re-edited, making it into the book he imagined, telling the story he wanted in the way he wanted it told.

It was a similar process with the artwork. Using AI, he described the scenes he envisioned for his children's storybook and the resulting beautiful, colorful illustrations perfectly complement the heartwarming story of a young girl learning to overcome her fears and discovering her own inner strength. Haynes says he loves being creative but admits he never thought he was capable of writing a children's book.

"Traditional authors and artists spend a lot of time writing their books and I have great respect for them and their hard work," Haynes says. "But I'm not sure I could do that. I always have plenty of ideas, but actually implementing them is the most difficult part." Having these advanced technological tools gives you more options, he says. "I know what I want and with the new technology, I'm able to get it."

Haynes sees Mira as an ongoing series. He already has the second book written and is starting to work on the illustrations. This story has Mira helping a friend deal with the loss of her pet, an idea that came from a neighbor who didn't know how to talk to her young son about the death of their dog.

Haynes bases his stories on his daughter because, he reports, "there are not a lot of books about African American children and I wanted that to be a highlight, but also want them to be relatable, covering topics that many kids deal with."

Haynes loves being a stay-at-home dad and having the time to spend with his kids. He enjoys cooking and cleaning and, with a busy physician wife that has a "very hard job," he's always looking for ways to support the family.

There are more Mira stories in Haynes' head and more Mira books in his future.

"Goodnight, Mira," which was self-published, is available at both Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

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