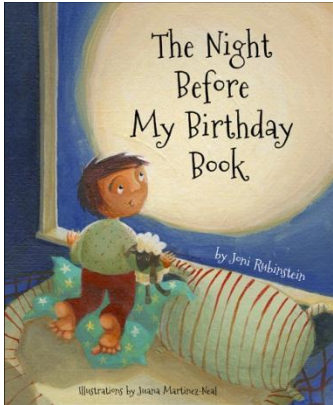


Local Author Publishes a Family Tradition

Randy Metcalf, The Explorer



The night before a child's birthday is an exciting time as they prepare to wake up a year older. And what was once a small family tradition, Marana resident Joni Rubinstein has taken and made into a children's book, "The Night Before My Birthday Book."

During her early years of being a mother of three kids, who are now 31, 27 and 25, Rubinstein found a small poem in a magazine with the instructions to read it to her kids the night before their birthday. It was short and sweet, but spoke to the child as they anxiously awaited becoming another year older.

Each night before a family member's birthday, as they were tucked into bed, they would be read this poem.

The family tradition carried on through the years, and about six years ago, Rubinstein's daughter had a friend who had a baby. She felt compelled to give her daughter's friend a copy of the poem and to pass on the tradition.

"As I did that, I realized that that was a powerful feeling to me to pass that along to another generation," she said. "As I did that, I thought in my mind that it would be nice to write a big poem, because this one was just a few lines, that would capture that feeling for kids of going to bed, not being able to sleep, or not sure if they were sleeping, dreaming about their birthday, and waking up a year older."

Fairly quickly, Rubinstein was able to write out the poem. The next hurdle for her was to take the images she had in her head and have an artist put them on paper.

She wanted to capture the magic not only for kids, but the magic that is created between two parents as they watch their son or daughter reach another milestone and are reminded of the moment in time when they became parents.

"That whole idea about transition came up for me," Rubinstein said. "You're one thing and now you are another. You are one age and now you are another. You are two people and now you are a family."

Rubinstein turned to the Society for Children Book Writers and Illustrators. As she progressed with self-publishing her book, she felt it was really important to find an illustrator she could really work well with.

Through the society, she found Juana Martinez-Neal out of Phoenix.

Over the next two years, the two worked closely together as Rubinstein would drive north to meet with Martinez-Neal with her "squiggly drawings and she was very kind and she would email me sketches."

Throughout the book, Martinez-Neal's paintings show a diverse range of families from twins and with brothers and sisters to small or large families, so it is relatable to all who read the book.

There are blanks left throughout the book, so it can be personalized for the age of the person who is having the book read to them.

In the back of the book, there is a place for families to record the readings. Who read it to whom, on the eve of what age, and a place to jot down a few little memories from the past year.

"It's a ritual. It's a tradition. It is something that just becomes something that you always used to do."