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## Oroville author immortalizes his two-headed turtle via e-book for children

### Story details adventures of Zack and Mack

By Barbara Arrigoni

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POSTED: 03/09/2014 04:36:09 PM PDT

OROVILLE >> It's tempting to wax corny and cliché about a two-headed turtle, but the fact of the matter is, the critter is downright unusual and cute.

In the case of a turtle named Zack and Mack, two heads became fodder for literary fun by its owner, Oroville artisan and author Jeffrey Reid.

Reid, who calls the turtle "the boys," has written a children's e-book about their adventures called "The Smile Ambassadors" that was launched on the Internet last week.

He spoke about the turtle and how the book evolved in a recent phone interview with this newspaper.

The author has had a few adventures of his own in life.

In the 1980s and 1990s, he was a news director for a radio station in Watsonville, gathering, writing and reading the news.

Reid has also written screenplays and documentaries and has done voice-over projects.

He and his wife left Los Gatos and moved to Oroville in 1996. Reid noted the move was ironic since they stopped in Oroville several years before, on a hot, windy day, and didn't like it.

"I thought, 'I'd never live here,'" Reid said.

Zack and Mack is a by-product of their travels to festivals, and state and county fairs in several states.

The couple sells tie dye articles. Reid also had a side show museum of "unusual curiosities" along the lines of Tom Thumb and, well, a two-headed turtle.

"You name it, I've had it," he said.

Reid, 56, turned to some prominent animal trainers to help him find a two-headed turtle.

Such creatures are rare, but not unheard of. The hatching of a two-headed turtle named Thelma and Louise at a zoo in San Antonio, Texas was widely reported last year.

Also, a two-year-old bicephalic turtle named Michael and Angelo was recently acquired by a zoo in Brownwood, La., according to an article online at the Biloxi, Miss. Sun Herald.



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Zack and Mack, whose adventures inspired "The Smile Ambassadors, are shown in a copyrighted photo provided by Jeffrey Reid. Contributed Photo

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(You'll note I did not grow up to be a chemist.)

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DROUSSARD, La, according to an article online at the DIXON, MISS. SUN-HERALD.

Through his friends, Reid finally found Zack and Mack in Florida.

"When they hatched, they were the size of a quarter," he said.

The turtle is a red-eared slider. Although it has two heads, Reid doesn't consider it to be like conjoined, or Siamese, twins.

"That's a different kind of deformity," he said, explaining that the turtle has one body and eliminates from only one orifice.

"The two heads do have different personalities — one's cute and the other's cuter."

Zack and Mack is almost 8 years old now, but Reid isn't sure how long the boys will live.

"In the wild, a red-eared slider can live 25 years," he said. "In captivity, some say they live longer, some say shorter. Because this is a two-headed turtle, every day is a blessing. You never know."

Apparently the boys are picky eaters. Mostly, they eat big meal worms and frozen fish.

"They're protein eaters," Reid said. "They do not eat turtle food or lettuce."

Zack and Mack is also well traveled. Reid has a tank for the boys in his recreational vehicle, but usually the turtle sits by his side on trips.

"We do take the boys out on walks," he added. "They can go pretty fast."

The idea of writing about Zack and Mack germinated on a visit to Yuma, Ariz. last year, when a documentary filmmaker Reid spoke to offered to look at any projects Reid might have.

It only took three seconds for Reid to think about Zack and Mack. He hurried to his RV, pounded out a quick outline and showed it to the filmmaker.

"He said a director would want more than one turtle," Reid recalled. "I said, 'That would be difficult.'"

Still, the idea percolated for about a year. Last October, he returned to the original outline and thought, "Why not an e-book? Why deal with the big publishing world when you can do it yourself?"

Although Reid initially envisioned making a family-oriented movie about Zack and Mack, the idea of publishing an electronic book was appealing. One reason it seemed a good idea was because an e-book is forever and can be tweaked over time, he said.

A brief synopsis of "The Smile Ambassadors" states the story is about a little girl named Constance who lost her "beloved" two-headed turtle named Zack and Mack.

Reid said the premise is to "Smile, smile, smile."

"It is their adventure," he added. "They become ambassadors to the world."

He wrote the book at about the fifth-grade reading level, or for children between the ages of 8 and 14.

It's also the first part of a series on Zack and Mack's adventures.

Reid said he likes writing because it keeps him off the streets.

"I am humourous and flip about this because it is a story about turtles," he quickly added. "But, hey, if a story of a two-headed turtle helps a kid flip pages quickly to see what's going on, then Zack and Mack have done their job."

"The Smile Ambassadors" is currently available on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) (<http://Amazon.com>). It's 379 pages on Kindle and costs \$2.99.

Reid said it will also be available soon through Apple iBookstore, Sony, Barnes and Noble, and Kobo Books.

He has also offered it to the Butte County Library for the e-book system there.

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