

Mallko and Dad

Gusti

Mara Lethem, Translator

Enchanted Lion Books (Nov 6, 2018)

Hardcover \$19.95 (120pp)

978-1-59270-259-6

Mallko and Dad is the tender, honest, and life-affirming personal account of a father and his boy, who has Down syndrome.

Mallko and Dad strikes quickly and with searing frankness, as Gusti writes: "Sometimes having kids is like making a drawing: it doesn't come out quite the way you were imagining it." The artist goes on to admit his first feelings about his son: "I did not accept him." Helped by his wife's and other son's unconditional acceptance of Mallko, Gusti quickly comes around, and the rest of the book is an equally unguarded record of days spent with Mallko: watching him develop socially at school, bringing him to the hospital for surgery, or, most of the time, just playing with him.

It's an intimate book, and Mallko's colorful personality shines through, in large part because of Gusti's innovative, almost eccentric book design. He uses a variety of fonts and font sizes, as well as handwritten notes, photographs, collages, and drawings by him and Mallko in crayon, pen, pencil, and marker. The book also features transparent layovers to translate handwritten notes from Spanish to English without losing the raw urgency of Gusti's original work.

Winner of the best book award in the disability category at the Bologna Book Fair, *Mallko and Dad* will strike a resonant chord for empathetic readers everywhere, but perhaps most for the nervous new parents of children with Down syndrome. For them, *Mallko and Dad* might provide assurance that although life with a Down syndrome child might be different than expected, it can be just as wonderful.

PETER DABBENE (January/February 2019)

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