

## Writer Anica Mrose Rissi loves a good surprise

BY MAGGIE WHITE

DEER ISLE—"I am now a seasonal resident in the place where I grew up. Which is lovely and a bit weird," said author Anica Mrose Rissi about living part-time on Deer Isle. Rissi, who splits her time between Maine and New Jersey, credits her profession as a writer with affording her a flexible schedule.

### Bookish beginnings

With 15 published books under her belt, perhaps it's no surprise that Rissi started her prolific career at a young age. "The first book known to have been written by me was when I was 4 years old," she said. Her mother saved the stapled together pages, which Rissi reports to be "full of good advice, such as donate dirt: it is not good for you."

Today, her audience ranges from toddlers to teenagers. Her most recent

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### Anica Mrose Rissi, of her writing career

Deer-Isle author

book, *Hide and Don't Seek: And Other Very Scary Stories* is aimed at middle grade readers (8-12 years old). Regarding the stories contained within, Rissi said, "Some are as silly as they are scary;



Anica Mrose Rissi.

BY KIM INDRESANO

some are meant to send a tingle up your spine; and some will make you want to hide under the covers and not come back out."

She has another middle grade book coming out in 2023, this one close to home. "It's my first book that is set on Deer Isle—very specifically set in the field behind my house. In some ways it was the hardest to write because it felt so important to get it right. And of course you can never get things right," said Rissi, going on to discuss the difficulty in perfectly capturing the smells of her home island: spruce trees, salt water, the granite quarry.

### Picture the process

When it comes to writing picture books (for those aged 2-5), the process is unique. "When you're traditionally published, as opposed to self-published,

the publisher finds the illustrator. That's one of my favorite things," said Rissi, "because they bring their own take, their own creativity."

She's been surprised by how an illustrator interprets her words. For example, *The Teacher's Pet* features a tadpole as a classroom pet. "I never thought the tadpole would grow to be a frog, but I assumed it would become some sort of an amphibious monster," Rissi said. "It wasn't until I saw the illustrations that I realized I had written a book about a tadpole who turns into a hippo!"

While she does have some say in the illustrator—her publishing house presents a few options and Rissi selects one—she doesn't control the process. "Illustrators bring their own vision and imagination to the text and I, as the author, get to be surprised by how the story turns out."

There's also the audience's role to consider. Rissi said, "Picture books are so collaborative, not only between author and illustrator, but also with the reader and with whomever is reading the book."

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### Anica Mrose Rissi, about the picture book writing process

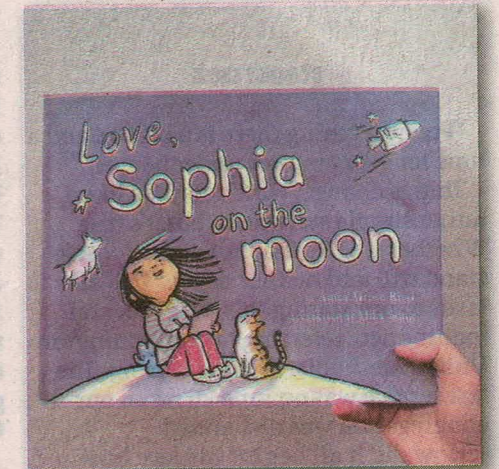
Deer-Isle author

When I am writing a novel, I don't think about the kind of tension a page-turn will involve, but when I write a picture book I always have that in mind."

### For love of art

Rissi derives inspiration from conversations, and from what she's watching, reading and listening to. "I love art that is in conversation with other art."

Her picture book *Love, Sophia on the Moon* was influenced by *Where the Wild Things Are* and is a "story where there is space for the safe expression of anger, especially female anger, which



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One of Rissi's books for young children.

is not always something we have in this world."

Rissi is often working on multiple projects at once, all in different stages. She might be brainstorming one, writing one, doing revision on another, waiting for someone to get back to her on a fourth. This allows projects "time to rest" while she turns her creative energy to something else.

"I love that every day is different," she said. "I love that I get to play with words and ideas and concepts and experiences. Process things on the page, share how my brain works." And she never knows what might have legs. "Even as someone with 15 published works, I still hear 'no'."

### Words of wisdom

Having recently accepted a low-residency teaching position in the MFA program at Vermont College of Fine Arts, Rissi said, "I always advise young readers to of course read and read and read and read. But while you read, really pay specific, exquisite attention to what you love and why. And also what you don't love and why...Don't try to write a story that pleases everyone. Write a story that pleases you."

Rissi's books are available at Blue Hill Books, Periwinkle, Sherman's locations and area libraries. They are also easily ordered through local bookshops and libraries.

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