

BlueStone Press

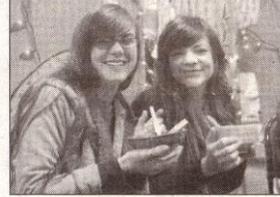
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Lost cat leads this illustrator to Rosendale
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BSP Business goes to the dogs
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Two popular Chili Fiestas next weekend
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Life of Reading Comes Full Circle

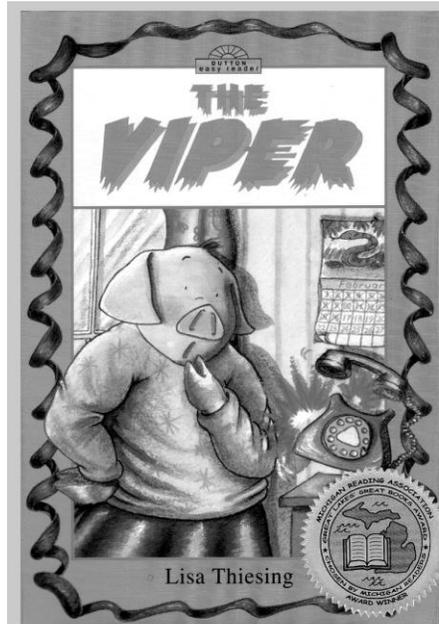
You grew up in New York City. How did you end up here in Rosendale?

Growing up in the city, I always imagined how wonderful it would be to live in the country. To have a little house, a yard, and be near mountains and rivers was how I pictured my future life. My husband also grew up in the city. We came here for a vacation, lost our cat, searched every inch of Rosendale for him, fell in love with the beautiful area, found the cat and decided to move here.

Your biggest influence growing up was Charles Schultz. Can you tell me about that?

I'd have to say that is only a partial version of the truth. When I was little I could draw a circle and 2 dots for eyes, just like in Charlie Brown. So I think that made me feel like I could really draw. I still think 2 dots for eyes is plenty!

Actually, I was lucky enough to be growing up just when the Minarik/Sendak *Little Bear* I Can Read Books, the Thompson/Knight *Eloise* books and Dr. Seuss' *The Cat In The Hat* and other Beginner Books were all brand new! I



Name: Lisa Thiesing

Occupation: Author / Illustrator of Children's Books

Location: Rosendale, NY

Age: 53

Sign: Libra

learned to read with *Little Bear* which was an exciting breakthrough.

There was a lot of change and excitement in children's books at the time, perhaps especially in ones for early readers. And I was lucky enough to have a mother who was

caught up in all the excitement. We would spend hours curled up in bed pouring over the illustrations. She would always say, "Look at how he captured the perfect expression!" and things like that. My mother imparted the feeling to me that drawing, writing and reading were

important, fun and valuable things to do. So, she gets the credit.

You wanted to be a dancer, cook, photographer or cowboy, but decided on a career as a children's book author and illustrator. Take me through a little of that journey.

Again, that is only a partial bit of the truth. I love ballet, hate cooking, love photography and love horses. But all I ever really wanted to do was to be a children's book author and illustrator. Ever since I knew that real people made books and that they didn't just appear by magic, I wanted to be part of it.

Tell me about your education and your career as a teacher and all that led to perfecting your craft.

I went to Parsons School of Design and earned my BFA in illustration. After graduation I was not yet ready for a career in illustration. I needed time to work on my portfolio, to make it my work and not "student work." First I got a job at an art supply store, where I met my husband. Then I became a preschool teacher at a Montessori school and got my Montessori teaching certificate. In the meantime, I was still working on making more "professional" looking illustrations that I could show to editors. After taking my portfolio around to many publishing houses and magazines, I finally started to get a few illustration jobs. Being assigned my first book was SO exciting! Then the first color book I was given, *Two Silly Trolls*, turned out to be an I Can Read Book! I felt like my life had come full circle.

And you have won quite a few awards for your talents. What have been the most memorable?

It's wonderful to get awards and to be recognized for your work. Writers and illustrators usually

work alone so we don't get the kind of feedback that sometimes occurs in a regular job, like "Nice job!" or "You deserve a raise!" (Of course I'm only imagining this happens in a regular job)! Often we're left saying to ourselves, "Is there anybody out there?" So, if an award or a good review happens, it's very satisfying. The most memorable was not an award but getting a good review in *The New York Times* for *Me & You*, which was the first book that I had both written and illustrated.

What has been the biggest challenge of your career?

The biggest challenge of my career is that the nature of publishing has changed. A few years ago, even before the general economic collapse, the bottom seemed to drop out of the book market. The publishing houses then needed to become more business oriented and they needed to publish books that they were sure would make money, such as all the celebrity-authored picture books, or books with only big name authors and illustrators, or books that are extensions of computer games and TV shows. This left a lot of the "midlist" people out and it's been very hard to find work or to have a book proposal accepted. I am ever hopeful that things will shift again.

Now you are on to yet another facet in your life, teaching children's art classes at your new Coop Studios. Tell me about the classes.

I'm excited about the classes! It's such a great opportunity to combine all the things I love: art, books, teaching, kids. I will be teaching a lot of basic drawing and painting skills. Since I'm an illustrator, we'll look at lots of book illustrators and learn some of their techniques. We'll also read stories and illustrate them. I hope it will help kids to learn how words

and pictures work together as well as art skills. But mostly, I would just like it to be fun.

In addition to classes for youngsters, I'll also be doing portfolio reviews for aspiring illustrators, and portfolio preparation for high school students who are thinking of applying to art school.

How can parents and students learn more and/or sign up for classes at Coop Studios?

I have a blog about the art classes: <http://lisa-coopstudios.blogspot.com>

There is a lot of information there. Of course I'd be happy to answer any questions and there is a contact link on the blog. I also have a regular website for people who would like to know more about my books, illustrations or school visits, www.lisathiesing.com

So you do school visits?

Yes, I do school visits, which I really enjoy. I have a PowerPoint presentation of one of my books, complete with sound effects! I discuss the process of how a book is made and show the students the different stages of a book's development. Then we have a short art lesson and learn to make animals using basic shapes. And I leave time for plenty of questions and answers. I have a blog with info about school visits, too! <http://lisathiesingschoolvisits.blogspot.com>

Any advice for a young artist or author?

Keep drawing and keep writing. The more you do it, the better you'll get. The better you get, the more fun it will be.

--Compiled by Donna Cohn Viertel