



# A Conversation with Marianne Berkes

Author of  
*Tortoise and Hare's Amazing Race,*  
*Daisylocks, Anybody Home, The Tree*  
*that Bear Climbed, and Animalogy*

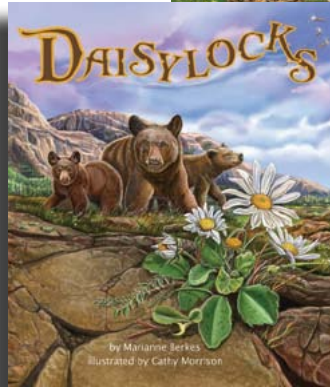
*What drew you to writing, children's books ?*

As a child our home was filled with books and music. I wrote plays that my friends and I performed in the summer, in our backyard. My dad even helped us build some of the scenery. Reading, writing, music and theater have been a constant in my life. In high school I did interviews for the school paper, and in college wrote my first picture book for a children's lit class. But it was many years later, after I moved to Florida, that I said "I can do this!" Reading so many books to children at the library where I worked, I kept coming up with ideas of my own. Because I love kids and love "words" I started submitting my stories to publishers, and one day...

*What do you hope children get out of your stories?*

An appreciation of our earth and respect for nature. I spent a lot of time outdoors as a child and still do. Discovering nature is a life-long adventure that I hope kids today still appreciate. Nature has so many stories to tell and is available

to anybody, any place, any time. I hope kids will be entertained by my books, but also that they will want to learn more about the topic. My first book, published in 2000, was about frogs making music in the night. Hopefully after reading this book, kids will go outside in the early evening, especially after a rain, and listen for the sounds



I've written about. I've followed with stories about birds, shells, creatures living in an ocean reef, rainforest animals, Arctic animals, animals that migrate, Australian animals, forest animals (like Polly Possum) and river animals. In Arbordale's *The Tree that Bear Climbed* kids also learn how a tree grows, and *Daisylocks* is about plant life. I've also written a book about the planets that I hope kids enjoy. How can we ask them to save the earth, if they don't learn to appreciate it first? My books are lyrical in verse, making it easy and fun for kids to read with lots of fact blended in. I want kids to really get inside my books, to read them more than once, each time finding something new and exciting!

*What is your favorite Animal?*

As a pet, I have to say dogs. My dog “Corky” is in the photo with me! In the wild, I guess dolphins although I love manatees too, and seeing deer in the forest and butterflies in my garden.

*What tips do you have to encourage young readers?*

Read! Read! Read! Reading can take you to so many places, near and far. Also, open your eyes to the world around you. Ideas are everywhere! When you get an idea, write about it. It’s a wonderful way to express what you feel or see.

And if you don’t know much about the topic you are writing about, do some research. It can be so much fun, kind of like a treasure hunt, because you never know what else you will discover. I do a lot of research for each book I write, using lots of reference book and on the internet.

*What is the most rewarding thing about having your books published?*

That I get to read my books to kids in schools and libraries. I hope they will be inspired to keep reading and also write stories of their own. Actually though, kids inspire me, and often give me ideas for a book. I was reading Marsh Music, which ends with a bird beginning the music of the day, when a student planted a seed! “I know what your next book is going to be!” he said with assurance. I wondered how he knew, because I was working on a book about seashells, but hadn’t told anybody. The boy assumed it would be a book about birds. The next day I was out at the crack of dawn recording a bird sounds and researching bird species. I wrote Marsh Morning as a companion book to Marsh Music and set Seashells by the Seashore aside.

*What other authors do you look up to?*

There are so many that I have come to love over the years, having been a children’s librarian. I am a huge fan of author/illustrators like Eric Carle and Kevin Henkes whose touching stories with perfect illustrations can be read again and again. I’m envious that they write so beautifully and can illustrate too. (Even though I think in pictures, I do not draw all that well. I now have ten wonderful artists using different mediums that illustrate my 17 picture books.) Patricia Polacco is another author that comes to mind; she is a wonderful storyteller. Naturally I enjoy authors who write in rhyme like Jean Marzollo and Stephanie Calmenson, and in repetition like Laura Numeroff, since that is what I like to do. Kids love rhythm, rhyme and repetition. It’s like making music with words. When you ask specifically which authors do a good job creating a learning environment, the three that first come to mind are April Pulley Sayre, Steve Jenkins and Anthony D. Fredericks. I read a quote recently by April Pulley Sayre that “Administrators are starting to recognize that non-fiction writing is the key to student achievement.”

Bravo to that and to all the wonderful Arbordale authors whose informational picture books are launch pads for learning!

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