

A Tushy Tale

Deborah Aronson gets to the bottom of what happened to a town's rear ends.

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Contributing Writer

Rather than focus on herself, first-time children's book author Deborah (Debbie) Aronson would much rather talk about her opera-singer daughter, Justine, of New York City, or her husband, Dr. Peter Aronson, supervisor of dermatology at the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center in Detroit.

Aronson, a retired social worker, is most comfortable at home in Bloomfield Township, fine-tuning the rhyming couplets that have become her specialty. Because of her picture book, *Where's My Tushy?*, she's gamely participating in public readings, book signings and interviews.

Told in playful rhyme for ages 3-8, *Where's My Tushy?* describes the hardships for people whose *tushies* (rear ends) decide to take a vacation. The book's illustrator is Ivica Stevanovic.

Aronson sent her manuscript to Kar-Ben, a publisher of Jewish children's book titles with Lerner Publishing Group. The book sold in 2012. On May 1 this year, *Where's My Tushy?* was released for nationwide distribution under the CarolRhoda Books imprint, another Lerner division.

"It's now in its second printing," said Aronson, also noting the positive reviews from Kirkus and School Library Journal.

In July, Lerner arranged for Aronson to read *Where's My Tushy?* during a child-friendly service on the beach for members of the Jewish Center of the Hamptons, in Long Island, N.Y. Cantor Debra Stein personally purchased a book for every family in attendance.

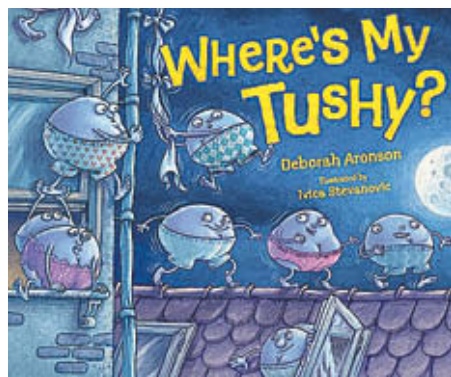
"The kids were very cute and asked me to sign the book," Aronson said.

A Chicago native, Aronson is the middle of three sisters born to the late Tillie and the late Joe Abrams.

A book from her parents' library, *Paramount Poems* by Morris Bishop, inspired Aronson's lifelong love of light verse. She especially likes the poem "How to Treat Elves," which "combines humor with a little mayhem — Bishop's trademark."

Listening to Gilbert & Sullivan's "The Nightmare Song" from their opera *Iolanthe* got Aronson thinking about "whether a regular person like me could tell a story with a Gilbertian rhyming structure.

"I stayed up all night trying to write a children's story that I called 'The Hole Story,' using the same intricate rhyming structure



Deborah Aronson

as "The Nightmare Song," she said. "It was such a feeling of accomplishment to finish it."

As a writer, Aronson is "constantly anticipating what will make the story better — changing the length, improving the humor, making the rhyme better."

She starts every couplet with an idea for how it will rhyme at the end, adding, "A thesaurus can help you get out of a rut."

Once satisfied with writing as a mental exercise, Aronson became curious to know "whether anything I'd written could be published." She decided against self-publishing because "I had no idea how to go about marketing a book."

Aronson subscribed to agent blogs online to determine the kind of children's books they sought. She submitted several manuscripts to agents and publishers found through the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

"They were all rejected," Aronson said. "It made me say to myself, 'Why did I think I could do this?'"

For *Where's My Tushy?*, she first tried telling her story from the viewpoints of different characters. She also played with rhyming structures.

"I asked people: 'Is "bottom" offensive? Is "patootie" offensive?'"

Through another manuscript submission, Ronnie Ann Herman of the Herman Agency agreed to become Aronson's agent. She helped negotiate the contract with HarperCollins Publishing for *Dragons From Mars*, Aronson's second book, scheduled for publication in the fall of 2016. Illustrating will be Colin Jack, story artist at DreamWorks Animation. □

As part of this year's Jewish Book Fair, Deborah Aronson presents a free reading of *Where's My Tushy?* at 11 a.m. Thursday, Nov. 13, inside Shalom Street at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield. www.jccdet.org.