

Mainer pens touching tale of heartbreak

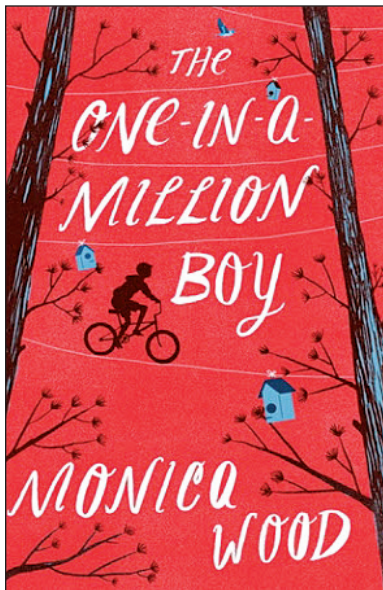
BY SARAH WALKER CARON
BDN STAFF

In a small, tidy, heated backyard studio with ladder bookcases and an L-shaped tabletop, built by her husband 22 years ago, a Maine author crafted a touching tale that explores relationships, heartbreak and the intersection of the two.

Author and playwright Monica Wood's newest book, "The One-in-A-Million Boy," tells the story of the aftermath of the death of an 11-year-old boy who'd forged a friendship with an 104-year-old woman. While his family reels from his death, his often-absent father steps in to finish a weekly commitment the boy had made to the woman, Ona Vitkus, to fulfill the requirements for an unfinished Boy Scout badge his son was working on.

The story is one that just came to Wood.

"Some books just arrive. This was one of them. Which is not to say it was easy; it was the hardest one yet," Wood said in an email interview earlier this week.



Although the novel is set in Portland, the story — and some places — aren't real, and the boy remains nameless throughout the story.

"I made up the street name where Ona Vitkus lives, but the astute reader will readily place it. As for the boy, I felt that to name him — a character who is not of the world anymore — was to tether him to the earth in a way that felt wrong. He does have a name, by the way, but it's a secret," said Wood.

Wood celebrated her book's release on Tuesday with a sold-out launch party and book signing at Portland Stage in Portland. She has another release party and signing scheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday at Nonesuch Books in South Portland.

"My calendar is filling up as we speak. I logged a ridiculous number of miles for my last book, and those libraries and other venues have asked me back," said Wood. "I did well over 200 events, which was too many, honestly. But it's very, very hard to say no to a Maine asker, you know? They are so loyal, and I love them."

Wood hopes her book is a worthy diversion for readers who dig into the nuanced story.

"I always hope for them to feel as if they have left their own lives for a while and spent time with people they care for. And I also hope they come away talking, excitedly, about something that popped up as a result of spending that time," said Wood.

As for Wood's acclaimed play "Papermaker," it will be staged in Bangor during the Penobscot Theatre Company's next season.

"It's on the schedule for Penobscot Theatre in Bangor for next year. Other theaters elsewhere are reading it, too, so keep your fingers crossed," said Wood.

But don't count on owning that work any time soon.

"I'm in no hurry to publish the play. I'd like to see another production or two first, in case I want to make changes. Plays are so fluid," said Wood.



ABIGAIL CURTIS | BDN
Jane Irish, 9, sings and plays "Rockin Robin" on her ukulele for the next episode of "Once Upon a Time," the locally produced children's television show.

'Once Upon a Time'
Midcoast show shines national spotlight on local talent

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

Backstage at the Belfast Free Library during a recent taping of Belfast Community Television's children's program, the scene was energetic, creative and more than a little chaotic.

That week's two young guest stars, Jane Irish of Morrill and Judson Thomas of Montville, both 9, were making a joyful noise as they got ready for their moments of community television fame on the local storytelling show "Once Upon a Time." (Not to be confused with the popular prime-time ABC show of the same name.)

"Quiet on the set!" Ned Lightner, the station manager for BCTV and the director of the program, exclaimed from behind his video camera.

And with that time-honored phrase of the show business world, the cameras were rolling and the talent jumped into gear.

"Once Upon a Time," co-hosted by local musician Jennifer Armstrong and Belfast children's librarian Erica Rubin Irish, is a half-hour show featuring songs, movement games, special performances by child guest stars and stories read aloud. It's broadcast to about 2,000 households in Belfast, but the audience doesn't end there. It's also shown on other community television channels around the country.

"I think we're one of the few libraries in the country doing it," Rubin Irish, a longtime participant in area community theater who also hap-



ABIGAIL CURTIS | BDN
Ned Lightner, station manager of Belfast Community Television, records 9-year-old Judson Thomas of Montville playing a song during a taping of the children's story time show "Once Upon a Time."

pens to be Jane's mom, said this week. "You have to have someone who's a children's librarian who is also willing to put themselves out there as a song-and-dance man. It's not a traditional library thing to do."

The show's largest audience is in Tampa Bay, Florida, where 250,000 people can watch it. It has also been picked up by community television stations in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Massachusetts, according to Lightner, who said some of the elements of the program are not specific to Belfast.

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The home I hope to find in Bangor

"This is the story of a small town tucked away in the great north woods of Maine. Its history — more or less typical of that of scores of other rural towns in this part of the state — carries little of more than local interest, because nothing extraordinary ever occurred in Crystal."

In 1937, Carlton J. Corliss, a Crystal native, published "The Story of Crystal," describing a place I've called home for over 20 years.

Corliss said that nothing extraordinary ever occurred in Crystal, and yet I've seen extraordinary things.

At night the sky lights up with stars. I could count them for hours.

A brook down the road babbles by in the spring, and peepers sing their songs at dusk.

Cicadas drone on during the hot summer, and cool, clear fresh air is never in short supply.

Autumn smells like wood smoke and soft apples, and in the winter the whole place is quiet and blanketed in snow.

My home is a beautiful place.

In each of my blog posts, I've said something similar to this: "I'm trying to make Bangor feel a bit more like home."

But I've neglected to answer an obvious question: What does home mean to me?

I grew up in Crystal, Maine, population 269. My family moved around to a few different places in the area before settling into a tiny two-bedroom home that sits off the road and is surrounded by forest.

It's a charming place.

The countertops are far too low for a 5-foot-10 person like me. The ceilings are, as well. The old hardwood is worn, and floral wallpaper covers almost every wall. The rooms are tiny, and yet they hold years of memories.

The little home sits on 15 acres of tall hardwood and conifers, and a sprawling front and back yard offered plenty of room for my sister and me to roam as children.

There are little flower patches meticulously planned and planted by my parents all over the property. Perennial flowers sprout up each year without fail, and the front of the house is lined by lilies.

In the neighboring town of Island Falls there's one grocery store and a few hundred friendly faces. Most people wave as they drive by, no matter who you are. It's impossible to come to town without at least a few people asking how you're doing and what you're up to.

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SHELBY HARTIN

Menagerie of animal art comes to Portland museum

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — High above Congress Square a migration of motley-hued birds soar. A great horned owl glares, an American oystercatcher swoops, and a large turkey vulture shifts in the air as you ascend the stairs into the Portland Museum of Art's newest installation: Modern Menagerie.

Just beyond the papier-mache sculptures by Christopher Patch, a shimmering buck head blinged out in crystal welcomes you to this new fourth floor zoo review.

"It's a natural entry point for kids," said Graeme Kennedy, the museum's director of marketing and public relations.

He gestured toward Bernard Langlais' large, brilliantly colorful "Indian Jungle Scene" wood relief. The 8-foot square, carefully carved masterpiece is "a great place to play 'I Spy,'" he said. A careful looker will see eyes peering out among the leaves, meeting the gaze of a curious child.

The semipermanent installation features a handful of well-known Maine artists. The work of Dahlov Ipcar juxtaposed

See Art, Page C2



PORTLAND MUSEUM OF ART
Papier-mache birds by Christopher Patch hang in the stairwell introducing Modern Menagerie at the Portland Museum of Art.

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April 8 – April 30 / *Common Street Arts*
Deadline, a poetry installation by Mexican poet Juan Manuel Portillo

April 13, 7:15 PM / *Railroad Square Cinema*
They Will Have To Kill Us First Director Johanna Schwartz in Person!

April 14, 12 PM / *Colby College Museum of Art*
Noontime Art Talk: Liberty, Equality, and Phrygian Caps: Martin Puryear's Up and Over

April 16, 10AM – 3PM / *Common Street Arts*
Encaustics Workshop with Helene Farrar
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April 19, 3:30 PM / *Waterville Public Library*
Spring Vacation Special – Stuffed Animal Party!

April 8, 9, 15, 16, 7:30 PM
& April 10, 17, 2 PM

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