

Elizabeth Bevarly

Kentucky author explores the lighter side of love

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ThisWeek Contributor

Best-selling author Elizabeth Bevarly employs a whimsical appreciation of human foibles to develop characters that alternatively tickle your funny bone and touch your heart.

The Louisville, Ky., native offers readers another witty happily-ever-after in *The Thing About Men*, her latest romantic comedy from Avon. Fans of the author's wicked wordplay and double entendres forced the novel into a second printing barely two weeks after its January release.

The Thing About Men features a nationally famous lifestyle diva protagonist, who doesn't practice the skills she preaches. Her biggest fan dies, leaving her a toddler and a conundrum.

Should she keep the adorable, rowdy child or turn over custody to the tot's mysterious and totally unsuitable uncle? The clever banter between the domestically challenged heroine and the leather-jacketed hero is reminiscent of the smart romantic comedies from Hollywood's heyday.

"I was definitely inspired by the old screwball comedies, which I've loved since I was a child," Bevarly recently told *ThisWeek*. "I'm a huge Marx Brothers fan. I also love Mel Brooks, Monty Python and old Woody Allen films."

As the prolific author of more than 40 romances, she has paid homage to the madcap movies of the 1930s and 1940s in a number of her popular novels, such as *Her Man Friday* and *My Man Pendleton*. Her plotting muse has been inspired as well by "song lyrics, overheard snippets of conversation, articles in newspapers or magazines, (and) personal experience," she explained. Bevarly was born with the fiction writing gene.

"I wrote my first book -- 32 pages in a spiral-bound notebook -- at the age of 12," she said. "It was a teens-in-trouble/haunted house epic. I started reading romance novels when I was 16. I devoured them all through college and my early 20s, and when I finally sat down to write at the age of 26, a category romance was what just naturally flowed out of my pen."

While her books have appeared on the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Waldenbooks* best-seller lists, Bevarly was driven to sell her first manuscript thanks to a smaller, more personal goal.

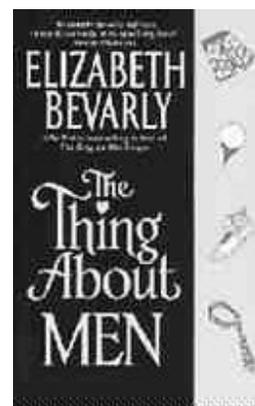
"I wanted to be published before attending my 10-year high school reunion," the author said. "I was working as a manager for The Limited ... and I began writing it as my New Year's resolution in January 1988. I wrote it by hand in ... five spiral-bound notebooks. Then I charged a typewriter on my Sears charge card because I was too poor to buy one."

The romance was turned down by Silhouette, so Bevarly pursued representation by a literary agent.

"I was rejected by all the big agencies in New York ... and finally found a one-woman agency in Colorado who got my manuscript on the desk of an editor at Silhouette who liked it and bought it. It was published in October 1989 -- one month before my 10-year high school reunion."



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Since then, Bevarly has penned many category-length (55,000-75,000 words) books for Silhouette's Desire line and is currently writing as well for the Harlequin side of the romance publishing empire. In addition, when several of her Silhouette editors moved on to other publishers, she branched out into the longer (100,000 words) single-title romances.

"I include a subplot in the longer books that the shorter length doesn't allow," she said. "Both types are funny and light, though. I love writing both."

Bevarly is proud of romance, which empowers women and celebrates the feminine experience. "I also appreciate the fact that there's such an enormous variety within the genre," she adds. "Any kind of book you like to read, you'll find it in romance. We have subgenres that appeal to mystery readers, fantasy readers, science fiction readers, horror readers, Western readers, general fiction readers, you name it. It's a huge segment of the publishing industry and the reading experience."

The author's Web site (www.elizabethbevarly.com) showcases her sense of humor. Online visitors are urged to park their reality at the door because Bevarly claims there is no reality in her books. She has left it out "for your reading enjoyment." A promotional tool, the site offers an impressive Awards page listing her kudos -- from the Rita Award, the Romance Writers of America's top honor, to more than 10 awards from *Romantic Times Bookclub*, the industry's leading publication.

Book signings, such as her scheduled Columbus stop, allow Bevarly to gather feedback directly from readers. "Writing is such a solitary profession," she said. "We sit in our offices with make-believe people all day, and then we send off our books and don't really know for sure if any people besides our moms and friends even pick them up. It's always gratifying to know if you've done a job well." Bevarly must be doing something right, given the sales and -- in one case -- the shoplifting of her novels.

"I once saw someone steal one of my books at a B. Dalton's, which was kind of astonishing and hilarious," the author said, amused. "What are the odds that the person who wrote the book she was stealing was standing there watching, hoping to see her buy the book? Naturally, though, I didn't turn her in. She was a potential reader, after all. Plus, I figured I'd still get my royalty, since that book wouldn't be returned."

Elizabeth Bevarly, author of *The Thing About Men*, will appear at a book signing at 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, May 15, at the Upper Arlington Barnes & Noble bookstore, 3280 Tremont Road, Columbus. For More Information, call 614-459-0920.

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