

Ohio author kicks off national tour at Thurber House event

Jennifer Crusie: Bet Me

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MARCIA ANDERSON
ThisWeek Contributor

Thurber House celebrates Valentine's Day on Feb. 10 with "the queen of romantic comedy," Jennifer Crusie.

In addition to being a best-selling author, Ohio native Crusie is a sought-after lecturer on the use of humor in writing.

"Jenny has been a very popular guest at our Literary Picnics, which are our summer season of author events," said Emily Swartzlander, Thurber House Program Manager.

"An Evening With Jennifer Crusie," which kicks off the author's national tour, promises to be lively entertainment.

Born Jennifer Smith in Wapakoneta, Crusie has lived most of her life in the Buckeye State.

She earned her bachelor's degree in art education from Bowling Green State University before marrying and having a daughter. She taught in the Beavercreek public school system while pursuing her advanced degrees, eventually earning an MA in feminist criticism and an MFA in fiction

Then, as part of the dissertation research for her doctorate in literature, Crusie picked up a romance novel.

"After I'd read almost 100 of them," she said, "I felt wonderful about being a woman and very positive about the future. So I thought, 'If romance fiction makes me feel this good when I read it, what will it do if I write it?' I tried and got hooked."

In 1992, Crusie sold her first romance, a novella, to Silhouette and followed that success with six sales to Harlequin and several additional category romances to Bantam's now defunct Loveswept line.

"Crusie is my maternal grandmother's maiden name," she explained. "At the time I signed with [Harlequin], they insisted that all their authors use a pseudonym." As Crusie's career grew, she kept the pen name and garnered awards such as the RITA, the top award from Romance Writers of America, and a Career Achievement Award in Romantic Comedy from *Romantic Times* magazine.

Then, to her fans' delight, Crusie began to write sexy single title (300 - 400-page) books for St. Martin's Press.

Crusie enjoys setting her novels in small, often fictionalized Ohio towns, to her New York editor's bemusement. For example, in *The Cinderella Deal*, the town of Prescott "is loosely based on Yellow Springs, Ohio," she said.

Tell Me Lies, her first hardcover for St. Martin's, took place in a small burg similar to Wapakoneta.

After moving to Columbus' German Village, the author used the historic neighborhood in her *New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *USA Today* best-seller *Fast Women*.

"German Village...is just full-blown gorgeous," she praised, "a wonderful place to live."

However, "because it was time for a new start," Crusie recently moved to a home outside of Cincinnati. Not surprisingly, southern Ohio makes an appearance in *Bet Me*, her February 2004 release.

Bet Me, an unsold category romance manuscript of Crusie's from 1992, was unearthed ten years later and turned into a single title romance at the request of her agent and editor.



Jennifer Crusie

"Eleven months past deadline later, I had less than five thousand words of the old book left," Crusie said, "but another hundred thousand-plus of new words, better words, that added up to a story I loved."

As part of her Thurber House appearance, the author will talk about *Bet Me* and what she discovered as she rewrote it.

"It was a huge turning point in my writing and my career. My whole life changed as I wrote the book." Chock full of the author's trademark witty dialogue, *Bet Me* has been optioned already by a film production company.

Depending on the bookstore, you might find Crusie's funny, romantic novels shelved under romance, romantic comedy, fiction, even mysteries, but she considers herself a romance writer.

"I think romance fiction is the most feminist form of fiction on the market," she declared, "and I think romance readers are the most avid and demanding group of readers buying books today."

Despite her best-selling status, Crusie still gets asked a question all romance writers hate: When are you going to stop writing romance and start writing real books? She always has a clever answer ready, such as, "I like writing fake books. It gives such joy to those who need to feel intellectually superior."

When faced with anti-romance attitudes -- usually from people who have never actually read a romance -- Crusie champions the genre. "Romance novels tell women they have the right to be loved, to be respected,...and to pursue what they want in life. We all deserve that."

Meet the author

What: Jennifer Crusie, author of *Bet Me*, will appear at a special event for Thurber House that includes an author reading, audience Q&A, and a separate reception.

When: Tuesday, Feb. 10. Tickets for the reading only, which begins at 7:30 p.m., are \$17 and may be purchased in advance or at the door. Tickets for the 5:30 p.m. cocktail reception with the author plus the reading afterwards are \$30 and must be purchased by Feb. 6.

Where: The Canzani Center, Columbus College of Art and Design (on the corner of Cleveland Avenue and East Gay Street.)

For More Information or To Purchase Tickets: Call Thurber House at 614/464-1032 or visit www.thurberhouse.org.

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