

AUTHOR OF THE MONTH

# Liz Byrski

The new book by author **Liz Byrski** embraces the challenges and triumphs of a group of older women.



**MARRIED TWICE** with two sons and twin grandsons, romance and men have played significant roles in the life of award-winning Western Australian writer Liz Byrski, but when she started writing novels, she knew instantly who she wanted to write about – women.

In particular, the former journalist and broadcaster wanted to concentrate on a group who are “badly neglected” in Australian popular fiction – women over 40. “They have talents, skills, experience, many have money and more freedom than their mothers or grandmothers,” says softly spoken Liz. “They are living vital and interesting lives, yet older Australian women are virtually ignored.”

Liz set out to correct the imbalance with her acclaimed debut novel, *Gang of Four*, a dramatic and emotionally rich story about older women, all close friends, published by Pan Macmillan two years ago. Her second book, *Food, Sex & Money*, is about three former convent girls, now in their 50s, meeting again, and delves into the dynamics of the often tricky mother-daughter relationship.

In Liz’s latest novel, *Belly Dancing for Beginners*, the friendship between the women and their involvement in belly dancing act as potent tools for change and empowerment. “A lot of my life I’ve been single and it’s the friendship of women that has really sustained me and added richness to my life,” says Liz. “There’s the whole mateship thing in this country, yet it excludes women. Solidarity between women isn’t recognised or celebrated in the same sense, so that’s the other thing I’ve set about doing with my writing.”

Born in London in 1944, Liz, who moved to Australia in 1983, was an only child who spent much of her time “buried” in books. The former ABC broadcaster and adviser on women’s affairs to the WA state government lectures in writing at Perth’s Curtin University. She’s written 11 non-fiction books, a cookery book and has won four media awards. Resolutely single after being married for seven years the first time and 12 years the second, Liz is the first to admit that being the “good” wife was a role she never got quite right.

“I tended to not say what I really thought and instead what would please the man,” says Liz. “And I’d do that looking-after thing. I haven’t worked out the boundaries between doing things for someone because you love them and being a doormat, so I’d take on everything and feel resentful. And when I did finally blurt out that it was over and told them how I really felt, they were horrified.

“It’s not nice, I know, but being born middle-class and English, this was what you instinctively thought a ‘good’ wife should do and I think those ingrained attitudes are really hard to shake.” ■

– CAROL GEORGE

*Belly Dancing for Beginners* by Liz Byrski, Pan Macmillan, \$32.95.

This is a road story with a twist, full of spangles, charm and drama, about three women who go on a belly dancing tour and shake up everything in their lives. Byrski’s forte is getting inside women’s heads and hearts, and in this story she has done the same with three well-drawn male characters: a driven businessman who is both a product and victim of his own family history; a sensitive New-Age academic; and an attractive policeman with more than just criminals to battle.

To read an excerpt from this month’s Great Read, go to [www.aww.ninemsn.com.au/bookclub](http://www.aww.ninemsn.com.au/bookclub)

