

Something successful

Author Emily Giffin ('94) likes the surprises as her stories unfold.

By Kim McGrath



A soon-to-be bride loses her engagement ring during a pre-wedding fling. Her fiancé is hiding in her maid of honor's closet wearing only boxers. Darcy and Rachel, the bride and the maid of honor, respectively, share more than just their lifelong friendship. They share Dex, the fiancé. All are characters created by *New York Times* bestselling author Emily Giffin ('94), and their story unfolds in Giffin's companion novels, *Something Borrowed* and *Something Blue*.

Darcy is charmed—the kind of woman who must have the perfect shade of pink lipstick to wear with her perfect bridal gown on the perfect wedding day when she marries Dex, the perfect fiancé. Rachel is her hard-working, ever-dependable best friend who is always on-hand to support Darcy although she's often felt overshadowed by Darcy and her perfect world. *Something Borrowed* is told from Rachel's perspective and *Something Blue* from Darcy's, because, as Giffin says, there are always two sides to every story.

"All of my characters have some of me in them," says Giffin, when asked which of her characters she most resembles. "It would be hard to write effectively about people if I couldn't somehow relate to their feelings or circumstances."

Giffin spends about six hours a day, four days a week creating her memorable characters. "Some days everything just flows and the hours fly by and it feels incredible. Other days are a complete struggle, and I end

up scrapping most of what I've written. I don't write with an outline so I tend to be somewhat inefficient. But for me, it's a very character-driven process. I like being surprised as the story unfolds."

Giffin's spontaneous style seems as well-suited to her writing as to her personal life. Majoring in history and earning minors in English and politics, Giffin graduated summa cum laude. She chose the University of Virginia law school over Harvard to stay in the Atlantic Coast Conference. "I loved law school much more than the actual practice of litigating at a large New York City firm. During law school and my four years of practice, I continued to write often with thoughts of becoming a novelist. After I paid off my loans, I moved to London to pursue my dream."

Giffin left for London in September of 2001. She committed to finishing her novel, *Something Borrowed*, in one year, allowing herself six months to find an agent. She determined that, if after eighteen months she found herself unsuccessful, she would return to New York to practice law. "Fortunately I got very lucky. I finished the story in a year, found an agent in another two months, and a publisher a month later."

While writing her books, Giffin worked in references to her hometown of Naperville, Illinois. One of her back-porch dramas, "The Day the Mothers Ran Away," written in elementary school, was performed there. The neighbors were charged admission, and the play opened

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to rave reviews. Giffin says she enjoys “paying respects to her old stomping grounds.”

As for Wake Forest, Giffin pays her respects there as well—working in details about Wake Forest hoops. “And if I can do it while slamming Duke, all the better. I grew up obsessed with college basketball. In high school, I decided that I wanted to follow my passion and be the manager of an ACC basketball team. I actually got the job as a student manager for the basketball team before I was accepted by admissions.”

Actor Marc Blucas ('94), the shooting guard/small forward when she was student manager, says Giffin's curiosity led her to constantly question and analyze people and the situations in which they found themselves. “She kept a journal that the whole team wanted to read,” says Blucas. She wrote in it constantly. Emily always wanted to understand relationships and feelings. She'd ask ‘How did you feel after that shot was blocked?’ It was a constant assault. It's no surprise to any of us that she became a novelist.”

“Emily was my favorite manager,” says Dave Odom, former head coach of the Deacons and now head coach at the University of South Carolina. “Her contribution to the team was much greater than retrieving balls, handing out towels, or arranging water breaks.... We loved her as a manager and adored her as a person.”

After a psychologically devastating loss to Carolina, “Emily walked into my office and handed me a two-page

essay she had written on the bus back to Winston-Salem. It was a factual, accurate letter written from the perspective of one who shared the emotions of the moment and the agony of defeat as much as any player or coach,” says Odom.

Odom and his wife have both read Giffin's second book and despite the novel's “chick-lit” reputation, Giffin receives several e-mails each week from men who've enjoyed her stories. Most, however, say they remove the pink jacket on *Something Borrowed* while reading it in public. “I read both of Emily's novels in three days. I read them because my friend wrote them, but I was so blown away,” says Blucas. “Emily is another Wake Forest success story. She's paid her dues, and she's earned everything that comes her way.”

Giffin, who resides in Atlanta with her husband and twin sons, Edward and George, has signed a contract for two more books and has sold the movie rights to *Something Borrowed*. Her next novel, about the complexities in a relationship where the husband wants children but the wife does not, is slated for printing next summer and is tentatively entitled *Baby Proof*.

“It has been a major adjustment. I went from living in Manhattan and London with no children to living in Atlanta with a car and a house and two children and a new career. I've experienced a lot of change all at once, but I love where I am now, and it's great to be back in ACC country.”