



# Elizabeth and After

*Matt Cohen*

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A touching and resonant story of a man who returns to the small town of West Gull, Ontario, to mend his family's legacy of alcohol and violence, to reconnect with his young daughter, and to reconcile himself with the spirit of his beautiful mother, killed several years earlier in a tragic accident. *Elizabeth and After* masterfully wraps us up in the lives of Carl and his family, and the other 683 odd residents of this snowy Canadian hamlet.

## Elizabeth and After Details

Date : Published April 11th 2000 by Vintage Canada (first published 1999)

ISBN : 9780676972573

Author : Matt Cohen

Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Canada, Literary Fiction

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# From Reader Review Elizabeth and After for online ebook

## Holly Hollyson says

I did enjoy this book, although it took me quite a long time to read it. I felt that some of the characters were underdeveloped and that made it confusing at times, I frequently had to go back to re read sections. I loved that it was set in Ontario - I could imagine the little town very easily! About half way through the book, it became much easier to read and I made better progress from that point.

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## Peter says

Matt Cohen is one of the real underappreciated Canadian Writers. This is typical of his work, lyrical, evocative and moving depictions of people torn by guilt, struggling to survive.

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## Steen says

I don't really know what to say about this one other than I finished it. I found that I couldn't keep some of the characters straight or visualize how old each were compared to the others.

It wasn't super horrible but honestly I will probably forget what happens in it before to long. It just wasn't that memorable. It was kind of interesting reading about Kingston and Napanee, ontario though. Both places I have been before. But that makes sense because Matt Cohen was a Canadian author.

I was a bit shocked at the ending and I honestly don't see how what happened changed anything or "Saved" anyone since nothing really changed.

meh.

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## Pamela says

[I can't say I loved it. But I've read it and now it is done. There were missing bits, I felt. How did it win? It ENDS in italics as it began, but she is now dead, although not yet here.

*"When she had the cup in her hands, steaming and aromatic, a candle lit to keep her company, she stood at the window looking out at the barn. She saw the yellow flame reflected in the mirror of the glass, the blurred image of her own face, the night-black dawn sloping down to the driveway where her*

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## Elizabeth says

A little slow paced but very interesting. An interesting look at small town life where everyone has a secret and nobody really knows the truth about everyone except for the reader as this tale is told. There was so

much sadness and heartbreak but it was hard to feel bad for the characters because of the choices they made. I definitely wasn't expecting that ending but maybe I should have since it ended almost how it began.

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### **Joyce says**

Beautifully written. "...one of those mythic late October days - a sunset day in a sunset month when the gold and scarlet autumn leaves shine as though shining from inside, when every hill, every tree, every rock and blade of grass is etched in the perfect light." I would have given this a 5, but for me, the ending was a bit...well, not firm enough. Kind of fell apart in the last few chapters.

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### **Greg Heller says**

A brilliant Canadian author that died far too soon. This is a book that took over 10 years to write, but is well worth it. Set in a fictional town north of Kingston Ontario.

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### **Fiona says**

A classic, beautiful read. A small town with unexpectedly complex characters, set against the backdrop of the tragic death of Elizabeth, the protagonist's mother.

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### **Chana says**

I didn't find the story line significant. It was hard to keep track of characters because the story was not sequential. There is a lot of weather and scenery in this book, which is OK but I found that eventually I was skimming those parts. The descriptions are good but the action is slow. I wanted to shake the author and say, does anything ever happen? Then things happen but the characters talk about the action in such a laconic and round about way that it makes it seem like nothing happened. I wish I could say that I thought it was better, it had moments of real potential and sometimes the descriptions, when not overlong, were about as perfect as writing can get.

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### **Angela says**

*Winner of Canada's prestigious Governor-General's Award, this is an incredibly intricate novel about a small town and its people. West Gull is in Ontario but could be anywhere in the world where small towns survive. Protagonist Carl McKelvey, who is reminiscent of Richard Russo's characters, particularly Sam Hall in The Risk Pool, returns to West Gull for reasons seemingly unknown to him and others in town. In West Gull, Carl had left an ex-wife and a daughter, a dead mother, an old father, and a reputation as a violent drunk. Hoping to rebuild his life, he reestablishes contact with his seven-year-old daughter, Lizzie, but finds that the memory of his mother, Elizabeth, who touched everyone in town to some degree and who died in a car crash when Carl was at the wheel, is a strong impediment. Now, Carl must put that memory*

*and guilt to rest before moving on. Cohen's novel is packed with humor, desperation, and romance. (Library Journal)*

A marvelous jewel of a novel, spare and beautiful and haunting and lush. Carl's efforts to rebuild his life and be a parent to his daughter are presented without filter, with all the joints and seams and ugly places exposed. A very human story, well worth reading. Highly recommended.

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### **Matthew says**

I loved how the book was driven by characters experiences rather than plot. The story wasn't what was compelling about this book but rather how it sucked you in to the emotions, dreams and world of the many POV character's day to day lives and how they all wove together. an enjoyable read.

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### **Diana Sandberg says**

Meh. It was ok. Some sporadically interesting characters wasting their lives. The kind of book that leaves me asking Why did I read this?

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### **Tom Gray says**

There was a corner store near my home where I grew up in Kingston Ontario. There was a book rack in the store that the local distributor kept filled with the usual pulp novels that he deemed appropriate for the working-class district of a university town. I bought books there and was familiar with the daughter of the owner who served behind the counter. One day she told me that she had insisted that the distributor stock the book rack with some books beyond the pulp. Contrary to preconceptions, people in that working-class neighbourhood could appreciate and buy literature. It was from that rack that I bought and read my first pieces of literature outside of the ones that I was supposed to read and didn't from school. I read "The Master and Margarita", "The Good Soldier Svejk" and "The Disinherited" by Matt Cohen. Truth to say, what intrigued me initially about the book was the stylized image on the cover of a naked woman running into the water. That may have intrigued me initially but what I quickly felt about the book was a real appreciation of the writing and the fact that the novel was set in Eastern Ontario and that the place that I lived in was acknowledge as a real place where real and important things could happen. That novel made a deep impression on me and was set firmly in my memory.

After working for over 40 years in a technical job and reading nonfiction, data sheets, patents and learned engineering papers, I decided to try to understand literature. A first year English course had "The Sound and the Fury" as an assigned text and that course left me with a life long conviction that the novels of William Faulkner and most literature with that were beyond my capabilities. That changed after I saw the movie "The Story of Temple Drake" on TCM. This was identified in the television listing as being based on a William Faulkner novel which I found by Google search to be "Sanctuary". I read the book and enjoyed it. With that I attempted again to read Faulkner and found to my surprise that I enjoyed and appreciated him. I truly liked "The Sound and the Fury". I read all of Faulkner's novels and short stories and embarked on an attempt in retirement to read all the books that I was assigned in school but didn't read.

With that project, I remembered the literature that I bought from that corner store and specifically remembered Matt Cohen and his novel. I liked those books a great deal. Why had I not carried on from them? With Amazon and its supply of out of print books, they were available to me. I took it upon myself to re-read "The Disinherited" and from that to read all of Matt Cohen's novels. I've accomplished that now. I read them more or less in order of publication and "Elizabeth and After" was the ultimate one. Matt Cohen is an accomplished writer who is adept at telling stories about complex and with that true human relationships. 'Elizabeth and After' is one such novel. It is a novel about set of multiple interrelated relationships. There is the relationship between Elizabeth, Adam and McKelvey and the related relationship between Elizabeth's son Carl, Chrissy and Fred. The complexity of the relationships is illustrated by the story of Elizabeth's conception. She was conceived because her mother had seen the child Adam speaking in tongues. It is the interworking these complicated relationships that is the basis of this novel. Fred beats and otherwise abuses Chrissy and yet has had a child and is still connected emotionally with Carl. Carl yearns to be near Chrissy and yet comes to accept that despite the beatings Chrissy loves and wants to be with Fred. Carl and Chrissy's daughter and Moira, a woman who is attracted to Carl are brought into this relationship along with the politician Luke Richardson who is a political rival to Fred. The web of relationships and their interactions reach out to encompass Adam and McKelvey with the memory of Elizabeth killed in a car crash. Elizabeth married McKelvey but Carl, her son, was conceived as the result of her affair with Adam.

Cohen weaves all of these relationships through flashbacks from the point of view of multiple characters. This he does effectively and subtly. He leads the reader to insights into these characters implicitly and through nuance. This is not a story of black and white. These relationships come in many colours and many shades. There are no real heroes and no real villains. There are only real people who live in a real society that is as all real society's do at all times is adapting to change that is upsetting some and exciting others. This links "Elizabeth and After" to the others of Cohen's novels. I think him specifically to Eastern Ontario but it does not limit him to that. This is not a regional novel although it captures the essence of one region. Cohen was an accomplished novelist and "Elizabeth and After" is a novel well worth reading.

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### **Abby says**

A strong, emotionally powerful and character-driven story that's both heartbreaking and at times very funny. Cohen's writing never ceases to amaze me. His attention to detail is impeccable as always, and the layers of his story so thorough. Once again he shows he is a master at telling stories so real and so human you feel immersed in the fictional town of West Gull and its inhabitants.

This is not a book for those who like fast-paced, action-driven stories. It moves slowly to observe minute details, flickers through time periods and perspectives. It tells a lot but never gives too much away. Brilliant.

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### **Julia says**

"All happy families resemble each other, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." - Leo Tolstoy

I applaud this Canadian author for such a descriptive and heartbreaking story.

27 year old Carl returns to his small home town after being away for 3 years, to reconnect with his young

daughter and to put behind him his legacy of violence and alchohol that had led to his divorce.

As he tries to rebuild his life, he finds that it is not an easy thing to do, in a town that has a long memory.

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