

# Elisabeth Stevens

## Artist, writer

A writer, graphic artist, journalist and critic, Elisabeth Stevens has published 22 books and created many etchings and other artworks. She was the art critic for The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and The Baltimore Sun. She also published six short-story collections, two novels and six collections of poems. Besides illustrating many of her own books, Stevens has created a number of large copper-plate etchings, several of which will be exhibited in the “Joys of Sarasota,” March 17-30, at Stakenborg Gallery, 1545 Main St., Sarasota. A reception, with the artist, will be held March 17, from 6-8 p.m. Proceeds from original prints will benefit the Sarasota Circus Arts Conservatory. For more information about Stevens, visit [gosspress.com](http://gosspress.com).



### **You're a writer and artist. What does being creative mean to you?**

Creating something can be a luxury, but for me it's always been a necessity. In the 1960s, when I was an impoverished graduate student at Columbia University, I started doing on-the-spot ink drawings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Lenny Bruce, Jack Kerouac, coal miners and dock strikers that I sold to magazines like The New Leader and The National Review. The price was \$10 a drawing, and I was glad to get it. In 2015, my daughter, Laura Forné, collected a number of these works in “The Sixties In Black And White: Drawings By Elisabeth Stevens.”

### **What's the favorite thing you've ever created?**

Fiction was my first love and I still relive imaginary scenes from my two novels, “A Green Isle in the Sea, Love,” a story of romantic revolt in the conservative 1950s, and from “Ride a Bright and Shining Pony,” a tragic love story set in 1963 on the day of the March on Washington for jobs and freedom. My short story, “Dinner for the Dead,” is also a favorite.

### **What are you trying to communicate with your art?**

Creating art or books is a job like any other. My ideas for art come from things I see. I don't know where my literary ideas come from. Let's say that they arrive out of the blue like uninvited guests and demand attention. How else can I explain a story like “Dinner for the Dead,” in which an elaborate meal is cooked and served to returning dead relatives?

### **Tell us a little about your “Secret Paintings” series.**

For more than 20 years, my main work was journalism. A widow, I was struggling to raise my daughter and get her through college. To the public, I was an art critic — not a fiction writer, poet or fine artist. In the evenings, however, I created a series of strange, colorful paintings on paper that I didn't show to anyone. These imaginative works pictured circus acts, magicians and strange animals and were eventually shown at the Stakenborg Gallery in 2013.