

Liz's scrambled eggs

CLOSE-UP

It's a wonderful book," said the woman from Bloomsbury. "It's all about madness, evangelism, genetic engineering and two daughters' relationship with their mother."

I don't know about you, but it sounded a bit of a dodgy mix to me. Did I really want to spend my evenings wading through such a book and then interview the Oxfordshire-born author?

"All right," I said to the publicist, "send me a copy and I'll see."

The next day it arrived. *Egg Dancing* by Liz Jensen. It's a first book, so I wasn't expecting it to be outstanding.

I took the book home, unopened, and found myself with a spare half hour. Three hours later I was still curled up in the same place, laughing. The washing-up was left overnight, the housework didn't get a look-in.

Egg Dancing may be about madness, but it's compelling. It's author is too — compelling, that is. Liz Jensen, 35, Wheatley born and bred, is the daughter of a carpenter turned violin-maker father and a linguist mother.

Her dad is Danish, her mum comes from a Moroccan Jewish family who moved to Britain when she was a child. An interesting mix, a wealth of cultures, all combining to give Liz a taste for exploration and for something different.

She didn't waste it.

At school (Oxford High School) she took six months out to live on a Kibbutz in Israel. Later she had a place at Somerville College, Oxford to read English, but took a year out and, at 19, found herself in Hong Kong, working on the South China Morning Post.

That was followed by a stint as a radio DJ in Taipei ("in the Ritz Hotel, in a bar full of shoe salesmen. . ."), then back to university.

"It was strange being at Oxford. I had a funny relationship with the city. There the town and gown divide and I was definitely a townie and knew where my loyalties lay. I never really got into being a student."

Anyway, as soon as her degree was finished, Liz went back to Taiwan, where she'd spent a summer with a Chinese family and perfected her Mandarin Chinese. She also worked on another radio station, an American one called ICRT.

"It was a bit like being a female version of Steve Koogan's spoof journalist Alan Partridge. I was the token Brit among the Americans."

Travelling in China, Japan and the Philippines followed, before Liz came



■ Wheatley-born Liz Jensen's first book, *Egg Dancing*, about madness and soul control really is a cracking read
Picture by: **Jon Lewis**

home to work as a radio journalist.

But by then she'd developed an interest in making cement sculptures and that, apart from her new career as an author, is where her heart really lies.

In 1987, she moved with her partner, Michel, a doctor specialising in cancer prevention, to France and set up her own sculpting studio. Her first son, Matti, was born in 1989 and Liz had her second son last year.

In between, the couple moved back to London and Liz worked part-time, so she could work on her new interest — fiction writing.

Egg Dancing involves sisters. Liz has a sister. One of the two is married to a doctor. But there is no similarity

and the book is definitely not autobiographical.

What it is about is soul control — how people are treated in mental health institutions, how genetic engineers could control people and how evangelists can, too, control souls.

But don't think it's a dull or dreary book. Liz has a way with words which, like honey, make them stick in your mind and make the point, but tickle you at the same time. The book reminds you too that there's a bit of madness in us all.

Fiona Tarrant

■ *Egg Dancing* by Liz Jensen, is published by Bloomsbury at £13.99, and was launched yesterday. It's available in all good bookshops.