



# The Sissy Duckling

*By Harvey Fierstein*

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## **The Sissy Duckling** By Harvey Fierstein

Elmer is not like the other boy ducklings. While they like to build forts, he loves to bake cakes. While they like to play baseball, he wants to put on the halftime show. Elmer is a great big sissy.

But when his father is wounded by a hunter's shot, Elmer proves that the biggest sissy can also be the greatest hero.

Acclaimed actor and playwright Harvey Fierstein has crafted a heartwarming story, based on his award-winning HBO animated special, about learning to embrace the special qualities we all possess. Henry Cole's gently humorous illustrations give it a new vitality. This is a book to share with all children, to help them understand that each one of them is unique and valuable.

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## **The Sissy Duckling** By Harvey Fierstein Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #125208 in Books
- Brand: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers
- Published on: 2005-06-01
- Released on: 2005-06-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.37" h x .10" w x 10.50" l, .38 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 40 pages

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Actor and playwright Fierstein (Torch Song Trilogy) turns a gimlet eye to Hans Christian Andersen in this ducky tale. Elmer, crowned by a wispy comb of feathers and wearing a pink backpack with daisies on it, is "one happy duckling doing all the things he loved to do," such as baking cookies and staging puppet shows. When Papa Duck, an imposing mallard, forces him to try baseball, Elmer promptly strikes out and heads for home, unfazed. Later, he hears his father complaining ("They all called him sissy! Now I'm the laughingstock of the whole flock") and endures threats from a school bully with a feathery flat-top and muscular chest. Elmer runs away and sets up housekeeping in a hollow tree, but comes to the rescue when his father gets shot by hunters and cannot fly south for the winter. Cole (Moosetache), assigned the daunting task of capturing Elmer's sensitive nature and the other ducks' bewilderment or scorn, keeps his zaniness in check. He makes a sympathetic hero of the skinny yellow nonconformist and suggests Elmer's wit in antic images of the duck kidding around with his convalescing dad. Fierstein handles serious and silly moments with aplomb, and shows Elmer staying true to his identity. In a campy, triumphant ending, the resourceful duckling loudly proclaims, "I am a big sissy and proud of it!" Ages 5-8.

From School Library Journal

Kindergarten-Grade 3-Elmer is not like the other male ducklings. "They boxed while Elmer baked. When they built forts, Elmer made sand castles. They had a football game, and Elmer put on a puppet show." When they call him a sissy, his mother insists that he is simply special, and "being special sometimes scares those who are not." Eventually, he is threatened by the local bully, Drake, and when he runs instead of fighting, his embarrassed father declares, "He's no son of mine!" Heartbroken, Elmer runs away and sets up house deep in the forest. As the air turns cooler, he sneaks to the great pond to view his parents one last time before they fly south and sees his father shot by hunters. He takes him home and nurses him back to health, and when the flock returns in the spring, Elmer's father boasts about his son's bravery and loyalty. Fierstein's book, based on his award-winning animated HBO special, sends out a positive message about differences and acceptance. The cartoon images are bright and colorful. The characters are engaging, and their faces and body language are wonderfully expressive. Snappy dialogue and enhancing details abound, from Elmer's flowered backpack, to the framed picture of his parents he packs in his pillowcase before his departure. With its universal message, upbeat conclusion, and snappy illustrations, this book is sure to be a hit with children.

*Heather E. Miller, Homewood Public Library, AL*

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From [Booklist](#)

Elmer is the happiest duckling in the whole forest, doing all the things he loves best: painting pictures, decorating cookies, sometimes even playing with the girls. But when Papa Duck insists he learn baseball like all the other boy ducks, Elmer fails miserably and, alas, is branded *sissy* (yes, a scarcely veiled term for homosexual). From that point on, there's no peace for the poor guy. Big bully Drake Duckling makes his life miserable at school, and although at home his mother assures him he's "special," and that he will amaze everyone, his Neanderthal father rejects him, angrily declaring, "He's no son of mine." Devastated, Elmer runs away to make a solitary new home for himself in the forest. He's admirably self-sufficient in the domestic department, but he's lonely and aches to see his parents once more. When hunting season comes, an accident delivers a surprising opportunity for Elmer to get his wish, and also to demonstrate to his father and to everyone else how very special and, indeed, amazing he really is.

Based on playwright-actor Fierstein's animated HBO special of the same name, this picture book is

something of a landmark title. Although it's not the first gay-themed book for youngsters, it's arguably the first one from a major trade publisher. The slender selection of previous efforts on this subject have, for the most part, come from smaller or specialty houses, most notably Alyson Publications, which has given us Michael Willhoite's *Daddy's Room mate* (1991) and Leslea Newman's *Heather Has Two Mommies* (1991). There have also been a handful of picture books dealing with AIDS--e.g., Newman's *Too Far Away to Touch* (Clarion, 1995) and Mary Kate Jordan's *Losing Uncle Tim* (Whitman, 1989)--and at least one about the subject of gay uncles, Judith Vigna's 1995 *My Two Uncles*, also published by Whitman. The point is that these books have seldom received wide distribution, and even more important, the gay characters in them are all adults. The one notable exception to this, a book that *The Sissy Duckling* marginally resembles, is Tomie de Paola's *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* (Harcourt, 1979). This semiautobiographical book is also the story of a boy who doesn't like to do "things boys are supposed to do." The difference is that *Oliver Button*-- like Charlotte Zolotow's pioneering *William's Baby* (Harper, 1972)--is more focused on the issue of gender stereotyping than on homosexuality.

Fierstein's book is much more in-your-face about this duckling's differences. As Elmer eventually declares, "I am a BIG Sissy and PROUD of it!" And the story concludes with a declaration that "out in the world Elmer met lots of other ducks just like himself."

Elmer's gay identity is even more evident in the artwork. There's lots of pink in Henry Cole's wonderfully droll, personality-packed, cartoon illustrations: Elmer wears a pink bathing cap and sports snazzy, heart-shaped sunglasses at the beach; he carries his books in a flowered pink backpack; he dances around his new forest home wearing a pink apron and carrying a feather duster; and he decorates cookies with pink frosting. Perhaps most telling, though, is the picture of Ethel Merman hanging on his bedroom wall. All of this, including the glitter used on the jacket's book title (also in pink), is saved from any hint of didacticism by the obvious affection and good humor with which it's done, so children can enjoy the story on different levels. The story, moreover, is fueled by drama and character, and Elmer is such a lovable, sweet-spirited duck that readers of all ages can't help but chorus, "Hey, Elmer! You go, duckling!" *Michael Cart*  
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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Pamela Bradley:**

Do you have favorite book? In case you have, what is your favorite's book? Publication is very important thing for us to find out everything in the world. Each reserve has different aim or goal; it means that book has different type. Some people experience enjoy to spend their a chance to read a book. They are reading whatever they consider because their hobby is reading a book. Consider the person who don't like looking at a book? Sometime, individual feel need book if they found difficult problem or exercise. Well, probably you will need this The Sissy Duckling.

#### **Donald Hidalgo:**

Your reading 6th sense will not betray an individual, why because this The Sissy Duckling reserve written by well-known writer who really knows well how to make book that could be understand by anyone who all read the book. Written with good manner for you, dripping every ideas and writing skill only for eliminate your current hunger then you still question The Sissy Duckling as good book not simply by the cover but also from the content. This is one publication that can break don't assess book by its include, so do you still

needing an additional sixth sense to pick that!? Oh come on your reading sixth sense already alerted you so why you have to listening to yet another sixth sense.

**Carmen Russell:**

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