

Simpson's ordinary characters face extraordinary events

BY SNOW PHILIP

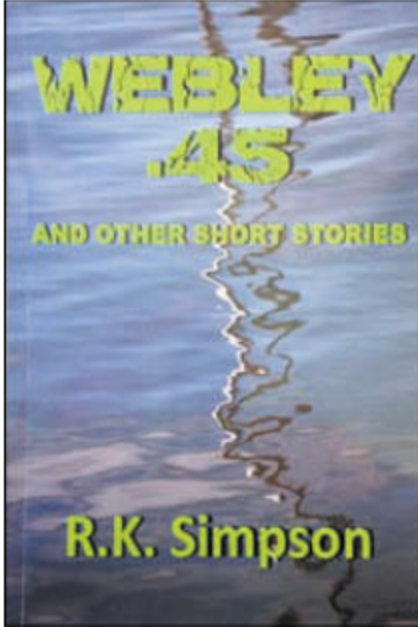
Special to The Citizen

R.K. "Chip" Simpson has joined the roster of Key West writers with the publication of "Webley.45 and Other Short Stories."

Now you won't need to read "The Brothers Karamazov" to get a taste of tragedy and redemption, childhood heartbreak, the wistful deception that can accompany infidelity, and a host of other human woes and joys. Simpson deals with all of these and more in this collection of stories, and you won't have to try to keep track of complicated Russian names as you read.

Chip and his wife Patty live in Alexandria, Va., and Key West. But before he settled into this routine, Simpson was an Air Force brat, a Dartmouth graduate, a former Marine, a U.S. diplomat and finally a registered nurse before becoming a published

author. He has a 42-year-old daughter and 40-year-old twin sons. His varied life has enabled him to write competently about a wide range of subjects; when you read his book, you'll find subtle references to warfare, medicine, Spain and a childhood spent as a military dependent woven into stories, some of which reflect his life experiences.



draws a reader into the narratives and makes you want to continue reading. Most readers will find in this collection at least one story with a theme to

Short stories are notorious for taking a long time to write, but by definition they take a short time to read. These 10 stories about extraordinary things that happen to ordinary people are quick to read as well as interesting and enjoyable. You will probably want to read some of them a second time. Simpson establishes early in his tales the tension that

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which they can relate.

Who among us has not experienced a childhood disappointment whose heartbreak can be eased but never entirely erased, even in adulthood? When you read "The Ump," you will be sure to realize that you too have a memory of an early calamity that continues to resonate.

Ever made a snap decision that forever changed your life and the lives of others? "Ignition" looks at the quasicomic circumstances that can lead to such a momen-

tous alteration. Next, set in the first half of the 20th century, "Hoodwinker" recalls a family friend who lived the agonizing life of fearful deception as an African-American passing for white. "The Elephant Hunt" looks at the complex relationship among a father, his closeted homosexual son and the son's unfulfilled love.

Other stories deal with a husband's practical joke on his wife, a youthful love recalled in old age and the remarkable strength of family ties.

Simpson's characters are believable and well-drawn, usually with just a few sure strokes. He is able to get

down on paper plausible local dialect — not an easy task. Much of his writing is delightful; the philandering husband in "The Dancer" who excuses himself for his infidelities as he goes to bed alone, and thinks those thoughts that will make him feel less than the heel he knows himself to be: "These obedient sheep jumped out of their stalls when summoned and trotted docilely across his conscience — each bearing a piece of woolly truth — until he fell asleep."

And this from "Ignition" when a first-time father is finally accepted by the ancient patriarch of his wife's Sicilian family: "...

Papa Lou embraced Arthur for the first time. The shriveled jackal, regnant but warm, had reached his mottled hands up, up to Arthur's face, pulled him

forward ... and kissed him on both cheeks."

I love this description of a performer: "The musical genes of her grandmother ... spawned in Jeannie's pool. At seventeen, she had a smoky contralto, a broken heart and perfect pitch, nice credentials for a blues singer."

So I suggest that you read these stories for their well-constructed plots, their wise observations of human nature, and their forays into humor and angst. Save the beautiful vignette, "Melon for Maid Service," for dessert. I frankly enjoyed these stories a lot more than "The Brothers Karamazov," and read them in a fraction of the time demanded by the brothers.

Happy reading.

Snow Philip lives in Key West and is a 'sometime writer.'