



Chapters of a Life

John Nieman

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This is a vivid portrait of a veteran journalist's vibrant life.

A magnetic personality emerges from the pages of this absorbing story about a news reporter and television anchor. *Chapters of a Life* by John Nieman explores the joys and heartbreaks of a popular correspondent.

Opening in 1926 and closing in 2015, this chronicle convincingly portrays Chaz Conner from his birth to his final breath. Deeply engrossing yet objectively simple, this encompassing view of an ambitious man's pursuit of a dream will strike an empathetic chord or inspire the unmotivated.

Marketed as a short story collection, this twenty-seven-chapter book is in reality a novel, even though select chapters could thrive outside the larger context. Mixing decades of history with a contemporary, third-person viewpoint, this informative account set against a fictional backdrop integrates celebrities into the narrative. Authentic-feeling interviews and candid encounters spice up what could have been a mundane record of world events. Chaz reports on tragedies like a seasoned professional, yet remains approachable and human throughout the moving plot.

Personally touched by the Vietnam War when his son is killed, Chaz demonstrates his profound grief and frank disillusionment through his actions: "in...his son's empty bedroom every night [he] visualize[d] the young man's life, touch[ed] the desk, and rub[bed] the dresser." He notices, cynically, that his son's high school textbooks have not been used much, implying criticism of military recruitment.

Chaz's domestic concerns and family are cemented into the structure, rather than being poured superfluously over the important foundation of his career. This technique allows a solid characterization to develop, sufficiently detailed and emotionally tangible. Yet a tendency to focus too heavily on trivia at certain moments taints the book with an artificial tone. Chaz's relationships with historical figures often come across as unnecessary, fun to read but not credible, even for an anchorman with rank.

The best scenes exhibit vibrancy. Neiman never succumbs to the temptation to launch into melodrama or prolonged introspection to advance his story. Character is revealed through daily interactions and work. Snapshots of a lifetime taken over the span of nearly ninety years, every chapter offers a different view of Chaz, until the novel's peaceful deathbed closure.

Political and social statements are sophisticated and subtle, natural rather than pronounced. Neiman is a fine artist who paints vivid pictures on the page. His skillful rendering of Chaz will attract anyone with an appreciation for in-depth literary depiction without excess sentiment. This is a life no veteran journalist would want to miss.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (January 27, 2016)

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