

Simple Simon

William Poe

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The author's clear and compassionate voice invites readers inside Simon's head as he hurts and heals.

Simple Simon, by William Poe, follows Simon Powell through a gritty, painful path and ultimately becomes a story of healing. At his counselor's urging, Simon is earnestly trying to make sense of his life by writing down his story. Poe is able to keep the first-person, confessional urgency of the story without falling into the rambling, self-indulgent, journal-like style of similar stories.

Simon grew up in the 1960s in Arkansas, where he faced adversity because of his homosexuality. This pain and tension sets the stage for the rest of his life. He seeks solace in Reverend Moon's Unification Church, through drug and alcohol abuse, and through unhealthy relationships. Eventually one of his relationships heads him in a positive direction—Thad, Simon's former lover, encourages Simon to seek treatment for his drug addiction. The counsel and healing that result are the impetus for this story.

While Simon's susceptibility to and involvement in Moon's cult are interesting and indicative of the vulnerability and loneliness he feels, it's the loving and flawed relationships in his life that will be more deeply felt by readers. Simon's childhood remembrances of running to meet his mother's car and playing Old Maid with his grandmother provide a touching background for the pain, conflict, and isolation in Simon's family. When his mother, late in her life, accepts his sexual identity, readers feel a warmth slowly begin to fill the chasm that had developed between them.

Poe's background in art and anthropology shine through in the delicacy and compassion he shows to his characters. Poe's clear, open voice draws readers in. Descriptions are well balanced, giving readers a clear understanding of events without bogging down the story with detail, and dialogue is realistic and easy to read.

The book provides readers with a hopeful, happier counterpart to Poe's other novel, *Simon Says*. As a result, the cover image is light, airy, and inviting, and the title type complements it well. Readers who rely on the cover to set the tone and skip the back cover copy may be taken aback by the harsh realities the book portrays on the path to healing.

The novel will appeal most to gay people like Simon who've journeyed through bigotry and pain to develop positive outlooks and relationships. That said, *Simple Simon's* message of reconciliation and hope is truly for anyone who has struggled to resolve the truth they know about themselves with the way others see them. The power of forgiveness and acceptance can resonate with all readers.

MELISSA WUSKE (July 29, 2013)

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