

## A Page from Real Life

According to playwright Neil Simon, “Art not only copies from life, it steals from it.” Simon should know, since, like many of his plays, *Chapter Two* draws largely from his experience.

*Chapter Two*'s thin line between truth and fiction begins with the character of George, who, like Simon, is a writer. After his wife of 12 years dies, George, 42, takes a trip to Europe; Simon was 46 in 1973 when his wife, Joan, died of cancer, and he traveled to Europe in an attempt to shed his grief. When George returns to New York, his brother, Leo, has taken to matchmaking; Simon's brother, Danny, did the same. By the end of the first act, George gets serious about actress Jennie Malone much like Simon did when he met actress Marsha Mason. Without giving away any more of the plot, suffice it to say that Simon's alter-ego makes many of the same mistakes Simon did.

Simon has described himself as a sleep-walker in the days and months following Joan's death, wandering Manhattan with “a feeling of numbness, inertia and confusion.” He slept with a picture of Joan on his bedside table and spoke nightly to the photograph. “The more I held onto Joan through our talk sessions,” he wrote in his memoir, “the more I was impeding my own recovery from the grief, a situation that was to remain constant for a very long time.”

That constant grief and Simon's desire to hold onto his love for Joan is at the core of *Chapter Two*. “When I had embedded Joan's face deeply into my brain after she died,” he wrote, “the aura of that imprint floated about the house... a vision that could be felt rather than seen by both Marsha and by me.” George and Jennie face the same challenge: how to honor the past chapters of their lives, yet at the same time, turn the page to begin anew.

One of Simon's great strengths as a playwright is his ability to capture life's bittersweet moments when sadness and humor coalesce to form an experience that is uniquely human. He accomplishes this especially well in *Chapter Two*, taking a chapter from his own life and using it to create a play that captures both the heart and the funny bone.

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