

norman etc. Fri., Feb. 15, 2013

# A closer look at an age-old institution

## 'One Hundred Years of Marriage' a marvelous exploration through four generations

**By Amber Hodge**  
For norman etc.

The perception of marriage has been altered and changed repeatedly over the course of history.

There are still many similarities to be found in past and present unions, but the modern beliefs and lifestyles have changed dramatically over time.

Author Louise Farmer Smith has dug to the roots of the past, present and everything in-between in her beautifully written novel "One Hundred Years of Marriage".

Smith, a former resident of Norman, is a descendent of dugout-dwellers and chip-gatherers. She was a 2005 Bread Leaf fellow, and one of her stories set within this novel, "Return to Lincoln," was nominated for a 2005 Pushcart Prize.

"One Hundred Years" provides an alluring look at how marriage has progressed over the years as Smith takes the reader on a thoughtful journey through four generations of one family. Each story is filled with raw characters and real issues that many people may have dealt with or seen before in their own lives. That aspect makes reading this story more of a personal journey in which the reader can relate, sympathize and learn from.

Set in Oklahoma, this novel is composed of numerous stories that begin and end with Patricia, who is seen at the start as a young girl growing up in the '60s and trying to make sense of her parent's mar-

riage.

"What was your father thinking the night he proposed to your mother? Why did she say yes? By the time we ask, all the compelling details have cooled into whatever myths they've chosen to tell us. Our grandparents' stories are even more frozen, and the truth of our grandparents' unions have perished in airless memories of the dead."

Her house is a happier, brighter place when her father is away. Her mother's passiveness toward him troubles Patricia greatly, and she can't understand why a woman would let her husband run roughshod over his family without putting up any sort of a fight.

After being compared to one of her relatives, Patricia knows more than anything that she doesn't want to end up like the women in her family.

"Surely there was another great-grandmother back there in time I could take after. I knew nothing about Grandma Vic's mother except that her name was Margaret and she was from North Carolina. Maybe she was a real southern belle, fiery like Scarlet O' Hara."

Societal pressure is a major theme throughout this book. Society is an unseen iron fist full of expectations that demand families keep their problems at home, hidden from the public's eye.

And while female perspectives dominate the pages, it is made clear the men don't escape the pressures and expectations unscathed. Though each

couple deals with a different set of problems, no one can avoid succumbing to the pitfalls of marriage eventually.

The author takes a brilliant approach by taking the reader back in time with each of the stories, instead of forward, and does a fantastic job in telling how each generation deals with marriage and all it entails. The writing style is engaging, and pulls the reader into the story effortlessly. Reading this book is almost like reading a journal of one family's history, which is refreshing and almost addictive.

In the end, the stories circle back to Patricia, who is getting ready for her own wedding day. After finally breaking away from the never-changing expectations of her hometown, she is now back where all her thoughts and revelations began.

She sees how many of the people she knew and cared for put on fake smiles over the years to cover up the problems society would deem as disgraceful. In an instant she sets out on a new path, defying the expectations that would otherwise control her.

This story ends on a satisfying and hopeful note. It is thought-provoking and deep, and feels a lot longer than its 210 pages. Readers will be able to take away something from each story. "One Hundred Years" is a superb and sincere read for the soul.

For more information on Smith visit [louisefarmer-smith.com](http://louisefarmer-smith.com).

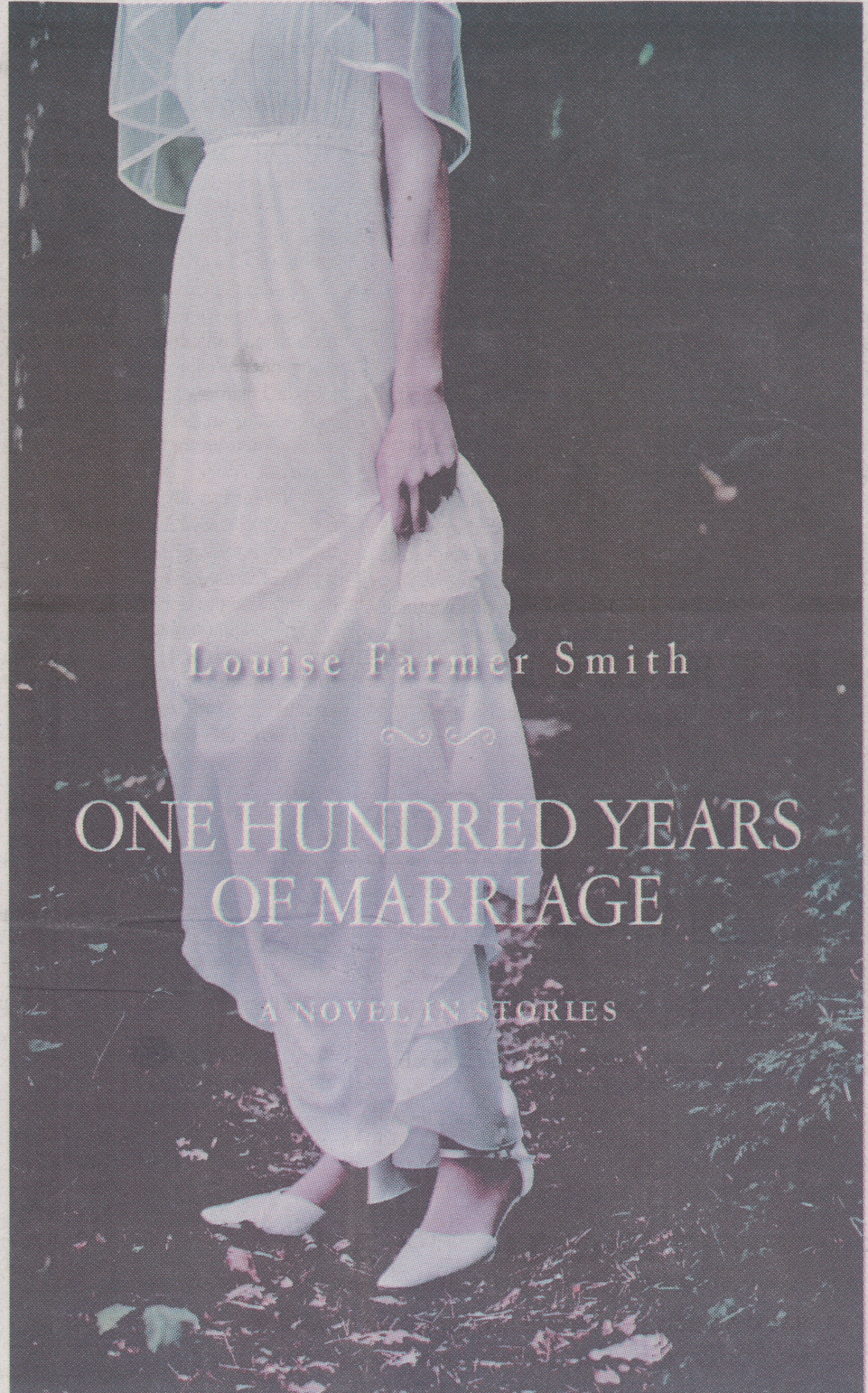


Image Provided