About the story:

Set during the turmoil of World War II, Purple Hearts is the story of the epileptic scion of an East Texas timber and oil fortune and his marriage to a stunning stranger desperate for sanctuary. Though naïve and virginal, thirty-year-old Georgie Karacek wins Sylvia through his charm and kindness. Longing to prove himself, he then hides his illness to join the Army. Sylvia's relationship with Georgie's overprotective mother proves difficult, so to make ends meet she takes on a boarder, Robert, in his absence. Soon he and Sylvia grow close, and he presses her to run away with him. When Georgie's epilepsy comes to light, he is discharged, but on returning home he suspects that his bride and the boarder are lovers. But wartime conditions explode into rioting, and that uproar puts them at odds with the town when Georgie helps a black friend flee. Purple Hearts is based loosely on events in Beaumont, Texas, in July of 1943, when shipyard workers rampaged following a rumor that a black man had raped a sailor’s wife. Several people died and scores were injured, and that riot echoed those in Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Writer/critic Bryan Woolley has hailed Purple Hearts as “the best novel I’ve read about the home front during World War II and [it] illumines the dark fact that there was more to that home scene than Rosie the Riveter and War Bond drives.”

Advance Praise for Purple Hearts:

“C. W. Smith’s new novel, Purple Hearts...is the best novel I’ve read about the home front during World War II and illumines the dark fact that there was more to that home scene than Rosie the Riveter and War Bond drives. The characters...are vivid and well-drawn, and as a portrait of the times, it’s excellent.” Bryan Woolley – November 22, Some Sweet Day, The Edge of the West.

“It's got great sweep and authority, a compelling story, and characters that I'm really interested and invested in--particularly Mary Kay, whose letters to Donnie are so pitch perfect for a 15-year-old girl in 1943 that it's almost uncanny. It's rare to find a novel in which the characters are so sympathetic and helplessly feral at the same time.” Steve Harrigan – Gates of the Alamo, Challenger Park, Water and Light.

“C.W. Smith’s novel, Purple Hearts, is driven by one of the most complex and heart-wrenching heroes in literature when the deeply flawed Georgie Karacek is confronted with challenges that would overwhelm
the most valiant heart. After only eleven weeks of training Georgie is
invalided out of the World War II army to return home to a town on the
edge of violence, a domineering mother driven by prejudice and a self-
delusional wife, Sylvia, the only woman he has ever loved. When the
town spins into violence, Georgie suddenly emerges as the only man
standing in the way of that violence. Purple Hearts is a testimony to the
mythic courage of the individual driven by love, and, in this, his finest
work, C.W. Smith is writing at the height of his power.” Jane Wood – The
Train to Estelline, Grace, Roseborough, Dance a Little Longer.

“Smith's novel Purple Hearts is a compelling story set during WWII that
vividly depicts the lives and dramas of the home front. Set in the Deep
South, the characters are both engaging and authentic. Smith's ability to
convey the truth through the eyes of both men and women, black and
white, young and old is a testament to his storytelling. Sexy, sad, yet
ultimately hopeful, it's a novel about war that reminds us how little we
have changed. This was terrific.” Molly Moynahan – Garden of Stone,
Living in Arcadia, Parting is All We Know of Heaven.

"C.W. Smith's sensitive, finely-crafted tale unfolds in a Gulf Coast Texas
town that seethes with the reflected violence of WWII. Most of the
wounds in 'Purple Hearts' don't come from bullets. Smith gives us the
stateside theatre: rations books and strained marriages, the dashed pride
of 4-F men, white shipyard workers set against black, and one sweet
washout of a soldier, Georgie Karacek, to whom fate delivers a desperate
choice--hold on to his beautiful wife or pay a debt to a childhood friend." 
Lisa Sandlin – In the River Province; Times of Sorrow, Times of Grace;
Message to the Nurse of Dreams.

"C. W. Smith remains one of our most intelligent and gifted novelists.
Purple Hearts is a precise sortie through contested human territory.
From wars of intimacy, with their many surprise attacks, to the battles
that define our communities, this splendid new novel maps the
strategies behind ordinary people's fights to meet the extraordinary
demands of American life.” Tracy Daugherty – Desire Provoked; Axeman’s
Jazz; The Boy Orator, Five Shades of Shadow, and other works.

“Against the backdrop of worldwide war, the suppressed hatred and
violence of racism explode in a small Texas city, and unlikely heroes risk
the
kind of moral action that changes destinies. In this time of patriotism,
paranoia, sacrifice, and selfishness, Smith's wholly convincing characters
reveal the extraordinary secrets and dreams of ordinary people and
dramatically remind us that cowardice and courage may be inextricably tangled in anyone's life. Uncompromising yet compassionate, Smith's remarkable rendering of the time and the place give us history as only fiction can, not as facts or imitations, but as deeply felt human experience, as volatile and poignant as life itself.” Allen Wier – Blanco, Things About to Disappear, Tehano, and A Place for Outlaws.

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About the Author:


He has twice received the Jesse H. Jones Novel Award from the Texas Institute of Letters; the Southwestern Library Association Award for Best Novel; the Dobie-Paisano Creative Writing Fellowship from the University of Texas; two National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowships; the Texas Headliner's Feature Story award; the Frank O'Connor Memorial Short Story Award from Quartet magazine; the John H. McGinnis Short Story Award from Southwest Review; a Pushcart Prize Nomination from Southwest Review; Special Merit Award for Feature Writing from the Penney-Missouri Foundation; the Stanley Walker Award for Journalism from the Texas Institute of Letters, an SMU Research-Travel Grant, and an award for Best Nonfiction Book by a Texan in 1987 from the Southwestern Booksellers Association for his memoir Uncle Dad.

He belongs to PEN American Center, The Authors Guild, Writer's Guild of America West, and the Texas Institute of Letters.
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