



thisweek

Readings & signings on LI

Monday

Westbury resident **Arthur Dobrin**, discusses his self-

published book "The Harder Right: Stories of Conscience and Choice," tickets \$10.

At noon, *Mid-Island YJCC*, 45 Manetto Hill Rd., Plainview; 516-822-3535, ext. 335, miyjcc.org

Tuesday

Tad Hills reads his book "Duck and Goose Go to the Beach" (Schwartz & Wade) at a children's story hour. At 10 a.m., *Barnes & Noble, 91 Old Country Rd., Carle Place*; 516-741-9850, barnesandnoble.com

Wednesday

Mark Epstein, M.D., readsfrom "The Trauma of Everyday Life" (Penguin Press). At 7 p.m., *Radio Lounge of Chancellors Hall, Stony Brook Southampton*,

239 Montauk Highway, Southampton; 631-632-5030, stonybrook.edu/mfa



Thursday

Investment adviser **Larry Doyle** speaks about his book, "In Bed With Wall Street: The Conspiracy Crippling Our Global Economy" (Palgrave Macmillan). At 7 p.m., *Book Revue*, 313 New York Ave., Huntington, 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

Friday

Northport author **Paullina Simons** signscopies of her novel "Bellagrand" (William Morrow). At 7 p.m., *Book Revue*, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

reviews

This plot is rich in characters

AND THE DARK SACRED NIGHT, by Julia Glass. Pantheon, 379 pp., \$26.95.BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

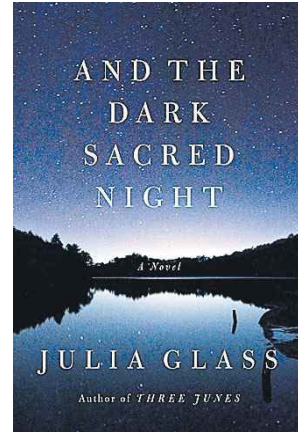
Julia Glass can really do geezers. Her sure hand with the voices and idiosyncrasies of older men is the strongest thing about "And The Dark Sacred Night," the third in a trio of novels featuring gay Scottish bookseller Fenno McLeod. He debuted in Glass' National Book Award-winning "Three Junes" (2002), then returned in "The Whole World Over" (2006), where he got a boyfriend, a bantering, nurturing Greenwich Village restaurant owner named Walter.

Now Fenno and Walter are secondary players in a cast that includes a crusty Vermont outdoorsman, Jasper Noonan, and a post-stroke state senator, Zeke Burns. Zeke is the father of art critic Malachy Burns, who died of AIDS in "Three Junes." Malachy plays a key posthumous role in the current novel as well.



Julia Glass' character Fenno McLeod returns in her latest book.

Unfortunately, the character at the center of the new plot is the weakest of the troupe. Kit Noonan, adoptive son of Jasper Noonan, is a 42-year-old art historian who lives in New Jersey with his wife and twins. He's a bit of a drip, and it's hard to understand why his once-teenage and single mom has permanently refused to reveal who his biological father is, and why his wife thinks it'll solve his unemployment and depres-



sion problems if he finds out.

If the paternity-mystery plot line of this book doesn't have enough mojo, the character development is so rich, the Vermont and Provincetown settings so vivid, and the relationships so carefully shaded that it remains an engrossing read. For example, Walter, the endearing restaurateur, is unrelentingly peevisish about Fenno's long-ago friendship with Malachy. When Malachy, along with a list of others lost

to AIDS, is remembered with a toast at a survivor's 60th birthday party, Walter kvetches, "Can we move on a little here? If I want to visit the Quilt, I'll get on a plane to San Francisco. Or DC. Wherever it is." One of the points of "And The Dark Sacred Night" is that people are defined as much by their flaws as their assets — in fact, in relation to another character, a Catholic activist, it is observed that "saints . . . fall hard. Saints are merely tyrants in the kingdom of virtue."

As for the title, it is explained by Walter and Fenno's therapist. It's a lyric from the Louis Armstrong song "What a Wonderful World" — "the bright blessed day and the dark sacred night." "The past is like the night: dark yet sacred," says the therapist, underlining the importance of unraveling one's history. Good old Fenno nearly bolts from the office at that point.

It's kind of odd that the strongest characters in the book have an ironic relationship to the somewhat gooey wisdom it imparts. But the odd moments in this novel are its best.

A cyclist's grand journey

LIFE IS A WHEEL: Love, Death, Etc., and a Bike Ride Across America, by Bruce Weber. Scribner, 336 pp., \$26.BY STEVEN RAE
Philadelphia Inquirer

Bruce Weber claims that traveling by bicycle isn't "the contemplative, mind-meandering activity that it is generally presumed to be."

And The New York Times writer, whose "Life Is a Wheel" chronicles his 79-day, 4,122-mile pedal from Astoria, Ore., back to his apartment in Lower Manhattan, has a point: riding 50, 60, 70 miles a day, sometimes on busy blacktops with tractor trailers rocketing alongside, on county roads that suddenly dissolve to gravel, through endless prairies, wondering if you're going

to a find a place to eat, or sleep, the concerns are more immediate, practical, particular.

Weber took his custom-built, \$8,000 touring bike across America in the summer and early fall of 2011, and blogged about it on the paper's Travel site (and in its pages). This was Weber's second transcontinental cycling jaunt — he had traversed the States in 1993, when he hadn't yet hit 40. Now he's 57, fit but not without health issues: acid reflux, occasional gout, nearsightedness, tinnitus, spinal stenosis in the neck. And a tendency to fall melancholy.

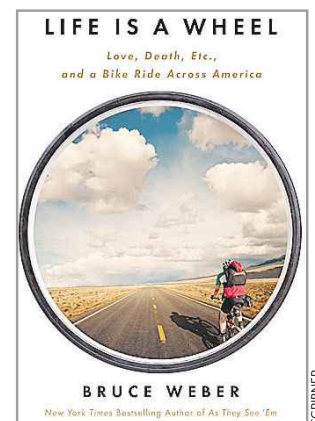
"The standard joke," he writes, "is that I'm both perfectly healthy and falling apart."

Although Weber had some beer cans thrown at him, for the most part the folks he ran into offered only good wishes, good company and the occasional back-of-the-pickup

conveyance when he was faced with a dead end. The kindness of strangers, even in a country fiercely divided into red states and blue, is much in evidence.

"Life Is a Wheel" isn't just journal entries about fields of North Dakota sunflowers, about grinding through baking heat, pouring rain, gusting winds, about the shabby inns and Indian-reservation casino hotels. Weber loses a best friend to cancer in the early weeks of his ride, parks his bike and takes a plane to LA for the memorial service, where he delivers a eulogy.

The book is full of reflections about growing up in suburban New Jersey, about romance and regrets. Jan Benzel, a fellow journalist who became the girlfriend of the commitment-phobic Weber on a bike trip through Provence, accompanies him on the Great Allegheny Passage — carless



bliss and dramatic gorges on a reclaimed railway from Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Md.

"Life Is a Wheel" is for cyclists, certainly, and for anyone who has ever dreamed of such transcontinental travels. But it also should prove soul-stirring to those who don't care a whit about bikes but who care about the way people connect — strangers, friends, lovers, parents and children.