

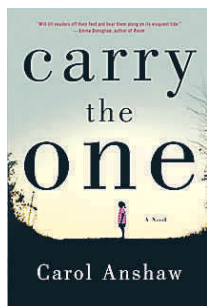
# Siblings and 25 years of guilt

**CARRY THE ONE**, by Carol Anshaw. Simon & Schuster, 253 pp., \$25.

BY MARION WINIK  
Special to Newsday

The long shadow cast by the excesses of the 1980s has been the subject of several excellent recent novels, including Michelle Huneven's "Blame" and Eleanor Henderson's "Ten Thousand Saints." How do the survivors of self-induced, self-indulgent tragedies do penance, find wisdom, compensate (or not) in the decades following?

Carol Anshaw's novel "Carry the One" begins at the rural Wisconsin wedding of Carmen Kenney and Matt Sloan in 1983. The final hours of the reception find Carmen's sister upstairs making out with Matt's sister, while Carmen's brother and his date take mushrooms with teenage cousins. At 3 a.m., that foursome, plus a folk singer



friend, pile into a car to head back to Chicago. The bride, who is pregnant and exhausted, doesn't have the energy to run after and tell them their lights aren't on as they head down the driveway.

A few minutes later, the car hits and kills a little girl.

Anshaw's story follows the Kenney siblings and other characters over the next 25 years, though a series of distinct moments, so that the structure is

almost a novel-in-stories. Leftist / feminist do-gooder Carmen will lose her husband to Christianity and the baby-sitter; fortunately, her quirky, wonderful son Gabe and her sister Alice never fail her. Alice, meanwhile, sees her art career go over the moon but never recovers from the

passion conceived at the wedding for the beautiful Maude. Their on-again, off-again relationship is one of many captivating plot elements that add juice to this sobering tale — as do Anshaw's humor and acuity, which make every description a delight. For example, Alice's



Carol Anshaw

reaction to the reappearance of her beloved:

Maude was "still totally invasive. She went through Alice's mail, her drawers, the paintings in her racks. She picked bits of nut from between Alice's teeth, Q-tipped wax from her ears. Alice had mixed sentiments about this, the sentiments being (a) thrilled, and (b) wanting to run from the room screaming."

The youngest Kenney sibling, Nick, is also hostage to an obsession — drugs. Guilt, love,

other people's forbearance and aid, his success as an astronomer — nothing, it turns out, can stop Nick from following the itinerary of his life.

The heartbreaking slog of being Nick's sister is a burden shared by Alice and Carmen, and contains one of the resonances of the title. Another is elucidated by Alice with regard to the folk singer dude who, after trying to slink off from the scene of the accident, profits from it years later with a cheesy song. "Here's what I hate," Alice says, "There's still this connection, between me and him because we were both in the car. Like in arithmetic. Because of the accident, we're not just separate numbers. When you add us up, you always have to carry the one."

In life, celebration is often followed immediately by tragedy, which then yields to some pretty good stuff and some slightly annoying stuff, then more of the huge bombs again. Learning to live with every variety of sadness and happiness and mundanity is the central challenge of spending many years on Earth. What a great thing to write about, and what a fine job Anshaw has done.

## A glimpse of the private Sontag

**AS CONSCIOUSNESS IS HARNESSSED TO FLESH: Journals and Notebooks, 1964-1980**, by Susan Sontag, edited by David Rieff. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 523 pp., \$30.

BY MELISSA ANDERSON  
Special to Newsday

In the three years since "Reborn," the first volume of Susan Sontag's journals and notebooks, was published, at least three more books about the literary titan have appeared, notably Sigrid Nunez's 2011 memoir, "Sempre Susan." Although Nunez's reminiscences — centering primarily on the brief time she lived with Sontag and her son, David Rieff, in the mid-'70s — are filled with intimate, candid and often unflattering observations about the writer, nothing compares with going to the source directly. The second of three volumes, "As Consciousness Is Harnessed to Flesh," spans the years of

Sontag's most prodigious output and her greatest intellectual influence, including the 1966 publication of her first volume of essays, the landmark "Against Interpretation," and the equally influential "Illness as Metaphor," a 1978 treatise inspired by her first bout with breast cancer. Though there are passing references to these and other works in this volume — and plenty of lengthy, piercing disquisitions on politics, philosophy, art and literature — "As Consciousness" reveals Sontag as plagued by doubt and despair, a maker of self-exhorting to-do lists.

"Her heart was one often broken, and much of this volume is the elaboration of romantic loss," Rieff, editor of his mother's journals, notes in the Preface. Indeed the first entry, dated May 5, 1964, finds Sontag grieving over her four-year relationship with playwright María Irene Fornés, which had ended in 1963. "I don't really accept the change in Irene. I think I can reverse it — by explaining, by demon-

strating that I am good for her," Sontag says. Her propensity for near-masochistic self-abnegation while in love is painfully detailed in several lengthy entries from 1970, when she was involved with an Italian aristocrat and former heroin addict called Carlotta here. "I must be strong, permissive, unreproachful, capable of joy (independently of her), able to take care of my own needs (but playing down my ability, or wish, to take care of hers). . . . I cannot ever show her all my weakness," Sontag writes.

That directive — "I must" — recurs throughout "As Consciousness," whether as a list of "Essays still to write" or a roster of goals for greater self-discipline, including "I will try to confine my reading to the evening. (I read too much — as an escape from writing.)" Yet moments of self-regard — assessments closer in spirit to Sontag's imperious, confident public image — also punctuate the journals. "I do like myself. I always have. . . . It's just that I don't think other people will



Susan Sontag

like me. And I 'understand' their point of view. But — if I were other people — I'd like me a lot," Sontag notes with peculiar logic. But a mere four lines later, she returns to the journal's dominant, rueful tone, repelled by her own needs and determined to never seem weak: "I vow not to make a fool of myself."

## this week

Readings and book signings on Long Island

### Monday

Former Yankees pitcher

**Jim Abbott** talks about his memoir, "Imperfect: An Improbable Life" (Ballantine). At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



### Tuesday

A panel discussion featuring young-reader authors **Jim Benton** ("Dear Dumb Diary"), **R.L. Stine** ("Goosebumps") and **Kathryn Lasky** ("Wolves of the Beyond"). At 7 p.m., Barnes & Noble, Country Glen Center, 91 Old Country Rd., Carle Place; 516-741-9850. (Wristbands distributed starting 4 p.m. Monday.)

**Ricki Lake** discusses her memoir "Never Say Never: Finding a Life That Fits" (Atria). At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



### Saturday

North Merrick author **Jen Calonita** discusses her latest teen novel, "Belles" (Little, Brown). At 2 p.m., Barnes & Noble Country Glen Center, 91 Old Country Rd., Carle Place; 516-741-9850



### Next Sunday

The Long Island Authors' Group Book Fair features works by more than 20 local authors. Noon to 4 p.m., Martha Clara Vineyards, 6025 Sound Ave., Riverhead; 631-298-0075, longislandauthorsgroup.org  
Compiled by Mary Beth Foley