

talking with Michael D'Antonio

BY MATTHEW PRICE
Special to Newsday

It's a truth almost universally acknowledged: rich, powerful men like to race sailing boats. Think of Ted Turner at the helm of the *Courageous* in the '70s, and, more recently, Oracle billionaire Larry Ellison, who spent millions wresting the America's Cup back from the Swiss. Before them both was Sir Thomas Lipton, founder of the eponymous tea company, who rose from the gritty streets of Victorian Glasgow to build a vast commercial empire.



D'Antonio

A cheerful eccentric and master of publicity, Lipton is the subject of Michael D'Antonio's entertaining new biography, **"A Full Cup: Sir Thomas Lipton's Extraordinary Life and His Quest for the America's Cup"** (Riverhead, \$26.95). Lipton made headlines wherever he went, and his participation in the 1899 America's Cup turned the event into a grand spectacle (though he lost). In a recent phone conversation, D'Antonio — a Miller Place resident, sailing aficionado and former News-

day staffer — talked about the man who Will Rogers said "made losing worthwhile."

Could we say that Lipton was the first celebrity tycoon?

He was the first playful celebrity tycoon. Prior to Lipton, men like Rockefeller, Morgan and Vanderbilt were celebrity tycoons of a sort. But these were men that broke strikes and developed monopolies; they were viewed with as much resentment as admiration. Lipton's role model was P.T. Barnum, not Ebenezer Scrooge. He thought that consumers could be reached

through quality, fairness and fun. A jolly, somewhat doughty millionaire eccentric from the British Isles, he was happy to play a character.

Lipton himself couldn't sail, so why was he so consumed with winning the America's Cup?

Well, first of all it was the most visible sporting event in the world. Whenever something big was happening, you could always count on him to be there. He was also a child of terrible poverty who wanted to prove himself against the



Tea mogul Sir Thomas Lipton, the subject of "A Full Cup"

elite in a pursuit dominated by rich men of the sort he didn't quite match. His ambition to win was actually very American, as was his belief that a person with his origins could compete in [the] sport of millionaires and, quite literally, kings.

Today's America's Cup boats are almost as advanced as the space shuttle, but weren't the racing vessels of Lipton's time also marvels of technology?

Yes, they were both works of art and the height of engineering. A lot of metallurgy developed around boats. Sort of like aeronautics today, the drive

for stronger, lighter materials in yachting produced metals useful in other industries.

All about a tycoon who couldn't sail but pursued the America's Cup

Between 1899 and 1930, Lipton lost five America's Cup attempts, yet he did so with grace, charm and humility. Where did his fortitude come from?

He considered the project of his life a magnificent victory, so losing a yacht race every five to 10 years, while painful, wasn't crushing. Everything was part of a whole creation, and that creation was himself. He is still associated with the America's Cup, and sailors still talk about him today.

His memories are giving him grief

YOU LOST ME THERE, by Rosecrans Baldwin. Riverhead, 304 pp., \$25.95.

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

When you are awash in grief, it's hard to know how you will ever move on, what further torments lie in wait, how long this can possibly continue, and how much you should drink while it does. Then, when you least expect it, new information turns up, changing everything . . . or perhaps nothing. You lost your love, now you've lost the comfort of your memories, and the person you shared them with is no longer there to discuss it — or even to give you the password to their computer so you can posthumously spy on them. What do you do?

Rosecrans Baldwin's debut

novel, "You Lost Me There," shadows widower Victor Aaron through this process with compassion, realism and humor. Despite the fanfare attending its publication, this is not a huge novel. It is small, intelligent and sweet, set in a coastal town in Maine, focused on the relationships between a set of quirky, endearing characters. Aside from the protagonist, most are women: a sharp-tongued, gin-soaked aunt; a dreadlocked teenage goddaughter; a grad student who writes poetry and entertains in bed as La Loulou.

Aaron, a neuroscientist who runs an Alzheimer's institute (memory is everywhere in this story), lost his wife, Sara, a successful playwright and screenwriter, when her BMW

hit a patch of ice. The couple, in their late 50s, had been through a period of estrangement, but right before the accident, Sara came home from Los Angeles to suggest a reconciliation trip to Italy. Three years after her death, Victor finds a set of index cards in Sara's office. On them she had described, for their marriage counselor, turning points in her relationship with Aaron. These cards allow Baldwin to weave in Sara's voice and perspective on the marriage — both in sharp

contrast to her husband's. She was the soul-searching artiste, he the dispassionate, logical scientist. He thought they complemented each other perfectly; her take was less glowing.

Victor's continual observa-

tion of himself and others give the narration a wry, deadpan flavor. For example, when Victor's goddaughter Cornelia gets fed up with Shostakovich and flees a violin recital, he follows her outside. There he finds her smoking a cigarette. "You know that will kill you," he says. But after she finishes, he duly notes, "Cornelia seemed calmer, though. Perhaps nicotine was good for something." Indeed.

"By Cornelia's age, I had written encyclopedias inside myself on the ways of the universe and the gears of man," Victor observes midway through the novel. "Now I contained about a pamphlet, relating mostly to rodent brains." By the end of the story, though, he has expanded his limits. Reawakening from numbness to survive a suicide attempt, a humiliating public freak-out and another death, he becomes a man with a future as well as a past.



Rosecrans Baldwin

this week

Readings & events on LI

Sunday

Jeffrey A. Wands signs copies of "Knock and the Door Will Open: 6 Keys to Mastering the Art of Living" (Atria). At 2 p.m., *Best Bargain Books, 217 Centereach Mall, Centereach*; 631-737-7777, bestbargainbook.com



Robert Schlesinger discusses "White House Ghosts: Presidents and Their Speechwriters" (Simon & Schuster). Tickets \$15; call for availability. At 5 p.m., *Quogue Library, 90 Quogue St., Quogue*; 631-653-4224, ext. 4, quoguelibrary.org

Friday

Adam Ross reads from his novel "Mr. Peanut" (Knopf). At 5 p.m., *BookHampton, 41 Main St., East Hampton*; 631-324-4939, bookhampton.com



Helen Simonson reads from her novel "Major Pettigrew's Last Stand" (Random House). At 6 p.m., *Sag Harbor Books, 290 Main St., Sag Harbor*; 631-725-4926, caniosbooks.com

Centerport author **Michael Atkinson** reads from his mystery "Hemingway Cutthroat" (Minotaur). At 7 p.m., *Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington*; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

Saturday

East Hampton Library Authors Night, a library fundraiser, hosts 155 writers, including **Candace Bushnell, A.J. Jacobs, Sam Lipsyte and Jay McInerney**. *Cocktail reception (\$100) from 5 to 7:30 p.m. at the library, 159 Main St., East Hampton. Author dinners (starting at \$225) at various locations. For more info and tickets, go to authorsnight.org or call 631-324-0222*