

Tuesday

Massapequa author **Linda Maria Frank**

discusses her self-published novel for teens, "The Madonna Ghost." At 7 p.m., *Borders*, 1260 Old Country Rd., Westbury; 516-683-8700



Wednesday

E. Lockhart signs copies of "Real Live Boyfriends" (Delacorte), the new novel in her Ruby Oliver series for teens. At 7 p.m., *Barnes & Noble, Country Glen Center*, 91 Old Country Rd., Carle Place; 516-741-9850

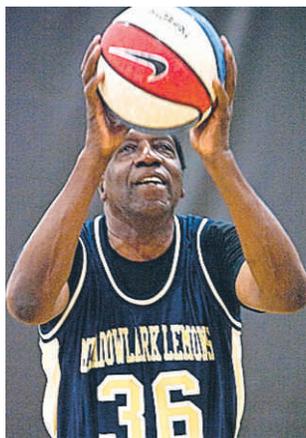
Thursday

Northport's **Alanna Lea Wiest** reads from "The Other Side of the Mirror" (Chipmunk Publishing), a collection of poems about the author's experience with schizoaffective disorder. At 7 p.m., *Book Revue*, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

Saturday

Christopher Impiglia reads from his epic poem, "The Song of the Fall" (Tate Publishing). At 3 p.m., *Book Hampton*, 20 Main St., Sag Harbor; 631-725-8425, bookhampton.com

Harlem Globetrotter **Meadowlark Lemon**, below, signs copies of "Trust Your Next Shot: A Guide to a Life of Joy" (Ascend Books). At 7 p.m., *Book Revue*, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC PHOTO

Dad's an addict, but his tale has few high points

COCAINE'S SON, by Dave Itzkoff. Villard, 221 pp., \$24.

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

The best memoirs read like novels, so well crafted that they transform life into art, people into characters, the author into a narrator. They do this not by lying, but through the alchemy of storytelling. Lesser memoirs feel more like journalism: They may be absorbing and well written, but there's no liftoff.

"Cocaine's Son" is both. Dave Itzkoff, a New York Times culture reporter and the author of a previous memoir, "Lads," occasionally makes the story of his relationship with his father, a fur salesman and cocaine addict, into something timeless. The first sentence — "He was such an elusive and transient figure that for the first eight years of my life I seem to have believed my

father was the product of my imagination" — is a close echo of this famous first line: "She was so deeply imbedded in my consciousness that for the first year of school I seem to have believed that each of my teachers was my mother in disguise." That's Philip Roth, opening "Portnoy's Complaint." The Portnoy echo — the not completely likable yet vivid, outrageous and darkly comic Jewish voice — is the book's strength.

When this type of storytelling is at work — as in the section titled "How We Argue in My Family," which traces a classic Itzkoff contretemps through its many phases (The Recitation of Grievances, The Queen's Gambit, The Invocation of the Immutably Past and the Turnover on Downs) — the magic happens.

But much of the time, the story is mundanely and confusingly told. Before he was born, Itzkoff's parents were carefree partyers — their "Martin Scorsese years." Dad and his friends did a little coke, but nothing

extreme. By the time the author was growing up in New City, N.Y., in the '80s and '90s, Itzkoff Sr. was always either high, depressed or absent; Mom was the patient martyr, keeping things together. As a young adult, Itzkoff dragged his father out of flophouses and watched him snort coke out of his shirt pocket at family events. Finally, though Itzkoff doesn't seem to know exactly when, Dad got clean.

Midway, the memoir switches tacks, recounting the author's recent attempts to reconcile with his father (and to write this book). They go on various trips to unearth the past: from the fur market in Toronto to the pelt traders in New Orleans. The stories are weakened by being told out of sequence and within the travelogue frame.

More crucially, Itzkoff's father never makes the leap to



Dave Itzkoff



become a successful antihero. If you have a character who bores everyone by telling the same story over and over, it had better be hilarious, not actually boring.

The final chapter of the book regales us with the story of the author's wedding, which he describes as the day that "reorders the narrative of [his life] . . . the crucial chapter that unlocks all the others." Suddenly he is grateful for everything that has happened — the anxiety, the selfishness, the fights and the injustice. Maybe so, but it seems a happy ending grafted onto an imperfectly rendered and unresolved story.

A hero is besotted with a drunk driver

RESCUE, by Anita Shreve. Little, Brown. 288 pp. \$26.99.

BY BRIGITTE WEEKS
Washington Post Book World Service

No one can create the beginning of a complex relationship like Anita Shreve. Her latest book, "Rescue," opens with a car accident that changes both lives involved. Peter Webster, a rookie emergency medical technician, is roused at 1:10 a.m. to race to the scene of a one-car wreck involving a drunken driver who has "wrapped herself around a tree." The injured driver is a young woman named Sheila Arsenault. After she is rushed off in an ambulance, Webster, overcome by an unexpected desire, talks his way into the hospital to see her and then returns to



Anita Shreve comes to the emotional rescue.

PHOTO BY DEBORAH FEINGOLD

the crash site, finds her keys and takes them to her. He feels a puzzling link to this patient he knows nothing about.

Sheila is defiant and prickly. She resents Webster's lecturing her on drunken driving. Just the same, his interest remains strong: "She was sexy and beautiful, and Webster wondered if he could smooth out the rough edges. Though maybe it was the rough edges that he liked." Confused by her anger but intrigued by her strength, he tracks her down after she leaves the hospital. Her greeting to the medic who probably saved her life is hardly inviting: "How do I know you're who you say you are?" she snaps. "And, more important, why . . . should you care how I am?"

Shreve gets deep inside these characters, and her insights draw us into their lives. This random encounter in the small hours of the morning leads into a story of hope

and fear, of promises made and broken. Sheila, almost an antiheroine, drinks to excess, remains in an abusive relationship and resists the young EMT who's so concerned about her. Webster, a beloved son of a strong family, nurses a mission to save lives and avert tragedies. He seems her opposite in every way. The relationship between the secretive, hard-drinking, oddly vulnerable Sheila and the down-to-earth small-town hero is wonderfully etched.

Shreve sometimes gets pigeonholed as a good women's novelist. But that misses her greatest strengths. Readers don't see the puppet mistress pulling the strings, labeling her characters as heroes or heroines. She gives them lives and then lets them stumble along — as do we all. Sheila and Webster fight and reconcile and fight again. Most important, we care about what happens to them.

