



thisweek

Readings & signings on LI

Thursday

Westbury author **Arthur Dobrin** discusses and signs copies of his self-published book, "The Harder Right: Stories of Conscience and Choice." At 2 p.m., Great Neck Library, 159 Bayview Ave., Great Neck; 516-466-8055, greatnecklibrary.org



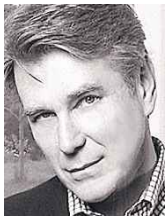
Friday

Children's author **Raymond Bean** reads and signs copies of his new book, "Benji Franklin: Kid Zillionaire" (Capstone Press Inc.). At 1 p.m., Barnes & Noble, 600 Smith Haven Mall, Lake Grove; 631-724-0341, barnesandnoble.com



Sunday

Photographer **John Hall** discusses and signs copies of his new book, "Private Gardens of the Hudson Valley" (Monacelli Press). At noon, Madoo Conservancy, 618 Sagg Main St., Sagaponack; 631-537-8200, madoo.org



Author **Noah Fecks**, below, speaks and signs copies of his book with Paul Wagtouicz, "The Way We Ate: 100 Chefs Celebrate a Century at the American Table" (Touchstone). At 2 p.m., Quogue Library, 90 Quogue St., Quogue; 631-653-4224, quoguelibrary.org



NOAH FECKS AND PAUL WAGTOUICZ

reviews

Here's writing for you, kid

ONE MORE THING: Stories and Other Stories, by B.J. Novak. Alfred A. Knopf, 276 pp., \$24.95.

BY MARION WINK
Special to Newsday

The guy from "The Office," as most people think of B.J. Novak, has written a book — a fun and unusual one. Though "One More Thing" is subtitled "Stories and Other Stories," only a few of the 63 pieces are stories in the usual sense. Many are fables, some are comedy monologues, others are nearly prose poems. A few are two-line koans. Almost all 63 of them are smart, quick and funny.

Many revolve around taking a common phrase and turning it on its head. The poor schlubs in "Great Writers Steal" have misunderstood Oscar Wilde's advice — "good writers borrow, great writers steal" — imagining Bret Easton Ellis robbing liquor stores, and



MICHAEL LIONSTAR

B.J. Novak ■ See a book trailer: newsday.com/books

following suit. "The Market Was Down" gets inside the mysterious mood swings of the financial index. "The truth was no one knew why the market was down. It started the day just . . . down. It stayed down most of the day."

Various types of supercharged verbal cleverness drive most of the book. There's the odd lyricism of

"They Kept Driving Faster and Outran the Rain," the deadpan whimsy of "Diary of the Man Who Invented the Calendar" and the LOL hilarity of "The Comedy Central Roast of Nelson Mandela," at which speakers include the Dalai Lama, Sisqó and Pauly D. The junior detective "Wikipedia Brown" doesn't solve many mysteries, but, he ex-

plains, "I work fast, and I work for free, and I'm everyone's best friend. Plus, I'm getting better by the second — and it's all thanks to people like you."

The best pieces have characters and plots and some heartbreak along with the humor. "Sophia," a story about a man who returns his sex robot because it falls in love with him — "Her" with a twist — almost made me cry. The most developed story in the book is "One of These Days, We Have to Do Something About Willie," in which a group of college friends has a reunion in Las Vegas with the secret purpose of staging an intervention for Willie, whose Facebook posts have led them to believe he's gone over the edge, partywise.

In the Acknowledgments, Novak says his best advice is to "write for the kid sitting next to you." If so — don't change the seating chart. Keep this charming, slightly immature, supersmart guy right where he is.

Tiger Mom and Dad

THE TRIPLE PACKAGE: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America, by Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld. Penguin Press, 320 pp., \$27.95.

BY HECTOR TOBAR
Los Angeles Times

More than two centuries ago, our Founding Fathers declared that all humans are born with the same inherent potential.

Now, married Yale law professors Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld have stepped forward to say that being "created equal" doesn't matter. Instead, their controversial (and sometimes cringe-inducing) new book, "The Triple Package," argues that our cultural background largely determines our fate.

The luckiest Americans, they say, are born with "The Triple Package," a set of values handed down to them by their families. Chua and Rubenfeld know this could make them sound "un-American," but they don't care. Chua's contentious previous book, "The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother," seems to have emboldened the authors.

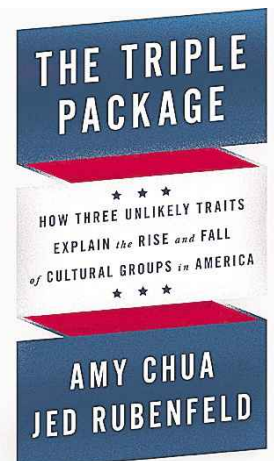
"The reality, uncomfortable as it may be to talk about, is that some religious, ethnic and national-origin groups are starkly more successful than others," the two write. They point to Jews, Mormons and immigrants from China, Iran and Nigeria as examples of groups that raise their children with three contradictory but powerful qualities: 1) They believe themselves to be superior to other groups while 2) remaining deeply insecure about their place in American society. And 3) they all impose

an extraordinary sense of self-discipline on their children.

The authors make qualifications and exceptions to their basic thesis: Not everyone raised in a Triple Package culture succeeds, they say. And being raised in one can be corrosive to the soul.

What about the many Americans born without the Triple Package? Chua and Rubenfeld do their best to tiptoe around some minefields. If the Triple Package isn't present in the culture of black Americans, it's because "the United States did everything it could for centuries to grind the Triple Package out of African American culture — and is still doing so today," they write.

The book's gravest sin is its refusal to put these groups in economic context. For Chua and Rubenfeld, the '80s and '90s were times of plenty because many Americans got filthy rich. But a vast literature



has shown how fiscal austerity and de-industrialization ravaged the middle class during this era.

"The Triple Package" is a grim book, a scolding rebuke about the softening of America dressed up in pseudo-academic arguments. It will convince few and offend many, though one senses the authors believe themselves to be too special to care.