



thisweek

Readings & signings on LI

Sunday

Carol Wallace discusses and signs copies of her book "To Marry an English Lord" (Workman); registration required. At 2 p.m., Gold Coast Library, 50 Railroad Ave., Glen Head; 516-759-8300, goldcoastlibrary.org



Monday

Garden City author Nelson DeMille speaks and signs copies of "The Quest" (Center Street). At 7:30 p.m., Port Washington Library, 1 Library Dr., Port Washington; 516-883-4400, pwpl.org

Tuesday

Former owner Mark Russ Federman will be discussing and signing copies of "Russ & Daughters: Reflections and Recipes From the House That Herring Built" (Schocken). Reserve tickets in advance, \$12. At 10:30 a.m., Sid Jacobson Jewish Community Center Gallery, 300 Forest Dr., East Hills; 516-484-1545, sjcc.org

James Dashner, author of "The Maze Runner" series, signs copies of his new young-adult novel, "The Eye of Minds" (Delacorte). At 7 p.m., Barnes & Noble, 91 Old Country Rd., Carle Place; 516-741-9850, bn.com

Thursday

Simone Cinotto discusses his book "The Italian American Table: Food, Family and Community in New York City" (University of Illinois Press). At 4 p.m., Room E4340 in the Frank Melville Jr. Library, Stony Brook University Center for Italian Studies; 631-632-7444, bit.ly/iIZftCm

Friday

Sag Harbor author Tom Clavin talks about his book "The Heart of Everything That Is: The Untold Story of Red Cloud, an American Legend" (Simon & Schuster). At 7 p.m., Shelter Island Library, 37 N. Ferry Rd., Shelter Island; 631-749-0042, shelterislandpubliclibrary.org



reviews

A good life, in 22 essays

THIS IS THE STORY OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE, by Ann Patchett. Harper, 306 pp., \$27.99.

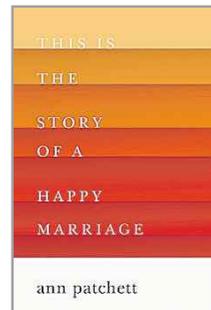
BY MARION WINK
Special to Newsday

Prior to the publication of her breakout novel, "Bel Canto," in 2001, Ann Patchett made her living writing for magazines; of Seventeen she says, "I learned how to write an essay there, just as I had learned how to write fiction at Sarah Lawrence College and the Iowa Writers' Workshop." "This Is the Story of a Happy Marriage" collects 22 previously published essays, from early freelance days through 2012.

Though many readers have wearied of memoirs of trouble and dysfunction, it is even harder for a nonfiction writer to pull off happiness and success. It is a feat that Ann Patchett remains so lovable as narrator, and so engaging as a storyteller, when writing about her excellent career, personal life, dog, and husbands. The title essay



PHOTO BY HEIDI ROSS



Ann Patchett's essays span decades, from early freelance days up to last year.

is a love story with the twists and turns, larger-than-life characters and pure sweetness of a Harlequin romance; it includes an actual miracle, which is how you know it has to be true. No fiction writer is crazy enough to have dead cardiac tissue mysteriously regenerate after one achieves one's heart's desire. (Well, maybe Alice Hoffman.)

Patchett's nonfiction voice is marked by an equal lack of braggadocio and false humility. She knows the importance of obstacles in the shape of a

narrative and her foreshadowing and pacing are masterful. From the title essay: "the story of my marriage, which is the great joy and astonishment of my life, is too much like a fairy tale — the German kind, unsweetened by Disney. It is the story of children wandering alone through a dark forest, past shadowy animals with razor teeth and yellow eyes, towards an accident that is punishable by years and years of sleep. It is an unpleasant business, even if it

ends in love. I am setting out to tell the story of a happy marriage, my marriage, which does not end in divorce, but every single thing about it starts there."

Who doesn't want to read that?

Patchett's gift invigorates essays ranging from magazine-y pieces about traveling in a motor home, trying to join the Los Angeles Police Department, and staying alone for a week in a fancy hotel, to memoirish ones about her relationship with her grandmother and with the elderly nun who taught her to read. (It was a surprisingly difficult process.) Several pieces discuss literature and the writing life, including the saga of the serious flap at Clemson University when "Truth and Beauty," Patchett's account of her friendship with the late author Lucy Grealy, was assigned to the freshman class.

To read a collection of personal essays is a lot like making a friend. Ann Patchett is a friend you will be glad to have; if she does make you a little jealous, it's in a pleasant, wistful way.

Dad's gone, the pain from him isn't

THE DEATH OF SANTINI: The Story of a Father and His Son, by Pat Conroy. Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 338 pp., \$28.95.

BY KIM CURTIS
The Associated Press

Any fan of Pat Conroy's work already knows a lot about his dad. The abusive, self-proclaimed "Great Santini" achieved added notoriety when he was portrayed by Robert Duvall in the movie bearing his nickname.

Even the most loyal reader may wonder what else Conroy could possibly have to say about the man, especially when they see his new memoir is a whopping 336 pages.

Simply answered: a lot.

Conroy has the reflective ability that comes only with age. He has a deeper understanding of his father and the havoc he brought to his family.

"When I grew up, I found the word 'father' to be an obscenity. . . . He bewildered his children by failing to know a single one of us," he writes.

In "The Death of Santini," Conroy examines not only his father, but also his much-loved mother and his siblings, including the brother who killed himself by jumping off the tallest building in Columbia, S.C., and his sister, a poet (he hasn't spoken to her since their mother's death in 1984).

But against the backdrop of ugliness and pain, Conroy also describes a certain kind of

love, even forgiveness. He said he didn't realize his father loved him until his younger brother killed himself.

"From that day forward, my long war against Dad came to an end. The Conroy children wiped the slate clean. I was coming up on my fiftieth birthday. It embarrassed me what a mess I'd made of my life, and casting stones at my own parents lacked the allure for me it once had in my fire-eating youth."

Conroy kindly offers his readers occasional relief with hysterical tidbits like when the kids tried to explain to their grandmother that one of the Conroy girls was lesbian.

"Carol's never been to Beirut," she replied.

"What do you mean by that," Conroy said. "Who

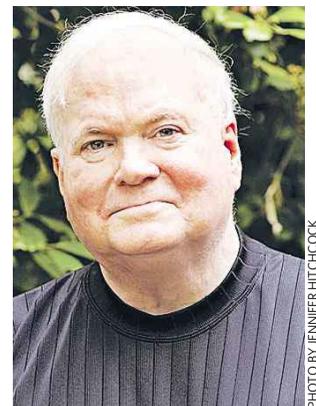


PHOTO BY JENNIFER HITCHCOCK

Pat Conroy, whose book deals with pain — and forgiveness.

cares if you've been to Beirut or not?"

"Only people who're from Lebanon can be real lesbians."