



thisweek

Readings & signings on LI

Today

Contributors **Jenna Blum, Sarah McCoy, Kristina McMorris, Karen White** and **Alyson Richman** discuss and sign copies of the anthology "Grand Central: Original Stories of Postwar Love and Reunion." At 4 p.m., *Book Revue*, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

Saturday

Actress **Diane Keaton** discusses and signs copies of her new book "Let's Just Say It Wasn't Pretty." At 4 p.m., *Book Hampton*, 41 Main St., East Hampton; 631-324-4939, bookhampton.com

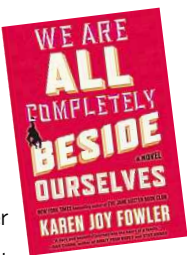


Sag Harbor author **Alan First** reads from his new novel, "Midnight in Europe." At 5 p.m., *Canio's Books*, 290 Main St., Sag Harbor; 631-725-4926, caniosbooks.com

plus

bookclub

The Newsday Book Club is meeting once a month this summer to discuss a book with its author. The lively conversation continues with our next pick: **Karen Joy Fowler's "We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves"** (Plume), winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award and a Newsday Top Book of 2013. In the book, narrator Rosemary Cooke recalls her 1970s Midwestern childhood and the scientific experiment conducted by her father — one involving a chimpanzee — that tears apart her family. On **July 14 at noon**, we'll discuss the novel with Fowler in a live online chat. To read an excerpt, go to newsday.com/bookclub



reviews

What a long, strange trip

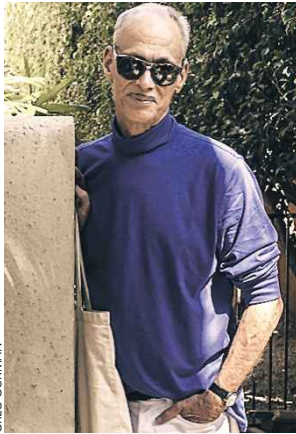
CARSICK: John Waters Hitchhikes Across America, by John Waters. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 322 pp., \$26.

BY MARION WINK
Special to Newsday

You may have heard something about 68-year-old Baltimore film director John Waters ("Pink Flamingos," "Hairspray") hitchhiking across the country in 2012. The tweets and Facebook posts of those who picked him up went viral, and by the time he reached San Francisco, the trip had been covered by The New York Times.

The prologue to "Carsick" explains the inspiration for Waters' "hobo-homo journey" — "Hasn't writing and directing fifteen movies and penning six books made me feel complete?" he wonders. "Go ahead, John," he urges himself after due consideration, "jump off the cliff."

Before he ever left the house, he'd written two-thirds of the book: novellas



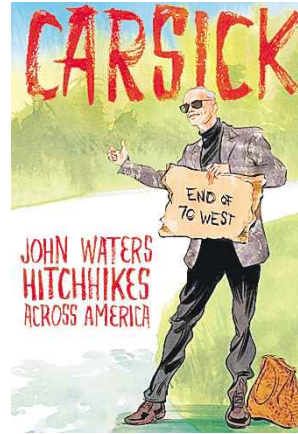
GREG GORMAN

Director John Waters wrote about his "hobo-homo journey."

titled "The Best That Could Happen" and "The Worst That Could Happen." Both are crazy, nasty and pornographic, with moments of true hilarity — just like a John Waters movie.

The Best trips include visits to a demolition derby, a deprived carnival, poppers and Juyfruits, sex with aliens and a ride from Connie Francis.

The Worst trip — well, it



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wasn't easy to distinguish between the Best and the Worst, as Waters' typist said to him.

Bad Ride Number Ten is from a vigilante animal rescuer named Bristol. "A dead dog is in the backseat, and the rest of the vehicle is loaded with cages filled with snarling canines in all states of ill health." I mention this because it is one of the few passages that might be quot-

ed in a family newspaper.

But here's the thing — the third part of the book, the memoir he wrote when he got home from the actual trip, is so endearing that you should buy the book, anyway. The John Waters we meet here is sweet, funny, fastidious, a little old and frail but also very brave and determined. He is delighted to meet his many fans, is just as nice to people who don't recognize him and turns out to be sort of a prude.

One of his first rides is a young man from Maryland who stays in touch and ends up driving up West to make sure the end of John's trip goes more smoothly. When The Kid tells John he's given his cell number to a trio of trashy people "who appear to have stepped straight out of one of my screenplays," Waters is horrified. "God knows what they have in mind. . . 'Come on, Kid, we're leaving.'"

Probably the third part of "Carsick" couldn't have been published as a book on its own, but it turns out to be worth the price of admission.

England's demure undead

THE QUICK, by Lauren Owen. Random House, 523 pp., \$27.

BY SAM THIELMAN
Special to Newsday

For most of its first 100 pages, Lauren Owen's "The Quick" resembles nothing so much as Evelyn Waugh's beloved novel "Brideshead Revisited" — it's about a young Englishman at the turn of the century in love and enthralled by his paramour's enigmatic family. But the similarities end with a jolt on page 101; suddenly, there's a shocking attack by something otherworldly. So much of the fun of "The Quick" is in its twists and turns that if you are of a sensitive disposition and inclined to write angry responses to critics who spoil

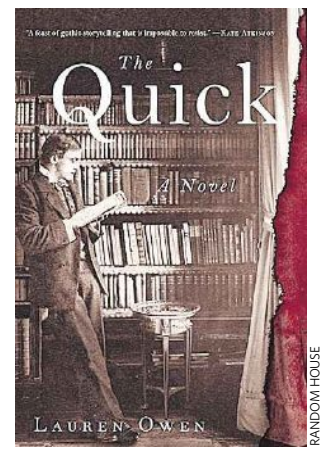
plot points, all I can do is entreat you not to read the last word of this sentence, which is "vampires."

That word barely appears in "The Quick," as demure a novel of bloodsucking as was ever written, but it does plenty of work — the creatures themselves are undead, uncaring and averse to living beings like us (the Quick of the title), who smell like we're rotting — and, from their perspective, we sort of are.

The book follows James Norbury, poet and victim of the aforementioned attack; his brave sister, Charlotte; a murderous scientist named Augustus Mould (from whose diary come details about the vampires' world); and a child vampire named Liza. The bond between Charlotte and James is beautifully delineated, as is Charlotte's relationship, late in the novel, with a former

partner. The book's final pages contain its most genuine emotions — the Gothic atmosphere is rich and sure, and Owen brings her characters together deftly. "The rabbits were still there, bolder than ever," Owen writes of her heroine's return to a childhood haunt. "As [they] left the path, they passed a great rook, which hopped a little way from them and then took to the air with a forlorn caw. Apart from this it was very quiet; there seemed to be no other creatures but themselves left in the world."

It's surprising how much storytelling here pleasantly dead-ends or implodes, leaving major characters dead or abandoned without much impact on the central narrative. It's no easy task, in fact, to locate the central narrative; Owen already has, in this first novel, mastered backstory and



RANDOM HOUSE

lore, but it's not always clear why she's picked this character and not that one to show us in interesting detail. That's not a handicap, exactly; more of a puzzle. The story zips through more than 500 pages with incredible speed, and that's enough to recommend it highly. But of its accomplishments, the best is surely what it promises for Owen's future.