

thisweek

Readings & signings on LI

Today

Great Neck author **William Helmreich** discusses and signs copies of "The New York Nobody Knows: Walking 6,000 Miles in the City." At 2 p.m., Great Neck Library, 159 Bayview Ave., Great Neck; 516-466-8055, greatnecklibrary.org

Wednesday

Emily Giffin discusses and signs copies of her new novel, "The One & Only." At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



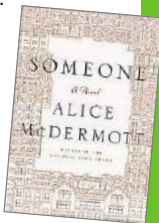
Friday

Late-night talk show host **Chelsea Handler** speaks and signs copies of her new book, "Uganda Be Kidding Me." At 2 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington, 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

plus

bookclub

Avid readers of Newsday's Books section online and in print can now join the lively conversation at the **Newsday Book Club**, launching this summer. Once a month, from June through August, we'll convene online to discuss a selected book with its author. The first pick is **Alice McDermott's "Someone"** (FSG), a 2013 finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction. "Someone" offers a portrait, in vivid prose snapshots, of an ordinary Irish-American girl as she grows up in Brooklyn, marries, and makes her own modest way in the world. McDermott will join us for an online chat about the novel and answer your questions on June 16 from noon to 1 p.m. To read an excerpt from "Someone," go to newsday.com/bookclub



reviews

Dentist's psyche has a cavity

TO RISE AGAIN AT A DECENT HOUR, by Joshua Ferris. Little, Brown and Co., 337 pp., \$26.

BY DANIEL AKST
Special to Newsday

Until now, the only novel I could think of with a dentist as a protagonist was Frank Norris' melodramatic "McTeague" from the turn of the 20th century.

So it may not be saying much to award the laurels for Best Novel With a Dentist in a Starring Role to the alternately sad and hilarious new book by Joshua Ferris. "To Rise Again at a Decent Hour" showcases the wit, intelligence and keen eye for workplace absurdity the author displayed to such great effect in his first novel, "Then We Came to the End."

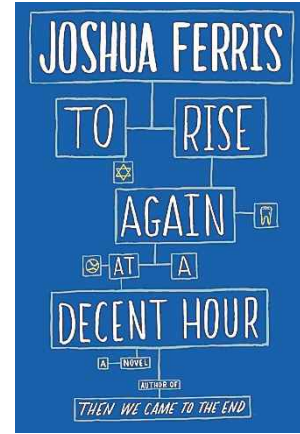
"To Rise Again" is the story of Paul O'Rourke, a seriously alienated Upper East Side dentist who seems to have inherited some of his father's bipolar tendencies along with the old man's Boston Red Sox



Joshua Ferris, author of "To Rise Again at a Decent Hour."

obsession. O'Rourke narrates his own story in tones that will be familiar to fans of Don DeLillo, Walker Percy and, most of all, Joseph Heller. It's the furious, urgent, mordantly comic voice of heterosexual male self-loathing.

O'Rourke is a guy who can't even keep a puppy, never mind have a kid, for fear something will happen to it. An atheist and a Luddite who calls smartphones "me machines," he hates social media because



the only thing worse than being left out of all the world's fun is having to put up with everyone's tweeting and liking and bookmarking it. As he explains to his hygienist: "The world was a sufficient trial, Betsy, before Facebook."

He's got that right, because soon someone has created a website in his name, opened Twitter and email accounts as him, and yes, launched a Paul O'Rourke DDS Facebook page. As if that weren't maddening

enough, his online alter ego is posting a lot of mysterious biblical-sounding stuff.

Soon an entire theology emerges. The online O'Rourke is supposedly an Ulm, a member of a small band descended from a minor biblical figure named Amalek. Their religion is predicated on doubt, and their holidays include the Feast of the Paradox, but otherwise — otherwise? — they sound an awful lot like the Jews. Or, as Paul's doppelgänger explains by email, "We are the Jew's Jew."

It's never altogether clear why the Ulms chose him as the online vessel of their ministry, but it doesn't matter. The whole business is just a welcome outlet for Ferris' enormous virtuosity as a philosopher and storyteller. Ferris raises profound questions about the role of faith, not just in belonging, but in living. Ultimately, his hero will discover that doubt and belief aren't so much opposites as inseparable sides of a single coin — one that can't buy much, except for anything really worth having.

McMurtry's West, again

THE LAST KIND WORDS SALOON, by Larry McMurtry. Liveright, 196 pp., \$24.95.

BY ANN LEVIN
The Associated Press

Larry McMurtry, descendant of Texas cattlemen, can't stop writing stories about the American West. His latest novel, "The Last Kind Words Saloon," reimagines the gunfight at the O.K. Corral, an event he brought to life more vividly in his 2006 novel, "Telegraph Days."

In this version, itinerant lawman Wyatt Earp and his pal Doc Holliday, the dentist-turned-gambler/gunslinger, are in the frontier town of Long Grass, Texas, where Earp's wife, Jessie, tends bar at the Last Kind Words Saloon.

A big cattle deal is going

down between an English baron and Charles Goodnight, a real-life Texas Panhandle cattleman whom McMurtry has written about before. Historical figures like Buffalo Bill Cody and the Kiowa warriors Satank and Satanta drift in and out of the action, as do fictional characters from McMurtry's earlier works, including Nellie Courtright, the lusty frontier journalist-narrator of "Telegraph Days."

Inevitably, Earp and Holliday make their way to Tombstone, Arizona, where Earp reunites with his lawmen brothers Virgil and Morgan and begins feuding with the Clanton gang. The climactic events of Oct. 26, 1881, unfold in a few sentences, ending on an odd note of marital discord between Jessie and Wyatt.

McMurtry clearly isn't interested in burnishing the

Wyatt Earp legend — he's portrayed as a surly, shiftless wife beater — but he doesn't offer much of a counter history either. The novel — he calls it "a ballad in prose whose characters are afloat in time" — ends with an epilogue narrated by Nellie, a sort of alter ego for McMurtry, both of whom have made good money in Hollywood writing about the West.

Years after the gunfight, she discovers that the Earps are living in a dilapidated bungalow in San Pedro, California. Wyatt is "rheumy-eyed" and doesn't remember much about the shootout. She regrets going to visit them until she spies the sign for the Last Kind Words Saloon in their junk-strewn yard.

"Not quite sure why I wanted it," she offers to buy it. When Jessie gives her the



Larry McMurtry, at his book store in Archer City, Texas.

sign, she sticks it in the back of her car and drives home to Santa Monica. McMurtry — the Pulitzer Prize- and Oscar-winning author of dozens of books and screenplays about the West, and an avid collector of rare books — may be suggesting that nearly a century and a half after the closing of the American frontier, its battered artifacts are as resonant as its stories.