

talking with Alex Prud'homme

BY KELLY McMASTERS
Special to Newsday

Water, water everywhere — or so it seems these days. Open a paper and you'll see American towns flooded out, forest fires sparking from extended drought and natural gas drilling practices polluting drinking water supplies. Alex Prud'homme, co-author with his great-aunt Julia Child of "My Life in France," believes this is the new normal. In "The Ripple Effect: The Fate of Freshwater in the Twenty-First Century" (Scribner, \$27), Prud'homme, whose work has appeared in *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*, posits that water will become our primary focus in the decades to come. In a recent telephone call, Prud'homme discussed the declining quality of our water, the evils of antibacterial soap and how we're drinking the same water as the dinosaurs.

The world's water woes are about to pour from the spigot

Historians say oil was the defining resource of the 20th century. Is water the new oil? Oil certainly defined geopolitics for the last century, and water will define geopolitics in this century. But unlike oil, water is something all life requires — there is no substitute for it. We can't live without it. Water is an essential resource.

Your title refers to the series of unseen consequences set off every time we use water. Can you give examples? Every time you turn on your computer or use hot water, this requires power, which requires water. Nuclear reactors have giant cooling towers that are tremendously inefficient, coal requires immense amounts of water — and as population grows, climate changes, and there is greater pressure on our water supply. If you wash your hands with antibacterial soap, it goes down the drain and kills bacteria that are the foundation of life, impacts the health of fish — and their endocrine system is very similar to humans.

Your book is divided into sections including Quality, Drought and Flood. Which is scariest?

All are equally scary for different reasons. Forty years after the Safe Drinking Water Act, the quality of our water is getting worse, not better, often because our laws are outdated or ignored, politicized. People think of drought in Africa or Asia, but Atlanta had a drought last for three years, and the governor prayed for rain on the steps of City Hall — then they had unprecedented floods! Floods will be more and more common in this country as sea levels rise and weather patterns change. We'll see more storms and more intense storms.

In your book, you say we are polluting our water at an alarming rate. Can't we just make more?

The Earth has always had the same amount of water that it has today — from the days of the dinosaurs to before. Any notion of new or unused water is a fallacy. What's different is

the number of people using that water and the ways we're using it — for energy, for food production, for manufacturing plastics, for computer-chip fabrication and much more. Unless we start taking this seriously now, in the coming decades we could have real water wars on our hands.



PHOTO BY ELENA SEIBERT

this week

Readings & events on LI

Sunday

Jeffrey Sussman discusses his book "No Mere Bagatelles" (Judith Leiber LLC) with the subjects, Holocaust survivor and handbag designer Judith Leiber and artist Gerson Leiber. At 4 p.m., Jewish Center of the Hamptons, 44 Woods Lane, East Hampton; 631-324-9858, jcoh.org

Tuesday

Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York, signs copies of "Finding Sarah" (Atria). At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



Wednesday

Fred Lichtenberg reads from his mystery, "Hunter's World" (Five Star), set on Long Island. At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

Saturday

Gail Sheehy ("Passages") discusses her new book, "Passages in Caregiving" (William Morrow). At 6 p.m., Canio's Books, 290 Main St., Sag Harbor; 631-725-4926, caniosbooks.com



Crime novelist **Alafair Burke** reads from her new book, "Long Gone" (Harper). At 7 p.m., Books & Books, 130 Main St., Westhampton Beach; 631-998-3260, booksandbooks.com



Salem to the Hamptons on a broomstick

WITCHES OF EAST END, by Melissa de la Cruz. Hyperion, 273 pp., \$23.99.

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

From the author of a bestselling YA series called "Blue Bloods" — chronicling the antics of teenage vampires in the elite reaches of Manhattan society — comes "Witches of East End," the first in a similar series for adults. With plenty of steamy sex and a more grown-up set of personal problems (infertility, adultery, real-estate developers), Melissa de la Cruz gives overgrown girls addicted to teen vampire books a little something for their second chakra.

The Beauchamps are a family of witches — mother Joanna, daughters Ingrid and Freya. They are immortal, but ever since they got busted at the Salem witch trials they



Melissa de la Cruz

have been under strict orders to live as normal people and not use their powers (except to keep the locals from noticing that they never age, change or die). For centuries, they have successfully merged into the life of the quiet Long Island village of North Hampton, but as the story opens, Ingrid, the town librarian, can no longer stand by and watch

helplessly as a middle-aged co-worker struggles to conceive a child. It would be so easy for Ingrid to fix it.

Freya, a beautiful, buxom, razor-cheekboned bartender, makes her first appearance in the book having sex with her fiancé's brother in the bathroom at her own engagement party. Though this makes her less than likable, she too is drawn back to witchcraft by her desire to help others. Touched by the plights of patrons at the bar — including a jilted wife and a mousy girl — she itches to add a little something extra to the "Love Potions" on her cocktail menu.

Even the Beauchamp matriarch, Joanna, finds herself going astray. Having become a surrogate grandmother to the child of the couple who do her house- and yardwork, she finds herself unable to resist un-burning the brownies and making toy planes fly to amuse her young friend.

It starts off harmlessly

enough, but soon Ingrid is bringing people back from the dead, Freya has apparently caused a kidnapping and suicide, and Joanna is back on her broomstick and accused of murder. Meanwhile, a mysterious ultra-toxic Thing has appeared in the ocean, poisoning the waters for fishing, swimming and everything else; the same poison is causing North Hampton residents to fall ill.

It's Salem all over again, except it's also Norway — in the last part of the book, it turns out that the characters are not actually witches but figures from Norse mythology, and a flurry of new plot elements (such as "Yggdrasil: The Tree of Life that held the Nine Worlds of the Known Universe") is introduced. For this reader, the narrative lost much of its charm in the rush to wrap things up and set the stage for the sequel. Let's hope Book 2 will continue the delightful witchy soap opera and downsize the arcane gobbledygook.