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by J.D. Dolan (Alfred A. Knopf, \$22)

Phoenix, written by Western Michigan University English professor J.D. Dolan, is a thoroughly compelling memoir that is, in a sense, structured in reverse. There are no dramatic paragraphs gradual-the author's brother, John, has died of burns suffered in a helilish industrial explosion in the Mojave Desert. This book (Dolan's first) is an elequent aftermath, showing us what survives when a family finds itself torm assuder.

The Bolans are quarreleome, loving, petty, generous, bittor, hopeful, kind, hurtful, ordinary, and unique. In other words, they are shot through with the ambiguities that mark families aross the world. The high-strung mother is at loggerheads with a willful daughter. The father turns his back on another high-spirited daughter.

Phoenix: A Brother's Life by J.D. Dolan (Alfred A. Knopf, \$22)

turns his back on another high-spirited daughter.

The sisters bicker among themselves. The sons eventually cease any meaningful communi-cation, aithough J.D. at one time has idolized his older brother, John, who teaches him to fish and to shoot and shares with him his delight in fast cars and

Tragic mishap

Tragic mishap

By the time John's tragic
mishap occurs in 1986 (a weak
seam on a pipe gives way, blasting out steem and abestos registering 1,000 degrees F), all the
children are grown, and their
father had succumbed to a heart
attack some months earlier. The
author receives news of the accident in Paris, where he is looking forward to the publication of
his first short story.

"I couldn't have invented a
story like this," he writes, "a guy
who's
burning up inside,
fathes up in a burn unit in
Phoenix, of all places.
"The older brother doesn't talk,
and the younger brother chooses
words as his vocation. The older
brother, the dying brother, is 39,
and son the younger brother
will be holding his first publicawill be not of the in we life, the
39th issue of the Mississippi
Review.

It is all too real, though and.

BOOKS

Professor paints sensitive

portrait of family in pain

Review.

It is all too real, though and, as the family gathers at the Phoenix hospital for the death watch, J.D. Dolan revisits the family's past, showing us the good times and the bad, and subtly illustrating how the threads of the past continue to color the present.

present.

Family portrait
In addition to the sensitive family portrait Dolan paints here, he also provides an atmospherically rich picture of the time and place in which they lived as the two brothers and three sisters were growing up.

From their modest home in California's San Gabriel Valley, they could see Mt. Baldy in the distance, the searchlights of a Hollywood premiere dancing across the night sky, or, once in a while, the Goodycar blimp humming overhead.

Sometimes, the brothers hopped into John's souped-up car and headed out Route 66 in search of desert bike races. They listened to Ricky Nelson and Elvis, and watched Combat on the family television, the smoke from their father's Chestrifields and John's Marlbores permeating the house, or spent hours at the nearby Masonic Lodge, where John was a master councilor, and oldest sister, Joanne, where John was a master councilor, and oldest sister, Joanne, where John was a master councilor, and oldest sister, Joanne, where John was a master councilor, and oldest sister, Joanne, where John was a master councilor, and oldest sister, Joanne, from the hospital 'vending machine swill' shared by the from the hospital 'vending machine swill' shared by the finally, to swellering Phoenix, to the chill air of the burn unit, to his sisters' desperate insistence that John will recover fully, this mether's desperate insistence that John will recover fully, the mether's almost-paraphic stockers.

his mother's almost-paralytic sto-cism.

Though some readers may wish that Phoenix were a bit less sketchy and ancedetal, it con-tains more than enough powerly moments to make it a reading experience not to be missed. Through Dolan's way with words, it is, in the end, not only an affirmation of a life, but of life itself.

Victoria Diaz is a Livonia resi-dent and writes about books, movies and theater for the Observer & Eccentric Newspa-pers.

BOOK HAPPENINGS

Book Happenings features events at suburban bookstores, libraries and literary gatherings. Send news leads to Kety Wygonik, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax them to (734) 591-7279 or e-mail to kwygonik@oc. homecomm.net.

MYSTERY READERS' GROUP

The investigation of an old mur-der delves into Kinsey Milhone's secretive past. If you have been wanting to find out more about wanting to find out more about Kinsey, the post-paced and sur-prise-filled O is for Outlaw is a must read. Join the group for an exploration of this fascinating book, 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 23, at the Northville Barnes & Noble, Six Mile near Haggerty. Call (248) 348-0696 for Informa-

tion. CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP REATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP
Be a part of this extremely popular group of budding writers. This
continuing monthly series of
events is designed to help develop your writing skills and creativjy. All ages are welcome to participate in this monthly encounter
with words. The next session is
set for 7:30 p.m. Thursday, May.
25. at the Farmington Hills
Borders Books & Music., 30995
Orchard Loke Road, (248) 7370004.

0004.
HISTORY/BIOGRAPHY BOOK
GROUP
Join this interesting discussion of a feminist description of the experience of women before, during and after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, Slavenka

Drakulik explores the relationship between politics and the every-day life of women in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and East Germany with insight and feeling. Everyone is welcome to attend 7 p.m. Thursday, May 25, at the Northville Barnes & Noble, Six Milla at Haggerty, Call (248) 348,0696 (248) 348-0696. GARDENING DISCUSSION GROUP

Learn how to turn your back yard into a natural habitat for wildlife. Master gardener Peggy Mainati, an advocate of organic garden-Master gordener Peggy Mainati, an advocate of organic gardening, will provide you with extensive information on creating a
haven for wildlife — be they butterflies and birds, toads and
fogs, snakes and bots, or even
larger animals. Mainati will also
discuss the Beckyard Habitat
Program from the National
Wildlife Federation and how you
can get your own back yard certifled. The event is set for 7 p.m.
Monday, May 22, at the
Farmington Hills Borders Books &
Music, 30995 Orchard Lake. Cali
(248) 737-7004.
BOOK SIGNINGS

B Richard A. Forti of Troy, author
of Serious Money: Straight Talk
about Investing for Reticement,
will discuss current economic
and financial market conditions,
answer questions, and sign

enswer questions, and sign copies of his newly published book at the Barnes & Noble

book at the Barnes & Noble bookstore in Troy, 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 24.

Author Hildegard Undstrom, will be available to sign copies of Child Prisoner of War from 5 to 7

p.m. Friday, May 26, at Waldonbooks, 30200 Plymouth Road, Livonia.

The next Kindermusik story time is set for 4 p.m. Saturday, June 3, at Little Book Shoppe on the Park, 380 S. Main in the Park, 380 S. Main in Plymouth, Parents and their children are invited to enjoy free 20-30 minute interactive programs of story telling, music and movement during "Story Time with Miss Karen." Instructor Karen Onkka Schanerberger is a licensed Kindermusik educator at Evola music in Canton. Call (734) 455-5220 for Information.

Storytimes at the Northyille

■ Storytimes at the Northville ■ Storytimes at the Northville Barnes & Noble are accompanied by a craft or activity, Weekly chil-dran's storytimes are sat for 11 a.m. Tuesdays for children ages 4 and under and 7 p.m. Wednesdays for all ages. Call (248) 348-0696.

PSYCHIC TALK

*SYCHIC TALK
Olympia Entertainment presents
"An Evening with Sylvia," part of
Sylvia Browne's book four and
psychie tecture series. Included
will be a discussion of the
author's third book, "Life on the
Other Side." Tickets are on sale
now for the event, set for 7 p.m.
Tuesday, Sept. 28, at Cobo
Arena, Tickets are \$25 and \$40.
For more information, call the For more information, call the Olympia Entertainment event hot-line at (313) 983-6611 or Joe Louis Arena, (313) 983-6606. For tickets, call (248) 645-6666.

Ark concert features jazzy violinist

Composer and jazz pianist Jeff Hans adda a special voices to his band when jazz violinist Miri Ben-Ari joins the Jeff Hans Trio and jazz legend Marcus Belgrave for a performance at the Ark in Ann Arbor on Thursday, May 25.
Larnell born Ben-Ari has been making waves on the New York jazz scene, performing and recording with Wynton Marsalis, Vernon Reid and Luther Vandross.

Vernon Reid and Luther Vandross.
Ben-Ari will be in Michigan for a week performing and recording with Haas & Friends.
"I've been busy writing original music for the band with the addition of Miri's broad musical palotte," said Haas. "She is a deep musician. She does it all, trained in classical and jazz, she also has roots in klezmer, which come out in a very hip, contemporary and soulful way."
Belgrave, a 12-year veteran of the Ray Charles Band who recently completed a recording with B.B. King and Dr. John,

has been performing with the Haas trie for nearly four years. The band also includes Chuck Hall on bess and Alex Trajano on drums.

Original music

Hans' original music combines the Jewish musical tradition with contemporary jazz. His 1996 CD, L'Dor VaDor - Genera-

1996 CD, L'Dor VaDor - Generation to Generation, raceived national calaim.

The Jeff Hasa Trio & Friends with Miri Ben-Ari and Marcus Belgrave will be appearing at the Ark at 8 p.m. on Thureday, May 25. The program will include Hase' new original music, and jazz classics by Monk, Ellington and Irving Berlin.

Tickots are \$15, and available

Berlin.
Tickots are \$15, and available at Ticketmaster outlets, Borders and Ann Arbor, and the Ark. To order tickets by phone, call (794) 769-8587. The Ark is ht 316 South Main Street in downtown Ann Arbor.



Featured musician: Jazz violinist Miri Ben-Ari will perform with the Jeff Haas Trio May 25 at the Ark in Ann Arbor

1