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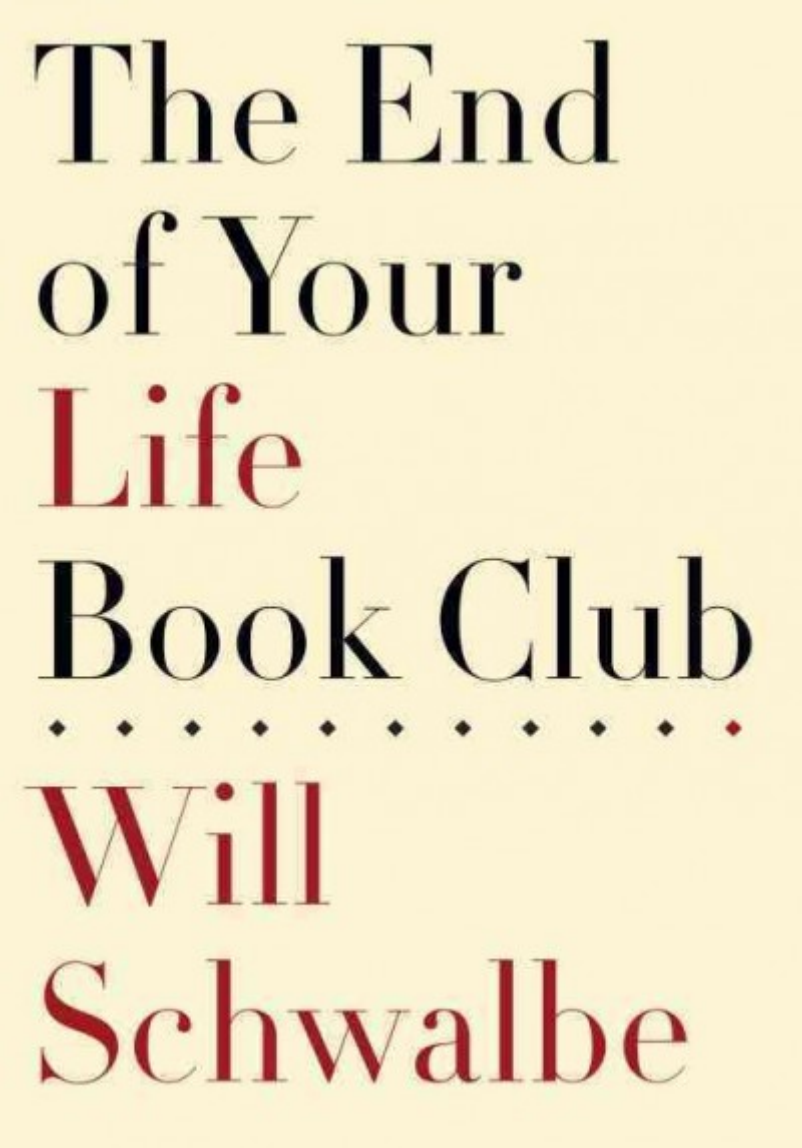
The End of Your Life Book Club



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You don?t have to be in a book club to be touched and inspired by this generous, warm-hearted account of a son helping his mother through her last year of life with the help of books. Former teacher and refugee worker, Mary Anne Schwalbe, had always been close to her son, Will, who was an editor and worked in publishing. Not only did they constantly share books and recommend titles to each other, but they also had many discussions--some heated--about these same books.

After his mom was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, Will spent a lot of time with her in hospital waiting rooms before her doctor visits and chemo treatments. On one of those trips they decided to pass the time by exploring the same books. ?But how can we have a book

club without food?? Mary Anne asked.
But *The End of Your Life Book Club* [2]is so much more than analyzing contemporary literature *à deux*. Will also chronicles his mother?s illness, her acceptance of her forthcoming death, and the effect these changes had on the family.

In one chapter Mary Anne and her husband revisit her favorite foreign city, London, where she lived as a young student. The book that mother and son shared that month was *Felicia?s Journey* [3]by Will Trevor. In another section, Mary Anne, Will and his brother discuss Russell Banks? *Continental Drift* while sharing a table with Mary Anne?s birthday-bash barbecued pig. Will had stayed awake the night before regretting that he had encouraged his mom to read such a depressing book, but at the party, he heard her recommending it to many people.

At one of their meetings, Mary Anne quotes the Queen of England in Alan Bennett?s *The Uncommon Reader* [4], ?Books are not about passing the time. They?re about other lives. Other worlds?.If one wanted to pass the time, one could go to New Zealand.?

What?s most heartening about Schwalbe?s account is how important books are to our lives and to our relationships. One of Mary Anne?s last major goals was to open a national library in Afghanistan. She knew how vital books are to a country and to individual lives. This lovely mother/son reading chronicle is not to be missed.

For books on related themes, try Randy Pausch?s given *The Last Lecture.* [5]Pausch, who was a Carnegie-Mellon professor, gave this talk to his class shortly before he died. Also consider Megan O?Rourke?s *The Long Goodbye* [6], a beautiful account of her mother?s dying and the period of grief following her death.

For the Love of Reading[7]Information, Answers & Reviews [8]Book Clubs [9]Memoir [10] Nonfiction [11]The End of Your Life Book Club [12]

Posted by Dory L. on Nov 17, 2012

- [13]
- [14]
- [15]

Links:
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