



thisweek

Readings & signings on LI

Today

Quogue writer **Roger Rosenblatt** discusses and signs copies of "The Book of Love: Improvisations on a Crazy Little Thing." Tickets \$20. At 5 p.m., Quogue Library, 90 Quogue St., Quogue; 631-653-4224, quoguelibrary.org



Tuesday

Woodmere author **Chava Willig Levy** discusses and signs copies of "A Life Not With Standing." At 7 p.m., Hewlett-Woodmere Library, 1125 Broadway, Hewlett; 516-374-1967, hwppl.org



Saturday

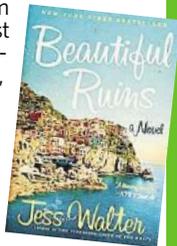
Former Secretary of State **Hillary Rodham Clinton** signs copies of "Hard Choices." Buy a copy to be admitted. At 5 p.m., Book-Hampton, 41 Main St., East Hampton; 631-324-4939, bookhampton.com



plus

bookclub

The online Newsday Book Club continues with the novel "Beautiful Ruins" (Harper Perennial, \$15.99), a Newsday Best Book of 2012. Moving from the Italian seacoast in 1962 to contemporary Hollywood, the novel follows the decades-long love between an Italian innkeeper and an American actress, with an ensemble cast of sweethearts and rogues, and a cameo by Richard Burton. Author **Jess Walter** joins us for a live chat on **Aug. 25 at noon**. To read an excerpt, go to newsday.com/bookclub



reviews

Half-sisters hitting the road

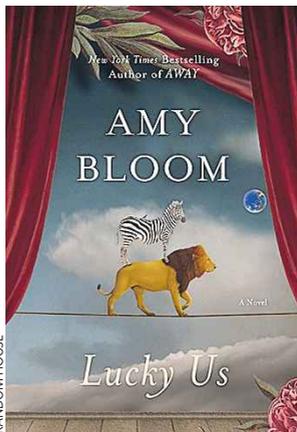
LUCKY US, by Amy Bloom. Random House, 240 pp., \$26.

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

When we first meet Eva, the protagonist of Amy Bloom's ebullient 1940s novel, "Lucky Us," she is 12 years old, living in a small town in Ohio with her mom. That lasts less than a page, as this perfidious mother unceremoniously dumps her on her father's doorstep and hits the road for good.

Eva's new half-sister, Iris, is 16, looks like a movie star, and has made a pile of cash winning speech and dance competitions. When their father is caught robbing Iris' kitty not once but twice, the girls light out for California.

While Iris is starting her acting career in Hollywood, Eva spends her days alone, becoming more endearing with every sentence. "I made up sequels to the books I'd read: David Copperfield and his wife and three kids, living at the seaside. . ." Already



Amy Bloom, right, is the author of "Lucky Us."



you feel you would follow Eva anywhere, which is good, because she gets around.

Iris' lesbian fling with another Hollywood starlet leads to a disaster involving gossip columnist Hedda Hopper — and the girls are back on the road again, this time to East Brooklyn.

The sections that tell the story of their adventures are interleaved with letters between the characters, some sent, some unsent, some con-

temporeous with the narrative and some from the future. The very first of these, sent by Iris from London in 1946, clues the reader in that a rift between the sisters lies ahead.

On the East Coast, the girls and their dad end up in Great Neck, living in the carriage house of some sweet Italian-American nouveaux riches named the Torellis. Iris has another crazy love affair — this time with Reenie, their married cook. This passionate

disaster leaves one person dead, one orphaned, and one in an internment camp for suspicious German-born Americans.

Unusual warmth and good humor prevail through even the tragic events of the novel. If the sudden turns of Bloom's plotting recall God's, her voice is filled with echoes of the late, great Grace Paley: the Yiddish cadences, the deadpan wisecracks, the motherly embrace of all that is human. One of many Paleyesque passages talks about the progress of racial diversity in Great Neck: "Gus knew his history; unless you actually kill the people you have let move into your town, there is no getting them out. Their children will mix with your children. . . . Their children will be more beautiful than any child ever produced in your otherwise monochromatic family tree."

I've always loved Amy Bloom, but until now thought I preferred her short stories to her novels. This delicious book, with its vibrant take on the decade it portrays, has changed my mind.

Take 6: Michelangelo

MICHELANGELO: A Life in Six Masterpieces, by Miles J. Unger. Simon & Schuster, 432 pp. \$29.95.

BY TRAVIS NICHOLS
Washington Post Book World Service

In this enjoyable but curious biography, art historian Miles J. Unger presents the High Renaissance master Michelangelo Buonarroti through six of his major works: the Pietà, David, two segments of the Sistine Chapel frescos (the Creation of Adam and the Last Judgment), the Medici Chapel and St. Peter's Basilica. For each one, Unger gives the political and personal context, and he uses choice biographical anecdotes to bring the artist to life.

So we get both the architectural theory behind Michelangelo's choice of columns at

St. Peter's and the story of how, when the workers finished a major milestone in the arduous, decades-long construction process, Michelangelo "celebrated not with a formal ceremony attended by princes of the church but with the humble bricklayers on site. The meal, delivered from the nearby inn of the Paradiso, included on the menu fried pig's liver, wine, bread, and 100 pounds of sausage."

"A Life in Six Masterpieces" has a fine selection of details such as this, but thankfully Unger manages not to get too bogged down in them. Michelangelo's long life (1475-1564) spanned nine popes, multiple wars and Western civilization's two major cultural upheavals, from medieval times to the High Renaissance, and then from Renaissance to Reformation. It would be easy to get sidetracked in all the

palace intrigue, but Unger shows just enough to facilitate understanding of the art.

The only true flaw in "A Life in Six Masterpieces" (other than an overreliance on "bravura" as an adjective) is that at no point are we told why Unger chose this method of approaching his subject. Some explanation would have helped.

As it is, we're left wondering if the world needs another book about Michelangelo. We already have Vasari's "Lives of the Painters," Irving Stone's novel "The Agony and the Ecstasy" and the hundreds of biographies, illustrated guides and even business-strategy treatises. There is no earthly reason for "Michelangelo: A Life in Six Masterpieces" except that it is a finely made thing. And as Unger explains in this light, airy journey, that would be good enough for Michelangelo himself. Unger



Miles J. Unger uses the master's major works as lens.

tells us early and often that the "secular saint" advocated art's value above and beyond its political or commercial use.

Unger has followed his lead somewhat, creating a biography that doesn't troll for scandal with lurid personal speculation or use the artist's works as scaffolding upon which to drape crackpot theories. And while the result is modest — Unger is no literary Michelangelo — it is a thoroughly enjoyable minor work.