



thisweek

Readings & signings on LI

Monday

Actress **Cameron Diaz** speaks and signs copies of "The Body Book: The Law of Hunger, the Science of Strength, and Other Ways to Love Your Amazing Body" (HarperWave).

At 6 p.m. Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



Wednesday

Lucette Bloomgarden and **Lois Heller** discuss their self-published novel, "Stone Cold: Allegiance to a Dead Man." At 7:30 p.m., Great Neck Library, 159 Bayview Ave., Great Neck; 516-466-8055, greatnecklibrary.org

Thursday

Barbara Diane Barry, an educator at the Whaling Museum in Cold Spring Harbor, discusses her book, "Painting Your Way Out of a Corner: The Art of Getting Unstuck" (Tarcher/Penguin). At 7 p.m. Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



Friday

Melissa R. Pandolf talks about her self-published book, "The Journey for Mama's Babies: A Long Island Couple's Journey to Adopt Four Biological Siblings From Russia." At 7 p.m. Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com



Saturday

Long Island native **Cathy Rudolph** signs copies of her book, "Paul Lynde: A Biography — His Life, His Love(s) and His Laughter" (BearManor Media). At 7 p.m., Book Revue, 313 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-271-1442, bookrevue.com

reviews

The boozy ties that bind

IF ONLY YOU PEOPLE COULD FOLLOW DIRECTIONS, by Jessica Hendry Nelson. Counterpoint, 256 pp., \$25.

BY MARION WINIK
Special to Newsday

In the title essay of this debut collection from Jessica Hendry Nelson, the author and her mother have driven to Delray Beach, Fla., to visit Nelson's brother, Eric, whom they believe to be at long last sober but who has actually been off the wagon for months. As they realize the truth, it is as if "we are in a play rehearsing the same scene for the gazillionth time.

"Mother and sister wait anxiously while son/brother gets high in tacky Florida motel room/mother's unfinished attic/dimly lit McDonald's bathroom/snow-heavy parked car/bowling alley urinal/New York City diner/empty New Jersey lifeguard station/suburban basement/family friend's gold-trimmed bathroom/bathroom/bathroom/bathroom/small black space of empty and release.

"Cut.
"Take gazillion and one."

The 14 autobiographical essays in this collection, of which the preceding quote is a partial synopsis, are graced by fine



PHOTO BY NICK ADAMS

Jessica Hendry Nelson's personal essays explore family relationships.

writing and insight, all the more crucial since this territory is well traveled. The memoir of a dysfunctional family united by love, booze and drugs has been done by Mary Karr, Susan Cheever, Caroline Knapp and many others, but the familiar story is refreshed by the unfussy lyricism of Nelson's voice and the interesting structure of the book. Each chapter could stand alone, and rather than driving a plot, they explore a set of relationships over time.

Shoes, boats, Ted: A poet's sketches

DRAWINGS, by Sylvia Plath. Harper, 64 pp., \$25.99.

BY DAVID L. ULIN
Los Angeles Times

The most striking thing about the 44 images reproduced in Sylvia Plath's "Drawings" may be how unpopulated they are.

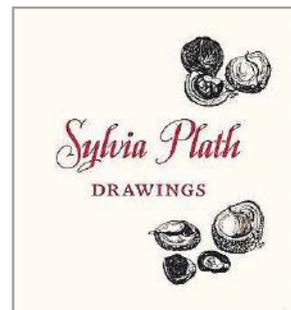
Produced during the two years the poet spent on a Fulbright fellowship at Cambridge — the same period in which she met and married (secretly, at first) Ted Hughes — this material evokes a world bound almost entirely by objects: boats, shoes, rooftops, all of it detailed, shadowed, but at the same time more than a little bit removed.

That's not entirely unexpected. Plath, who committed suicide on Feb. 11, 1963, at the age of 30, was a poet of

nuance, gesture; "Dead hands, dead stringencies," she wrote in "Ariel." Such a line might be a fitting epigraph for "Drawings," with its silent churches and solitary flowers, its boats left empty by the shore. Among the most evocative images here is that of a citronnade stand in the Tuileries of Paris — one of the few drawings to include people, although they are abstracted, rendered at a distance, more geometric shapes than human beings.

Plath took her drawings seriously; four of them, which she called "the best sketches in pen-and-ink I've ever done," were published, with a brief prose recollection called "Sketchbook of a Spanish Summer," in the Christian Science Monitor in 1956.

Drawing, her daughter, Frieda Hughes, suggests in a brief introduction, was part of her process, a way



to settle down.

"In his poem 'Drawing,' " Hughes writes of her father, "he describes how the very act calmed my mother, and how she became focused and still." In another poem, Hughes presents Plath recreating "the Paris roofs, a traffic bollard, a bottle, and him too." Those drawings — or ones very much like them — appear in "Drawings," including a brooding portrait

At the center of the overlapping circles are the "conjoined triplets," mother, sister and brother. Nelson's father, an unsuccessful product of the Philadelphia upper crust, was an alcoholic and died from a fall after many incarcerations and rehabilitations. Among the others we meet are Nelson's fragile gay friend, Jordan; her boyfriend, Nick; her paternal grandmother, Cynthia, whose stories and behavior are ample evidence of her pronouncement, "Mothers are no good, Jessie, mothers are no good"; and the Jewish side of her family, people who say "keppie" for head, who sell upholstery and real estate.

Nelson uses an incantatory style in two essays. A Prologue, addressed to her brother, traces the appearances of her father in their lives, with the recurring phrases "We visit him" or "He visits us." To equally good effect, the essay called "In New York" opens each paragraph with its title. Years — 1989, 2006, 2012 — are noted obsessively throughout the book, part of the attempt to pin things down, to know what caused what.

Some may have had it with this topic, but many of us find it of perennial interest, at least in the right hands. Now that she's weighed in with her version of the old story, it will be intriguing to see what this gifted young writer does next.

of Hughes in pen and ink. It's the only piece in the book to record a face, albeit in profile, evoking Plath's husband in a telling posture of disconnection, with even the most glancing contact more than either of them can bear.

Such an image stands in contrast to Plath's own words about the relationship, which are recorded in a sampling of letters, one to Hughes and a couple to her mother. In October 1956, she enthuses, "I write and think and study perfectly when with him; apart, I'm split and only can work properly in brief, stoic spells." Plath and Hughes, of course, would come apart spectacularly, and she would kill herself, after writing the astonishing poems of "Ariel." This was still years off when she produced these drawings, but in their distance, in their isolation, we see a glimmer, perhaps, of that empty, farther shore.