



## Excerpt from "Inflating a Dog" by Eric Kraft

If you're taking notes, jot this down: never buy a boat while you are under the beguiling influence of moonlight. Captain Mac kept us in his tiny house, telling us stories and delaying the moment when he finally gave in to our pleas to see *Arcinella* until the clouds had begun to part picturesquely and moonlight shone on the narrow path that led from the end of Bay Way through some cattail rushes to the canal. The path was so narrow that we could walk it only in single file. Captain Mac stood to one side and suggested that my mother should go first, followed by Patti, followed by me, with himself last. As a result, my mother saw the moonlit boat first, alone, and became a victim of the phenomenon known as love at first sight. Patti might have been less susceptible to the phenomenon if she hadn't found my mother already beguiled, and I might have been able to play the part of the rational and dispassionate cynic if I hadn't arrived to find the two women I most wanted to please cooing and mooning and all but swooning over *Arcinella*, a luminous vision floating on the silver water, her wet deck glistening.

Only after the moonlight and *Arcinella's* graceful lines had done their work did Captain Mac join us and ask, unnecessarily, "Isn't she a beauty?"

"She is," we breathed.

"Of course, beauty is only skin deep," he said. We clucked and frowned as if he'd insulted our *Arcinella*. "I suppose you'll want to take a look at her innards, poke her and prod her, give her a good going over." He made it sound obscene.

"Oh, I don't know," said my mother, gently.

"That's what the other people said they were planning to do, give her a good going over."

"Other people?" asked my mother.

"The people who looked at her before you."

"You didn't mention anybody —"

"They'll be back first thing tomorrow — bringing somebody who really knows boats —"

"Oh," said my mother, and then, brightening, she announced, incredibly, "Peter knows boats."

"Does he, now?" said Captain Mac.

"Some," I said, exaggerating.

"Well, then, I expect you'll want to get into her," he said, with a be-my-guest gesture that, it occurs to me now when I recall it, might have been ironic and patronizing.

"Right," I said.

I stepped aboard, made my way gingerly along the deck to the cabin, fumbled with the latch, and crouched to crawl through the opening that led below, into the dark. I found myself on a narrow planked way laid over the ribs of the hull. The air down there was dank, and it smelled of dead clams, sea water, motor oil, and gasoline. I couldn't see much, but that didn't really matter, since I had no idea what to look for. I spent some time running my hands over *Arcinella's* engine and wiggling its wire and belts. Then I began inching forward, picking up whatever I found and putting it back down, making as much noise as I could to show that I was on the job. I'm certain that Patti and my mother wouldn't have considered *Arcinella's* innards beautiful, but I could tell that the space below decks would be a fine place for a boy to go to work.

When I came to a porthole, I looked through it and saw Patti and my mother standing on the bulkhead, side by side, gazing at the boat and talking in low tones. They had their heads together, and from the blissful looks they wore I could tell that they were praising *Arcinella's*

PLEASE SEE INFLATING ON 5E

# Inventing a world

By SUSAN L. RIFE

susan.rife@heraldtribune.com

To open the cover of an Eric Kraft novel is to open a window into the peculiar world of Peter Leroy and the townspeople of Babbington, Long Island.

Leroy has been narrator, either directly or indirectly, of nine Kraft novels and a novella.

But the works do not constitute a series, exactly, and the novels aren't really novels, per se; they're more loose aggregations of reflections, minutia and digressions on scientific or philosophical points built around a plot.

## St. Pete newcomer Eric Kraft brings a quirky fictional memoirist to life.

In "Inflating a Dog," the current selection of the *Herald-Tribune* Book Club, Kraft tells the story of Ella Leroy (Peter's mother), "an entrepreneurial dreamer trapped in the body of a 1950s suburban housewife" who enlists 13-year-old Peter and his wise-beyond-her-years classmate (and possible girlfriend) Pat-

ti to convert a rundown clam boat into a elegant lunch and dinner cruise vessel.

The book is the eighth volume in a loose series collectively titled "The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences and Observations of Peter Leroy," but readers should be quick to note that in no way does the character Peter Leroy pretend to be telling the "truth" (fictional or otherwise) about his fictional life. In the preface to "Inflating a Dog," Peter makes clear that what he's about to recount is not what actually happened. "Must it be as it was when the way it

PLEASE SEE KRAFT ON 5E



Publicity Generated By:

## Herald-Tribune BOOK CLUB

Eric Kraft will read from, discuss and sign copies of "Inflating a Dog" (Picador, \$14) when the *Herald-Tribune* Book Club meets at 7 p.m. April 14 in Geldbart Auditorium, Selby Public Library, 1331 First St., Sarasota. Books are available at a discount at Sarasota News & Books, 1341 Main St. Admission is free. For information, call books editor Susan Rife at 957-5271 or e-mail her at susan.rife@heraldtribune.com.

SARASOTA NEWS & BOOKS  
1341 MAIN ST., SARASOTA, FL 34236  
941-365-6332; FAX: 941-365-6215  
www.sarasotaneedsandbooks.com

# Florida West

E

HERALD-TRIBUNE / SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 2004

## Excerpt from "Inflating a Dog" by Eric Kraft

### INFLATING FROM 4E

attributes and dreaming. In the moonlight, it was easy to join their dream, to sign on as lad of all work — cabin boy, waiter, busboy, it didn't matter — and it was easy to imagine the lazy hours the lad would pass in the company of Elegant Ella's sexy sidekick, who would probably, in her role as hostess, wear a very revealing low-cut satin gown. Even Captain Ma looked good in the moonlight, puffing on a corncob pipe, squinting with the gruff but kindly look of a simple, honest old salt. I could give all of these people what they wanted with a single word, even a wordless gesture, a thumbs-up, a nod of the head, even the right kind of smile.

I'd been below long enough. I pushed the hatch upward and rose from the hold. My mother and Patti laughed and applauded.

"Very dramatic, Peter," said my mother.

No one said anything while I made my way back onto the bulkhead. Then, with a nervous grin, my mother asked, "Well?"

I glanced at her. I glanced at Patti. Why not? How much could possibly be wrong with the boat, after all? If she had served Captain Mac so well for so long, standing up to the demands of clamming, she should find life easy with us. I smiled and nodded, and they threw their arms around me and hugged me as if I had just given *Arcinella* to them as a gift. In a blissful blur, I watched my mother write a check to Captain Mac, who wished us luck and left. For a while we stood there smiling in triumph, but then, with a start, my mother said, "I haven't made dinner."

We got into the car and started for home. Somewhere along the way, clouds drifted in again and hid the moon, and we began to have our doubts.

Publicity Generated By

**SARASOTA NEWS & BOOKS**  
1341 Main St., Sarasota, FL 34236  
941-365-6332, fax: 941-365-6215  
[www.sarasotanewsandbooks.com](http://www.sarasotanewsandbooks.com)