

# Volume packs ultimate in Peter Leroy stories

Boyhood recollections run gamut plus one

By Robert Johnson

With their combination of wry humor and imaginative yarn-spinning, Eric Kraft's Peter Leroy novellas have attracted a loyal readership. Here, for the first time, they are gathered in one volume with a new story added at the end.

Collectively "The Personal History" narrates the memories of Leroy, looking back on his time growing up in Babbington, N.Y. — home of the happy clam. A town whose life blood is the clamming industry, Babbington supports a tribe of quirky types who salt Leroy's memories like a chowder.

Among Leroy's sharpest recollections are those of learning to clam with his grandfather, an expert in the practice of "treading." A meticulous process, treading consisted of Grandfather's donning an ancient wool bathing suit, walking slowly through tidal waters and feeling for buried clams with his feet and toes.

Finding one, Grandfather would expertly scoop it up, rinse it off, and — much to young Leroy's horror — pop it down the front of those sagging wool trunks. Eventually the suit would become so laden that the old man would have to churn back to the boat to unload.

Leroy, on the brink of physical manhood, could not escape his terror at having Grandfather expect him to imitate those treading ways. The boy's mind froze: Do clams bite?

Among Peter's relatives one will also meet John Peter "Black Jacques" Leroy (1836-1906), alleged inventor of beer, or at least father of the legendary — and literary — regional brew, Leroy Lager. The beer was famous for its labels, which

## LITTLE FOLLIES

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By Eric Kraft  
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sported sections of verse.

In time Black Jacques gave his brewery to his son, Fat Hank, as a wedding present. A far-seeing, entrepreneurial spirit, Hank had a brainstorm. Any patron willing to submit a poem, accompanied by six bottle caps, could see his own poetry printed on the beer's labels.

Thus, the introduction of the six-pack, to place the required caps into a scribbler's hands all at once!

It was said that Emily Dickinson "in a generous gesture of self-parody" once immortalized the brew (or so Leroy claims) in lines reminiscent of her most turgid, religious quandaries:

*Inebriate of Lager, I —  
And debauchee of Pilsner, too —  
Reel — from Inn to Tavern —  
aye —*

*In search of Black Jacques' perfect Brew.*

Leroy is a talker, and a joy to hear. A wisecracking, seaworthy Holden Caulfield mellowed in middle-aged whimsy, Leroy reconstructs his boyhood as the kind of place we all wished we could have lived.

Half-remembered, half-invented later, the past as Peter Leroy shows us is at once the safest and most vulnerable place we'll ever be.

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