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**BURRELLE'S**

# Never a dull moment in Clam Capital

**'Little Follies' finds humor in trivia of life.**

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Contributing Reviewer

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**Little Follies: The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences & Observations of Peter Leroy (So Far)**, by Eric Kraft (438 pages; Crown; \$22)

Eric Kraft's *Little Follies* brings together in one book eight of the comic novellas Kraft published in single paperback volumes in the early 1980s, chronicling life in the Long Island town of Babbington, "the Clam Capital of America."

These eight, along with a new story titled "The Young Tars," are narrated by Peter Leroy, a boy who, like David Copperfield, stands at the intersection of an assortment of quirky, colorful characters and holds together a loose and episodic plot.

"Within a family," Kraft/Leroy writes at the start of the opening story, "some events that an outsider might consider important are allowed to pass almost unnoticed and are soon forgotten; yet others, which seem trivial to the world at large, may be elevated to positions of such eminence that they acquire the status of milestones."

Thus Kraft begins the story of "the day my mother tumbled from her lawn chair," which in turn recalls the day that Mr. Beaker next door, in frustration over his correspondence with Jack Simpson, threw his desk lamp out the window.

Mr. Beaker, an ad writer for the Babbington Clam Council, has quit his job and places an ad in the local paper: "Lovely young woman in unfortunate circumstances



Eric Kraft

wishes to correspond with lonely man." He signs it "Mary Strong."

Among those responding is Eliza Foote, a typist at a local insurance agency, who signs the name of one of the firm's managers, Jack Simpson.

The salacious correspondence between these two makes up the bulk of Peter Leroy's first adventure-observation and ends, as the reader thinks it should, with a meeting, unmasking of identities and eventual courtship — the couple's true names, genders and intentions properly in place.

Kraft is a spirited writer, and these nine stories, of which the funniest is called "Do Clams Bite?" are entertainment of an old-fashioned kind: broad and whimsically awry, with a humor untinged by cynicism or irony or anything that might be labeled Serious Intent.

Readers of Kraft's earlier book *Herb 'n' Lorna* already have met Peter's maternal grandparents, and much of the action of *Little Follies* takes place near their house on No Bridge Road, where Peter and his parents also live. Peter's boyhood friend Matthew Barber, the subject of Kraft's novel *Reservations Recommended*, reappears in three of the stories here.

A second volume of Peter Leroy's *Personal History* will appear in the fall, bringing together all the episodes (so far) in this appealing, funny serial novel — a history that may, by all indications, never move very far past Peter Leroy's childhood. Which should suit Eric Kraft's growing coterie of new readers just fine.

David Walton is a teacher and free-lance writer who lives in Pittsburgh.