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By ALICIA MILLER

## Kraft offers insight

Earlier this year, all eight of Eric Kraft's much-loved Peter Leroy stories finally appeared in one volume, with a new story thrown in for good measure. *Little Follies: The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences and Observations of Peter Leroy (So Far)*, (Crown, 437 pp., \$22), was good news for Leroy fans, who by now constitute a throng. First passed around as individual chapbooks in Boston during the early 1980s, later read aloud on Boston radio, the Peter Leroy stories, evocative, fictionalized "memoirs," attracted a devoted following.

Kraft, who is also the author of the widely-praised novels, *Herb 'n' Lorna* and *Reservations Recommended* (both of which involve characters from Peter Leroy's youth) insists that the character of Peter first came to him in 1962 when he was dozing over a college German lesson. At that time, Leroy was merely "a nameless little boy, sitting on a dilapidated dock, in the sunny warmth of a summer day."

As the years passed, Peter acquired a name, a town (Babington, Long Island), an extended family, friends, quirks, and an insatiable curiosity. Viewed from the vantage point of his dreamy, middle-aged self, Peter became a kind of ideal 11-year-old, ideal because the adult Peter, writing about his past, often makes his life into a story it never was. Says Kraft about Peter, "When he reminisces, he finds that he's interested in the possibilities as much as the facts, and that memory, like a radio receiver, picks up a lot of static."

Peter's accounts of his youthful self revel in the eccentric and tangential; under its hazy, 1950s surface, Peter's world is zanier than it first appears, more complex. Read closely, and you discover this isn't just a boy's world. It's more familiar than that: it's your world and mine, whoever we are, however landlocked, whatever our ages. This can be very heady stuff.

Admirers of Peter Leroy adventures will be delighted to learn there's a new installment, *Where Do You Stop?* (Crown, 181 pp. \$15). This is an effort on Peter's part—35 years after the fact—to complete a general science project, assigned to the seventh-grade Peter by his gorgeous teacher, Miss Rheingold. While Miss Rheingold is enchanted by the uncertainty principle, it turns out that she is not a bit uncertain about her own principles.

*Where Do You Stop?* raises questions that go far beyond subatomic particles, questions about children's acceptance and adult fears; about invention and convention; about whether spaces separate or connect. When black students arrive at Peter's new junior high, they are seen as simply a new source of friends by Peter and his peers. The adults have other ideas. Where does one's world stop and others' begin? Aren't we all really in this together?

This wonderfully digressive work is at once serious and light-hearted as it contemplates a whole universe of questions. Kraft gets better all the time, and Peter Leroy's fondly remembered world grows richer and funnier—more provocative, too—with each new episode. Stay tuned.