

BOOK REVIEW

Fishing the River of Time

Tony Taylor. 2012. Greystone Books, Berkeley, California, USA. 216 pages. \$19.95 (soft cover). ISBN: 978-1-77100-057-4

Author Tony Taylor, a geologist by training, has written a whimsically brief glimpse into his long life. He weaves a story that combines several disciplines, including ecology, geology, boating, history, fishing, and the art of observation. He traveled back to Lake Cowichan, in western Canada, after a several decade absence, rented a cabin and awaited the arrival of his grandson. He arrived a few days early to scout out the local rivers in hopes of catching a fish and show his grandson a land he once knew and enjoyed.

The book, however, is much more than meets the eye. It's a journey into the past, present, and future. Taylor enjoys water and especially rivers. Watching the flowing water allows one to reflect and think. Thinking is important; it helps sort out the day's experiences and allows the mind to float hoping to pick up on a different perspective on something so common. While preparing for his grandson's arrival, Taylor was quick to explore the landscape and tells the reader stories about his experiences at Lake Cowichan and its people. Nature is an important theme in the book and Taylor's discussions and storytelling does not disappoint.

Taylor is modest; he does not claim to be an expert on fishing, rivers, or fish. He tries to convey to the reader that there are different approaches to the various questions someone may have about life and learning is a two-way street. Ask questions and listen to others. The wisdom that can be gleaned from simple conversations may surprise you. The pending arrival of the young grandson provided plenty opportunity for sharing and testing the two-way learning paradigm.

Finally the day arrives when Taylor's grandson, Ned, appears at his cabin doorstep. They do not know each other particularly well but the historically and culturally rich backdrop of Lake Cowichan is a setting that facilitates relationships. Not just between people, but between people and the land; a land that encompasses all states of matter: earth, fire, water, and air. Ned is curious about his grandfather and they take an immediate liking to each other. Fishing and the idea of catching a fish is the vehicle used by the characters to become familiar with one another. It does not take long for the conversions to crystalize and Ned and Taylor begin their journey along the river's edge. The older generations have an obligation to pass along stories and knowledge to the next generation and the book exemplifies this age-old tradition very well.

It's not about catching a fish; it's the experience on the river. Watching the water, studying the flows and thinking like a fish. Keen observation is always key. Perhaps when someone is well versed with nature, you become part of the natural cycle. The concept of cycles was always in the back of Taylor's mind; from the spawning fish to the bears that feed on them. The dying and dead fish in turn provide much-needed nutrients to the granitic soils that otherwise could not support the vast Canadian forests. The fish make the difference. Taylor realized this, when he compared the Canadian ecosystem to the soils of Australia,

where Taylor has lived during the past several decades. Ned kept asking questions, and Taylor provided as truthful answers as he could. The two-way learning was clear and true; Taylor learned much from Ned because the grandson had an untainted and innocent look on life.

The book is a delightful read. It brims with wisdom and is a refreshing pause in our ever-busy lives. Taylor writes on page 193, “Anglers don’t fish to catch fish; if we did, we would net them. We hunt fish, which are very smart, in order to outwit them, and we are less successful than we like to think. Many great anglers have said fishing is a ridiculous passion because fish cost far more to catch than they would to buy in a market, but we continue the pursuit because it enables us to think. The mystery of water fascinates us.” Certainly this statement can be considered a metaphor of life. In the end, they finally catch a fish, but it’s not about the fish, it’s about the journey.

HOWARD O. CLARK, JR. *Garcia and Associates, 993 Ezie Avenue, Clovis, CA 93611, USA*