

Good morning! This is Marylou Burton. You're listening to "Reading Between the Lines," brought to you by the Friends of the Homer Public Library.

March and April are frustrating months for Alaska fisherman. The days are getting longer and the temperatures are moderating. But the winter winds are still whipping up from the West, and the rivers and lakes are still crusted with ice. Sure, there are a few hardy souls venturing out on the Bay in search of winter king salmon, but most of us won't de-winterize the boat and untangle our lures for another couple of months.

I can think of no better book to tide you over the interim than Rich Chiappone's *Opening Days: A Fly Fisherman Writes*.

*Opening Days*, which came out last year, is a collection of essays, short stories and poems that are not so much about fishing, as – well, *life*. Oh, make no mistake about it – Chiappone loves fly fishing. Some might say he is even a little obsessed, venturing out in early November and casting out over the icy fringe of the Anchor River in hopes of catching one last steelhead – which, to his surprise, he did in fact catch – and, of course, released.

But that is the only fish you will see Chiappone catch in this book, and you don't have to be a fisherman to appreciate this fine writing. Chiappone is sometimes laugh-out-loud funny, but more often his writing is infused with wry humor, almost always at his own expense. And while he may dip his rod towards sentiment, he never, ever, sinks into bathos. And always he is smart, observant, and very much the master of his craft.

His short stories are particularly good. One of my favorites, "The Spearfishers", features a couple who have given up on the husband's pipedream and are about to embark on the wife's. The man builds hand-crafted custom bamboo fly rods –

but he doesn't fish. They have a stream running through their property, but the fish are polluted. In short, things are complicated – just like they are in real life.

*Opening Days* also includes three poems, one of which captures Chiappone's humor and insight so well that I'd like to share it. It's called "Boys Like Us."

It was a dinghy of sorts – wooden lapstrake,  
clinker-built and heavy, sunk to its gunwales  
in the reeds where we fished for rock bass –  
just waiting to be found by boys like us.

We carried it overhead, overturned;  
dripping river mud and duckweed  
down our necks as we hefted its sodden  
weight across the Grand Island Bridge and home.

We tarred the hull and painted the rest  
and admired the lines of our flotsam prize,  
fitted then with a coffee can and concrete anchor  
and lines from our mothers' clothes poles.

Where did you get it? our fathers inquired.  
And for once we could say that – unlike  
the strange bicycles that showed up in our garages,  
the baseball gloves bearing other boy's names –

we'd found and claimed this boat fair and square.  
And in it we set off across the big river;  
pride in our hearts, rods in our hands,  
stolen oars creaking in the stolen oarlocks.

*Opening Days*, by Rich Chiappone, is available at the Homer Public Library and at our local book stores.

Library hours are Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Tuesday and Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Tune in next Sunday morning at this same time for "Reading Between the Lines," right here on KBBI 890, Homer!

