

Notes on Fly Casting Legend and Angling Mentor Lefty Kreh

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It's always a delight when one of your life long idols pops up in a bio pic and we get a full exposition of all the legends about him that you thought had to be true, but weren't sure. That's why the recent film on the Outdoor Channel, "Lefty the Greatest of all Time" was such a joy to find.

I should point out to you, gentle reader, that I'm referring to perhaps the greatest fly fisherman to come along since Lee and Joan Wulff showed the world one could land twenty pound Atlantic salmon on stream-side hand-tied flies, cast with amazing skill on a 2 oz. bamboo fly rod.

Many Leftys have gained fame over past years, like pitcher Lefty Grove, and Lefty Oduel, but when Lefty Kreh first started showing up in the columns of such renowned anglers as A. J. McClain, angling editor for *Field and Stream*, and Joe Brooks. who wrote for "*Outdoor Life*, one gradually began to realize Lefty Kreh was re-writing the book on fly casting fundamentals., by breaking old rules to create amazing new capabilities.

So who is this casting wizard anyway? We learn from the bio pic that Bernard Kreh grew up in depression poverty in Fredrick Md., the very city my daughter fell in love with when she lived there for two years, reveling in the many quaint specialty shops and historic points of interest, like the house of home of Civil War heroine Barbara Fritch, immortalized in Whittier's poem.

Lefty grew up fishing the many brooks and streams nearby for trout and also the mighty Potomac for bass and shad in the years just before WWII broke out.

I see myself in him a lot because I too had a fixation for water, and spent every free moment exploring the fishing and hunting along the banks of the ancient Boise des

Souix. And he, like I, came to love the beautiful places of solitude gracing our sacred, holy streams.

The film revealed Lefty had fought in *The Battle of the Bulge*. So he was facing death while I was just a six year old sketching battleships and airplanes from *Life Magazine*. That means Lefty was close to 90 when he died March, 20/2018. The film showed him as a joyful, friendly guy still able to lay out double-haul casts of amazing distance and uncanny accuracy: “still bringing forth fruit in old age,”(Is. 40) much to the amazement of his fans.

What really amazed me was Lefty’s sweet spirit. He simply overflowed with gratitude for having been invited to fish in nearly every famous fishing spot in the world, where he found himself venerated, even idolized by some of the world’s most famous anglers, – men like Flip Pallot, star of the *Walker’s Cay Chronicle*, the editor *Fly Fisherman magazine*, Nick Lyons, “Trout Bum author,” John Geriach, and countless others.

Lefty Kreh’s story is a testimony to the rewards awaiting those who live lives of grace, dedicated to sharing their passion with others, and walking with as much reverence for the beautiful places angling inevitably leads one to, as for the fishing itself.

Learning how Lefty delighted in teaching any kid who wanted to learn, made me a bit sorry my first fishing idol was *Sports Afield’s* Jason Lucas, the original Lone Ranger of bass fishing. I spent quite a few years sharing my angling lore only with trusted friends, like my old buddy, Warren.

I didn’t want unanointed rubes finding and defiling my honey holes. That’s pure selfishness, unlike the passion to teach everyone, fostered by the Lindners and my new master, Lefty Kreh who taught us selfishness is miserly, grace has huge rewards! Like being called “The greatest of all time.”

Gene Pinkney for the Daily News 04-27-2024