

Review: One Last Cast an invitation to get out and play



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Bruce Masterman is the author of *One Last Call: Reflections of An Outdoor Life*. *LORRAINE HJALTE / CALGARY HERALD*

Review: One Last Cast; by Bruce Masterman;
Rocky Mountain Books, Victoria, B.C.; 240 pages;

\$20.

Spring is the time for new things, like songbirds, daffodils and, perhaps, new Alberta political parties.

So it is entirely appropriate that this spring, which will put paid to what has been a tough winter, has brought a bracing new book to these parts.

One Last Cast, by my former Calgary Herald colleague, Bruce Masterman, would be welcome just about any year. But for some reason it seems especially timely this year, when so many of us are taken up with thoughts about jobs, money and other adult worries.

Masterman's book, a collection of new and past writings from this newspaper and other publications, is an invitation to forget about Donald Trump for a while and just go out and play.

The author, who now spends his time freelancing, teaching journalism at SAIT and serving on town council in High River, his hometown, has created a real gem. The short pieces in this volume sparkle with knowledge and insight. Best of all, they are fun to read, and interesting to think about.

Even those whose idea of an outdoor adventure is hauling old newspapers to the blue box out back can get something great out of this, if only a personal memory of tramping a mountain trail in the sunshine, or paddling on a glassy wilderness lake and wondering how anything so big could be so quiet.

Masterman has an ample supply of such memories, from a lifetime of fishing, hunting and thinking about nature. He was The Herald's Outdoors columnist for 16 years, and also produced weekly Heading Out pieces for the newspaper, along with countless freelance articles for a variety of other publications.

His journalism is rooted in a deep affection for the natural world, an affair that began in childhood, grew in his youth, and flowered fully in mid-life, when he discovered that just being outside seemed to cure the 'black dog' depression that had clung to him since his teen years.

Along the way, Masterman married and raised two daughters, made many

great friends, amassed a wealth of knowledge about the wild world, and found his voice as a storyteller.

All of these things are on full, joyous display in this book. Through Masterman's fine prose, readers get to join him on a tough hike up a remote ridge in the Rockies, shiver at the night sound of wolves while survival camping solo in the wilderness, and wait by a northern Manitoba railway siding in -40F temperatures, to see if a roll-of-the-dice meeting with a trapper friend comes off.

Best of all, we get to share the author's experience as he teaches his youngest daughter to fly fish (by not 'teaching' her, it turns out), and his emotions as he goes on one last outing with his oldest before she sets out for university, and her own life. The latter story is the basis for the book's title.

No review of a book would be complete without at least one quibble, so here it is: I wish the author, who is known to be stickler for accuracy, had referred to those large geological lumps west of his residence as the Canadian Rockies. Like lots of folks hereabouts, he calls them the Rocky Mountains, not once, but many times. While this is technically correct, I would like it better if we differentiated them from the lumps west of Denver, which are fine in their own right, but are, well, American. There, got that off my chest.

Masterman admits this book as been a long time coming. His last one, *Paradise Preserved: The Ann and Sandy Cross Conservation Area*, came out 15 years ago, and while he plans to write more books, "I'm too old to wait that long for the next one."

He also intends to keep going out every chance he gets.

"I still hunt and fish, primarily fly fishing. I plan to keep doing it until I can't. Death will make me stop."

If Masterman's future adventures lead to more books like this one, we should all pray that he enjoys many more springs.

(Jim Cunningham teaches journalism at SAIT in Calgary. He was a reporter and editor at The Herald for 22 years.)

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