

Community Comment
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Good Reading

I've thought about all the issues I could opine about that are current. There is the controversy about police tactics and race related abuse of power. There is the everpresent topic of water; not just in California but will water be the next oil on the world stage? Among other groups, Rotary International will focus on water, both quality and quantity of, in the near future. There is the face of the Eureka City Council which will be more feminine than before. There is a new City Manager in Arcata that has a diverse platter of issues before her. Arcata is always interesting. There are so many things to think about; it's hard to choose.

But since we have started the holiday season, we think about those we care about and are responsible for and the gifts we may give. And I have an Idea for a family gift this year. It's a book the whole family could enjoy; but more than that, it's a book that can teach and inspire.

I am not a book reviewer nor do I have any stake in this book. But our family reads. We read for pleasure and we read to learn. We read fiction and non-fiction but I'm kind of partial to historical biographies and novels. I'm going to recommend something we have not done before in my family but hope to this year. That is to all read the same book and talk about it as a family. And I mean all of us. From those of us in our sixties, our children in their thirties and our ten-year old granddaughter.

Last February, a friend of mine gave me this book for my birthday. I had not yet heard of it but the title grabbed my attention. The book is called "The Boys in the boat". I like small boats and I like to row. But the kind of rowing described in this story is the kind with eight rowers and a coxswain. Without spoiling the story for you, let me tell you what it's about and why I think it's such a good read for a family. And why I think it relates well to our area and culture in Humboldt County.

The setting is Western Washington in the time of the depression. The main characters are from blue collar families mostly farmers and loggers. One in particular has a very difficult start in life and yet aspires to an education that can help lift him out of poverty. From his rocky start, he enrolls at the University of Washington and decides the only way he can afford to stay in school is to make the Rowing Team. Some 175 young men try out for nine spots. What they learn along the way has to do with work ethics, perseverance, teamwork, technical skills, the ability to focus, and to reach for goals that might seem out of reach.

The builder of these boats, all 62 feet of them, works in a shop above the boathouse and seems to understand young men and the art of rowing as a team as much as he does about crafting a boat out of cedar.

This team rows against the likes of the University of California at Berkeley and East Coast schools like Harvard and Princeton. These races are vividly described but nothing like the race at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.

There is so much to learn from this story. I hope you give it a try this holiday season.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment