



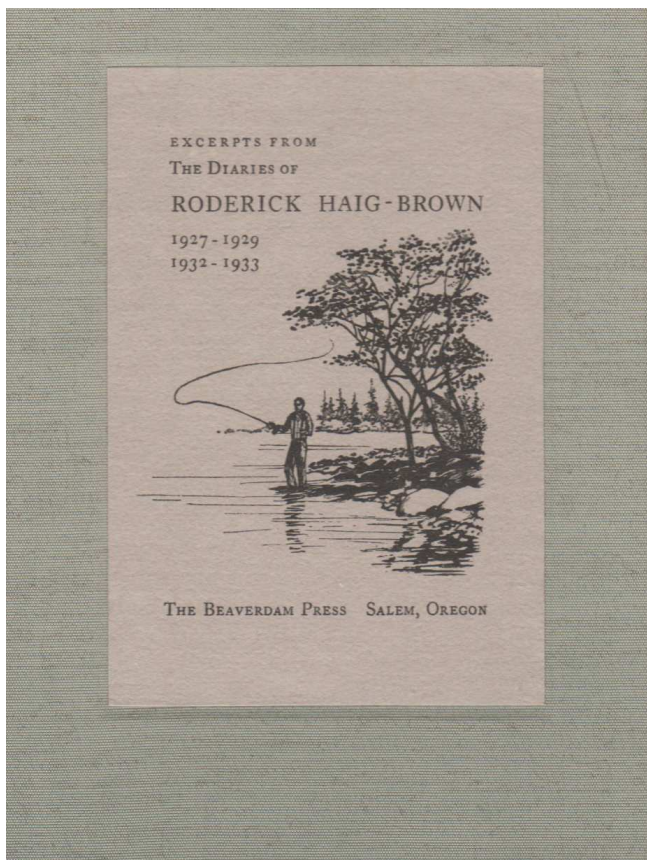
## A Toss of a Coin

In the last issue in this column I wrote about losing a good friend. Van Egan and I shared many common fly-fishing related interests, one of them was the love of books. Many of my fly-fishing related books I bought on his recommendation and some in his library he bought because I recommended them to him. When I visited him in Campbell River I often spent time looking through his library. Van was a bibliophile and he was quite proud of some of the special books in his library. When he died I wondered what would happen to those books he held dear to him. Some remain in the family but there were eight that he had a special attachment to and wanted them to go good homes so he bequeathed them in his will to his two best friends Neil Cameron and Art Lingren.

In my mind I can vision Van, when he was making his will and listing those eight books, thinking about Neil and myself and how they could be distributed fairly between us. He wouldn't have wanted to say

that Art got these four and Neil got the other four so he came up with a great way of dividing his prized tomes. He put in his will that Neil and I were to get together and by A Toss of a Coin the winner would select the first book and then we alternate until all the books had been taken.

I live in Vancouver and Neil is in Campbell River so in November after the Haig-Brown Fly-Fishing Association's fly-fishing symposium I made the journey north to Campbell River. I had two reasons for going to Campbell River. Just after Van died his last book was released and I had commissioned Gwen Kushner to make a Solander box with a tie of Van's Improved Fry Fly mounted in the cover. I picked up that box from Gwen, who lives about a mile or so from Van's house, then I went to Van's house to meet Neil, do the coin toss and pick four books. While looking through Van's picture window at the river, we toasted Van then I sent the coin sailing into the air and while it spun around

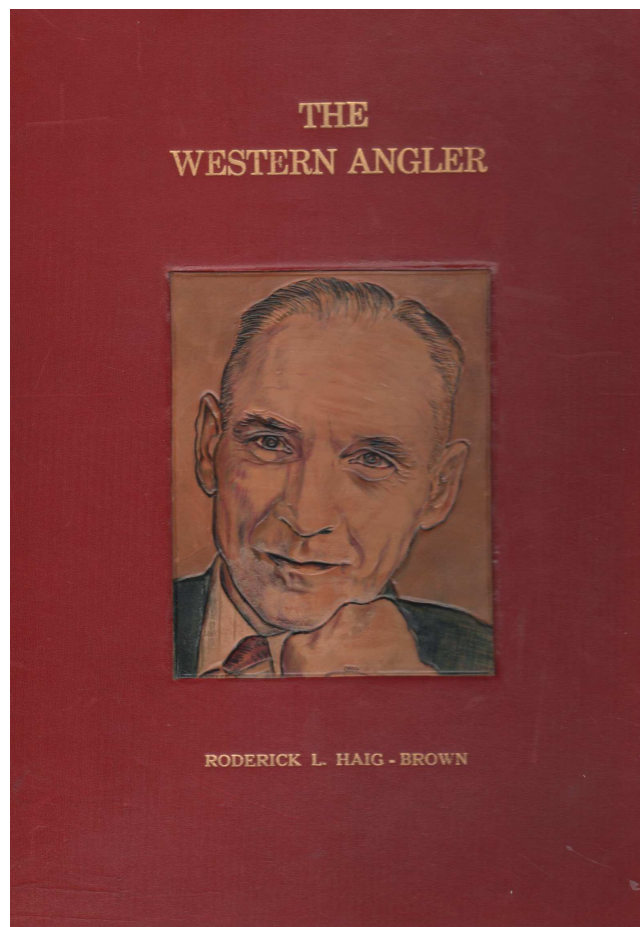


and fell to the floor Neil called heads. Neil lost and I got first choice.

I am a Haig-Brown fan and have most of his books but never did purchase the diaries when they came out in 1992 because they were really expensive. For my first pick I choose the six-volume *Excerpts from the Diaries of Roderick Haig-Brown : 1927 – 1929, 1932 – 1933* published by The Beaverdam Press, in Salem, Oregon.

Neil for his first pick selected the second, 1839 edition of Alfred Ronalds' *The Fly Fisher's Etymology*. James Robb in his book *Notable Angling Literature* notes that Ronalds' book when it came out in 1836 "caused a sensation in the angling world" and that "this was the first attempt to reproduce the natural flies of greatest interest to fishermen in their own colouring (p. 112)." It went through numerous printings and each printing is valuable, but those early editions really demands high prices in the collectors market. Van had Gwen Kushner make a special slipcase with false spine insert that protected this rare volume, making it even more collectable.

For my second pick I took Haig-Brown's 1939 two-volume Derrydale edition of *The Western Angler* which Rod had inscribed to Van. In volume one Haig-Brown wrote "For Lavant Egan, at Campbell River B.C. 25<sup>th</sup> June 1955." He inscribed and signed volume II as well. Van had a special leather-covered slipcase made with an etched into the leather colour picture of Haig-Brown on the cover. I remember Van telling me that he paid \$25 for the book back in 1954 and when he told Rod that, Haig-Brown said, "so much," now try find a copy for under \$1000. I already owned a copy of this edition which I value greatly but Van's copy is very special to me as it connects me to Van and through him to Rod Haig-Brown. My friend Steve Oei jumped at the chance to buy my copy of *The Western Angler*.

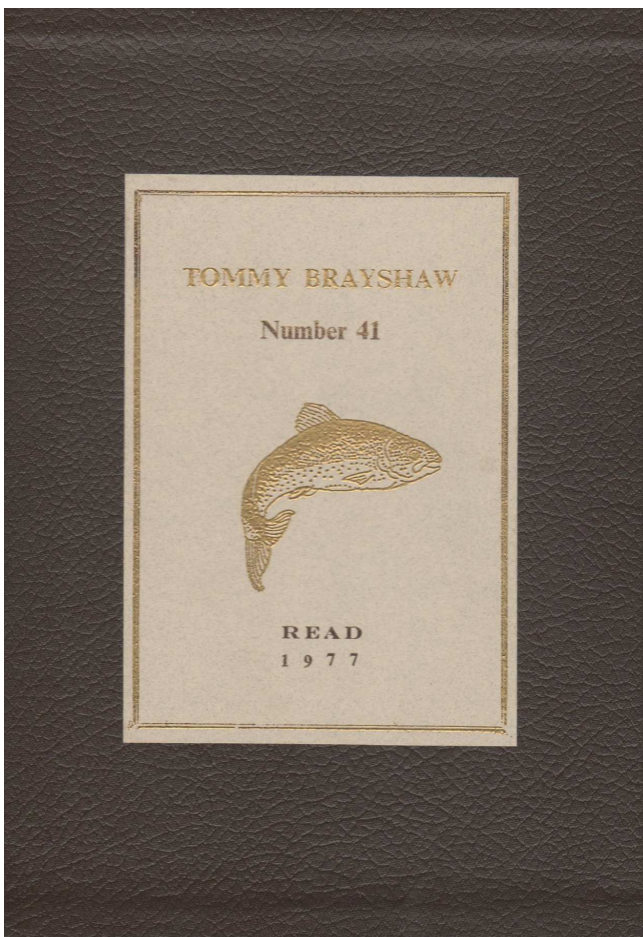
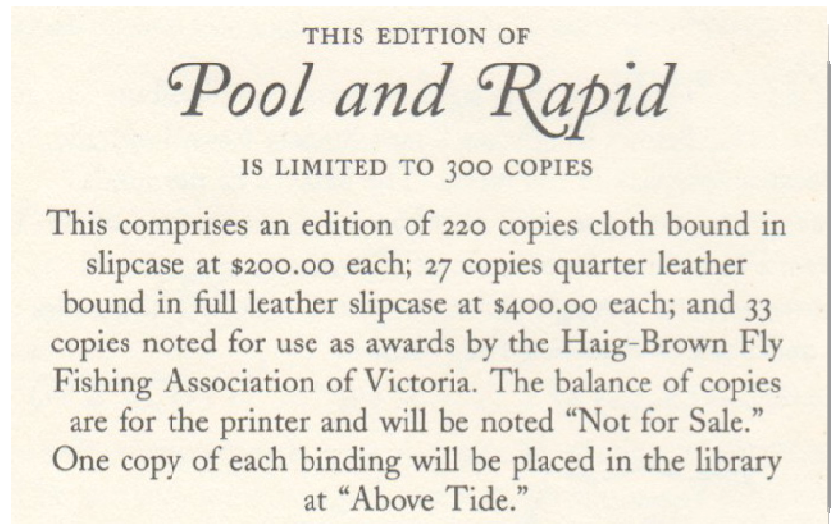


One book that Van was especially proud to own was a two-volume, half-leather bound, 1888 Lea and Dove edition, edited by R. B. Marston, of Isaac Walton and Charles Cotton's *The Compleat Angler*. I looked at that book many times and I found it a difficult decision to take *The Western Angler* over this beautiful book. This is probably one of the nicest editions ever printed of Walton's classic and it demands very high prices—several thousands of dollars—in the collector's market. As of writing this in December 2010, one New York dealer has one for sale for \$5000. Neil in keeping with choosing older

books selected the Walton and has since been offered over \$6000 from a British collector. It was prized by Van and is now prized by Neil and isn't for sale.

From the remaining four books, I carried on with my Haig-Brown theme and took the ¼ leather bound and leather slip-cased *Pool and Rapid*. The Haig-Brown Fly Fishing Association published this special 300-copy edition in 1997 and they produced an exquisite book, illustrated by Loucas Raptis. Only 27 were done in ¼ leather and had the leather slipcase. Van had 1 and with my third selection now have Copy N of 27.

Neil chose another limited edition Haig-Brown title called *Alison's Fishing Birds* published posthumously by Colophon Books of Vancouver in 1980.



For my last selection I took Stanley Read's 1977 tome called *Tommy Brayshaw: The Ardent Angler-Artist* in which Rod Haig-Brown wrote the Brayshaw tribute. Van had number 41 of 2000 and his copy was in a specially made Gwen Kushner slip case. That left Neil with the last book written by Al Purdy's titled *Cougar Hunter: A Memoir of Roderick Haig-Brown*.

Both Neil and I do miss our friend of many years but both of us will remember him, smile and think fondly of him and the process he devised to distribute these special books equally between us and we will always remember the day we met at Van's house for the toss of a coin.