

Earnest Schwiebert, Who'd Rather Be Fishing, Dies at 74

By **DOUGLAS MARTIN**
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Ernest Schwiebert, an architect and planner whose lifelong passion for fishing led him to write influential books on piscatorial matters like how trout perceive insects - all the better to make lures to catch them - died on Saturday at his home in Princeton, N.J. He was 74.

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Berry and Cathy Beck

Ernest Schwiebert, fly rod in hand, engaging in his favorite pastime, on this occasion on a visit to Fishing Creek in central Pennsylvania.

The cause was renal cancer, said his son, Erik.

Legend has it that Dr. Schwiebert (pronounced SHVEE-ber) landed a 12-inch brook trout with his first cast when he was 5 and never stopped casting. His literary piece de resistance, "Trout," traced the sport to the ancient Greeks and Chinese, then meandered through 1,745 pages covering pretty much every conceivable topic of interest to anglers, from the anatomy of Salmoniform fishes to the idiosyncratic philosophies of those compelled to pursue them.

In reviewing the book, which weighs in at 7 pounds, 5 ounces and has a bibliography listing 999 sources, William Kaufmann wrote in The Washington Post in 1979, "Surely no fly fisherman in history can have fished more widely than Ernest Schwiebert has, and surely no one else has combined angling, artistic and writing talents to better advantage."

As was his practice, Dr. Schwiebert himself drew hundreds of illustrations of fish and people for the book, reflecting the drafting experience he gained in earning two doctorates from Princeton, one in fine arts, architecture and planning and the other in the philosophy and history of architecture. He also worked 15 years for an architecture firm in Manhattan before deciding he would rather go fishing.

Dr. Schwiebert's most original contribution to angling was his book "Matching the Hatch," which he published in 1955 while still a student at Ohio State University. To fishermen, hatch refers to insect nymphs that have swum en masse to the surface and broken free of

their nymphal shucks and are flexing their muscles before flying away. Dr. Schwiebert was one of the first to link artificial fly imitations to these evanescent adolescent insects.

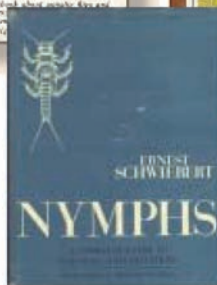
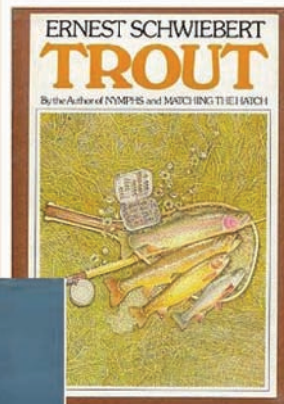
"He really changed the way America thought about trout fishing," John Merwin, fishing editor of Field and Stream, said yesterday. Mr. Merwin noted that the book appeared just as the post-World War II generation was turning to fishing and other forms of recreation in great numbers, and said it was gaining new popularity with their children.

For many of his readers, it is Dr. Schwiebert's sheer exuberance about fishing that most resonates.

"It is always the explosive fish we remember, thrust from the river like a mythic sword, like a ballerina tightroping a performance precisely between grace and sanity," he wrote in an article titled "Salmon or Steelhead?"

Ernest George Schwiebert was born in Chicago on June 5, 1931. The family moved with his father, a historian of religion who had appointments at a number of colleges in the Midwest. They vacationed in Michigan, where the boy caught that first trout with a light Cahill wet fly, an old American favorite, on the Pere Marquette River.

Dr. Schwiebert earned his bachelor's degree in architecture from Ohio State. A member of the school's Reserve Officers Training Corps, he served in the Air Force and was assigned to help plan that service's new academy in Colorado Springs.



Ernie at the CFFCM 2004 Hall of Fame Ceremony

Dr. Schwiebert earned his bachelor's degree in architecture from Ohio State. A member of the school's Reserve Officers Training Corps, he served in the Air Force and was assigned to help plan that service's new academy in Colorado Springs. Princeton then awarded him a fellowship for graduate study.

In his architectural practice, Dr. Schwiebert specialized in airports and military bases. His business travels from Chile to Tibet often coincidentally took him to great fishing streams. He left the firm, Tippets, Abbott, McCarthy & Stratton, in 1977.

Among his other books were "Nymphs" (1973), which told how to catch trout with lures resembling insects in their young, underwater stage; "Remembrance of Rivers Past," a love letter to trout streams; and "Salmon of the World" (1970), which included a review of literature on the various salmon species going back to 15th century England.

Dr. Schwiebert is survived by his wife, the former Sara Mills; his son, Erik, of Birmingham, Ala.; and two grandchildren.

Dr. Schwiebert helped found Trout Unlimited and other conservation groups and championed releasing caught fish. "The angler does not need a dead trout in his basket to feel satisfaction," he said.

Mr. Merwin, the editor, said there had been a reaction to the specificity of Dr. Schwiebert's advice on making flies in the exact image of just-hatched insects; he characterized it as reverse snobbery in the manner of golfers who play barfoot or wear cut-off jeans to flout country club etiquette.

But few fly fishing traditionalists could be unmoved by Dr. Schwiebert's evocative descriptions of days gone by, as in a description of the opening day of trout season he wrote for The New York Times in 2003. After calling the annual April ritual a bit like Christmas morning, he wrote:

"There were English pipes and the smell of expensive tobacco, and the anglers we knew were knowledgeable about wines and spirits, and the pleasures of good cookery.

"Most wore rumpled jackets of worn barleycorn Shetland, frayed herringbones from the Cheviot Hills and subtle tweeds from the thatch-roofed crofter's cottages of Connemara, Ireland. Many insisted on wearing neckties, because trout were gentlemen, and one dressed like a gentleman to enjoy the privilege of fishing."