

John Gierach, Fly Fishing Author With Wit and Wisdom, Dies at 77

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John Gierach, a fly fisherman who was as skilled with a rod and reel as he was with words, producing hundreds of articles and more than 20 books, including “Even Brook Trout Get the Blues” and “Sex, Death and Fly-Fishing,” died on Oct. 3 in Longmont, Colo. He was 77.

His wife, Susan de Castro Gierach, said the death, in a hospital, was caused by cardiac arrest.

Avuncular and white-whiskered, Mr. Gierach celebrated the everyday foibles and frustrations that make up the fly-fishing life, as well as the occasional triumph over an aggravating trout.

In a sport often considered a pastime for the well-to-do, he spoke to fly fishing’s everyman appeal. He was, as one of his book titles suggested, a “trout bum.” The expensive outfitters, private rivers and \$700-a-day guides? Not for him. To have a good day in the stream, all he needed was a decent rod, the right fly and a strong cup of coffee.

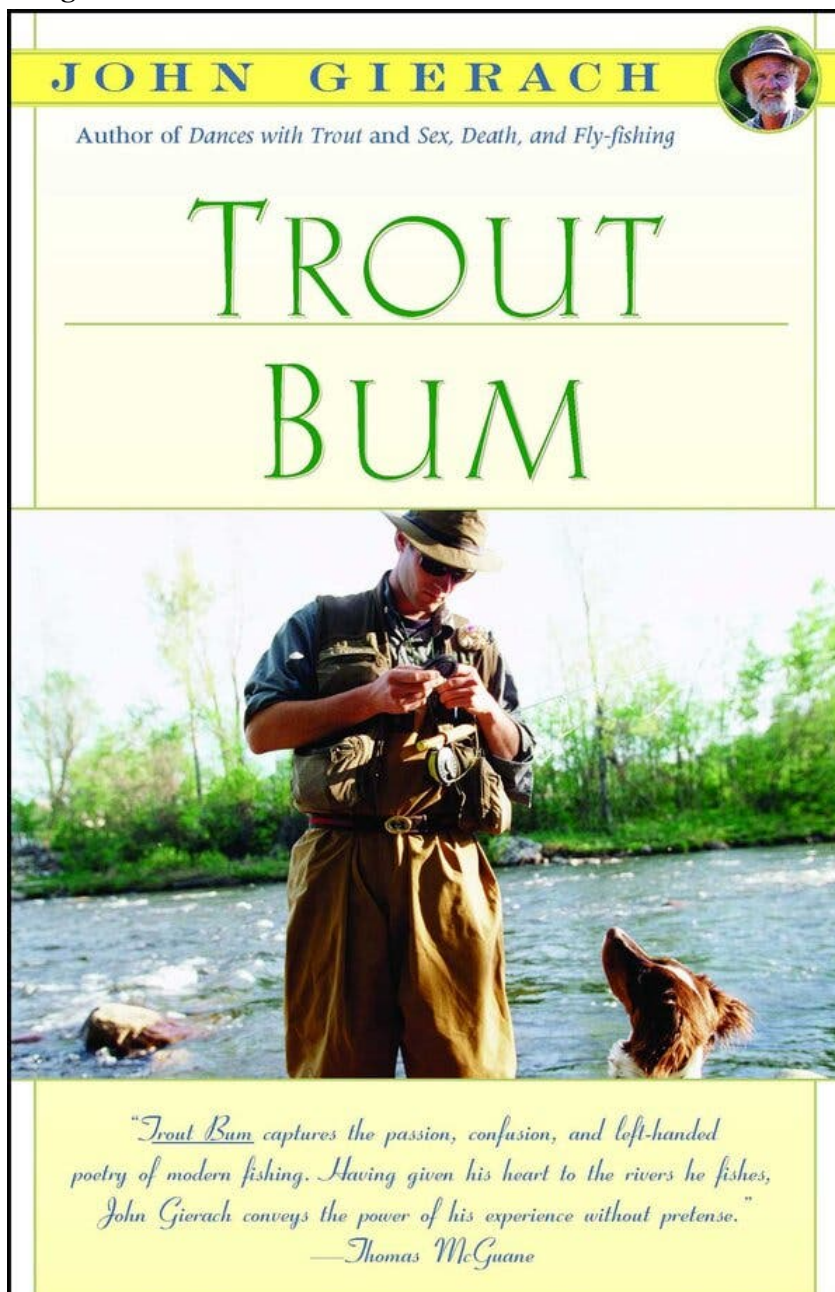
When he began writing, in the 1970s, the voluminous literature around fly fishing tended to the self-serious, reverent and snobbish. Mr. Gierach brought something different: humor, irony and self-awareness.

“Trout are wonderfully hydrodynamic creatures who can dart and hover in currents in which we humans have trouble just keeping our footing,” he wrote in “Trout Bum” (1986), his third book. “They are torpedo shaped, designed for moving water, and behave like eyewitnesses say U.F.O.s do.”

Although he wrote the occasional technical article or book, most of his work was reflective, experiential and broadly accessible. He was an inveterate storyteller; many of his best articles seem at first to be rangy shaggy-dog tales about a recent fishing trip, only to reveal, upon further examination, a piquant life lesson poking through the fish tales.

“The guy who didn’t catch fish must not whine or complain or offer excuses, and the guy who has landed a few (whether it was through luck or skill) is not allowed to either preen or engage in false modesty,” [he wrote in The New York Times in 1992](#). “I’ve been on both sides often, and I don’t know which is harder.”

Image



In “Trout Bum,” Mr. Gierach’s third book, he writes, “Trout are wonderfully hydrodynamic creatures who can dart and hover in currents in which we humans have trouble just keeping our footing.” Credit...Simon & Schuster

He was something of a vanishing breed. Outdoors writing used to be ubiquitous, not just in the many publications dedicated to hunting, camping and fishing, but in general-interest outlets, including The Times, where Mr. Gierach had a column in the early 1990s.

It would be hard to imagine someone replicating his wide-ranging career these days, or his easygoing, atmospheric prose: Outdoors writing today, when it does appear, is often focused on gear recommendations and adventure tales.

“John was down home,” Nick Lyons, a former publisher, Hunter College English professor and avid fisherman, said in a phone interview. “It was a way of life for him, and he found all of the particulars of that way, and knew them and wrote about them, with warmth and availability.”

John Lawrence Gierach was born on Nov. 24, 1946, in Chicago Heights, Ill. His father, John W. Gierach, was a manager for Sears, a job that soon required the family to move to Robbinsdale, Minn., a suburb of Minneapolis, where John grew up. His mother, Edna (Worthy) Gierach, ran the home, and then worked for Sears after her husband died in 1970.

Mr. Gierach graduated with a philosophy degree from Findlay College (now the University of Findlay), in Ohio, in 1967. He moved to Colorado in 1970 and, apart from traveling for fishing trips, never left.

At first, he took work simply to pay the bills: He spent a few months in a silver mine, a few more as a garbage collector. But he aspired to be a novelist or poet. By then an avid fisherman, he began to notice the growing number of magazines dedicated to the sport, and figured he could make money writing for them. His first columns appeared in Fly Fisherman, and he soon found himself in demand by outdoors magazines around the country.

Mr. Gierach’s first marriage ended in divorce. He married Mrs. de Castro Gierach, his longtime partner, in 2023. Along with her, he is survived by his sister, Lee Stock.

Among his longest-running engagements was writing the monthly back-page column in Fly Rod & Reel, from 1992 until the magazine closed in 2017. Each article was accompanied by an illustration by Bob White, an artist and fellow angler.

Among his friend’s many talents, Mr. White said, was an ability to speak across the various tribes that make up the fly-fishing world: dry-fly aficionados, bamboo-rod purists, jet-setting 1-percenters and weekend casters.

“There are lots of different approaches, and John spoke to them all,” Mr. White said in an interview. “He was kind of like the favorite uncle at the Thanksgiving dinner table, able to pull the tension back to reveal the reason why we’re all there.”

