



The Pat Conroy Literary Center will host the first Lowcountry Book Club Convention on Friday, December 15, in MacLean Hall (bldg. 12) on the Technical College of the Lowcountry's Ribaut Road campus. An all-day event, 10:00 am 4:30 pm, this will be an opportunity for book club members - or anyone interested in joining or forming a book club - to meet, mingle, and exchange ideas about fostering, inspiring, and sustaining a community of fellow book lovers.

The convention will be keynoted by best-selling author Will Schwalbe (*Books for Living* and *The End of Your Life Book Club*) in conversation with Cassandra King Conroy.

We recently interviewed Will Schwalbe for the Porch Talk blog of the Pat Conroy Literary Center. The following is an excerpt from that interview.

LCW: Here on The Porch, we like to start with this question: Do you have a Pat Conroy story?

WS: I don't have a Pat Conroy story that is much different from the Conroy story shared by millions of readers. I was never lucky enough to meet the author himself, but I was lucky enough to meet the extraordinary characters he created in his books. I remember exactly where

I was when I first read *The Great Santini* and *The Prince of Tides*. Both, along with his other books, gave me the kind of reading experience I most crave: when I get so wrapped up in a book that my friends and family take their lives into their hands if they dare to disturb me! I felt exactly the same way when I came across Cassandra King's work. I distinctly remember that I refused even to consider emptying the dishwasher or doing any other chore around our friends' summer house until I finished reading *The Sunday Wife*.

LCW: When your mother was undergoing treatment for pancreatic cancer, which ultimately killed her, you formed a 'book club' of two. How did reading together help you both through that very difficult time?

WS: When we read we were no longer a sick person and a well person - but, rather, two readers (a mother and a son) doing what we had done all our lives. Reading was an escape but also a way of engaging with many of the issues that were most important but most difficult. We could use characters as proxies and talk about what they were thinking or feeling. Reading also gave me an opportunity to learn so much more from my mother while she was still here to teach me. And we always had something to look forward to: the next book and the next conversation.

LCW: You're one of those folks for whom the old adage 'reading is fundamental' rings deeply true. In fact, you once called in sick to the office so you could finish reading a novel. What's so important about reading? (In a nutshell. Haha.)

WS: I love reading - getting wrapped up in someone else's stories and thoughts and opinions. It can be almost meditative. But I also look to books for inspiration. Reading helps me know what to do in my life and in the world. It also increases my capacity for empathy, which is a muscle that needs constant exercise or it atrophies. Reading widely is the best way I know to become more empathetic - when you walk miles in someone else's shoes you can walk farther and with more purpose in your own. One thing we could all use: more empathy. I also love the randomness of reading and the excitement. You never know what you are going to find. Even in a book you think you aren't loving you can come across a sentence or a thought that rocks your world.

LCW: In your latest book, you have some critical things to say about social media. Do you think reading a good book can serve as an antidote to immersion in the *sturm und drang* of social media?

WS: I have a new name for reading: Radical Listening. When you read, you need to be quiet, and consider someone else's point of view. Kind of the opposite of social media! Also, books are not ephemeral. A certain amount of time passes between when they are written and published and when they reach the reader. The form encourages more thought and consideration. Social media often appeals to our lesser angels. We are more gossipy, quick-to-judge, and quick to gang up on one another when we are online. Also, concentration is a skill - one we may be losing. Books remind us of the joy and importance of listening to one voice at a time without interruption.

LCW: When deciding what books to include in *Books for Living*, was it difficult to narrow down your list? Name a few great books that didn't make the cut.

WS: With *Books for Living*, I wanted to show how any book can be a 'book for living' - so

