

Pat Conroy: "Nothing's Off the Record"

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor
Tuesday, 05 November 2013 10:26



*As his new memoir **The Death of Santini** floods bookstores nationwide, we bring you a free-style, freewheeling, unabridged conversation with the man whose life has been an open book.*

By Margaret Evans, Editor

If you've lived in Beaufort for any time at all, you probably have a Pat Conroy story. Maybe you played basketball together as teenagers, or he was your high school English teacher. Perhaps you were in his writers' group, or he was your neighbor on Fripp, or you still smoke cigars together on his back porch every Sunday afternoon. Maybe your association is more ephemeral – you ran into him once at Publix, or at the old Bay Street Trading Co., or in his favorite restaurant, Griffin Market. But you really *connected*. Or maybe you've just read his books, and you feel like you've known him forever. No matter how fast or loose the relationship, we Beaufortonians all think of Pat Conroy as

ours

. He belongs to us. He's part of our mythology. Heck, he wrote our mythology.

Pat Conroy: "Nothing's Off the Record"

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor
Tuesday, 05 November 2013 10:26

My own Pat Conroy story goes back over 20 years. I was a young newlywed living on Fripp Island, with a shiny new masters in English and nowhere to use it. Enter the famous writer – he happened to be my neighbor – who generously offered me a job as his research assistant. To this day, I'm not sure whether he actually needed me or was just being nice. (That would be just like him.) It was a part-time gig; I spent most of my days working in a little dress shop while Pat spent his writing a book called *Beach Music*. He was a wonderful boss and we became friends, but when the novel was finished, so was



my job. Our lives meandered off in different directions. Looking back, though, I see we were always on strangely similar paths. In the two decades since, we both divorced and remarried, and we both left Fripp and moved into town. Career-wise, mine has clearly been the more stunning trajectory. No longer a shop girl, I am now the proud editor of this illustrious publication. Pat, on the other hand, has been content to remain as he was when I first met him – a world-famous, critically celebrated, bestselling author and American icon. What can I say? Some folks just aren't that ambitious.

Pat Conroy talks a lot about circles – he believes in their power – and today as I sit on his cozy back porch, looking out over Battery Creek and the autumn-gilded marsh, it occurs to me that those of us who fall into his orbit, whenever and however that happens, tend to stay there. Like planets circling the sun, we just keep coming back around. Lately, I've been working for Pat again. Again, it's a part-time gig. And again, I'm not sure he really needs me. But I'm not asking

Pat Conroy: "Nothing's Off the Record"

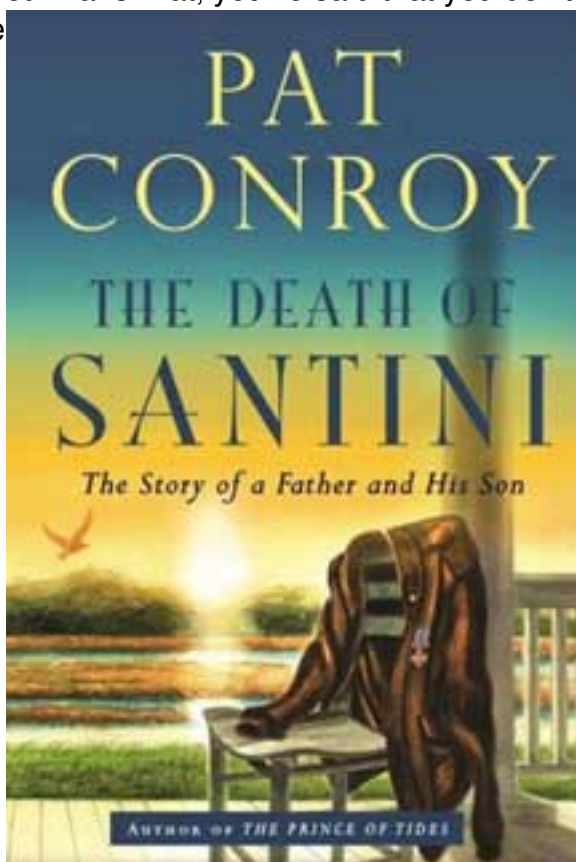
Written by Margaret Evans, Editor
Tuesday, 05 November 2013 10:26

any questions . . .

Not about *that*, anyway. I am here to ask questions about *The Death of Santini*, Pat's new memoir released just last week. In this book, we finally meet the family that launched a thousand novels, face to face, without their fictional masks, including the rage-driven father Pat says he remembers hating "even when I was in diapers." It is a beautiful, harrowing book that, for me – as someone who loves Pat Conroy – was as difficult to read as it was to put down.

We've been talking on this porch for almost two hours, and much to my journalistic delight, Pat keeps telling me that "nothing's off the record" . . .

Margaret Evans: Pat, you've said that you don't take pleasure in writing your books. Unlike your wife



Cassandra King, who has fun with her writing ("I crack myself up," she recently told the *Post & Courier*

Pat Conroy: "Nothing's Off the Record"

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor
Tuesday, 05 November 2013 10:26

), you find the process grueling and painful. I'm guessing that writing *The Death of Santini* was a bit like extracting your own teeth?

Pat Conroy: It was awful. Just awful. And it's been funny to hear the array of reactions from my brothers and sisters. My brother Jim was the most terrified about the book. He was dreading it. So, he reads it, and I call him up, "What's the verdict, Jim?" The Dark One (that's what I call him) is not effusive; he's very male, judgmental, restrained. Jim said I'd written an "adequate" book. So I call Mike – six weeks after sending him the book – and he says, "Nah, Pat . . . I've been so busy. Haven't even opened it yet." My sister Kathy seems to like it, which pleases and surprises me.

ME: Kathy doesn't normally like your books?

PC: Actually, I don't know. Basically, my family never mentions to me that they've even *read* the books. Including my daughters. Anyway, my brother Tim, like me, is an emotional male. Tim is all out there. He lets you know how he feels. He said, "Pat, reading your book was like taking a lead pipe and hitting myself in the head over and over for 350 pages. I found it agonizing. Why did we have to go through all that? We were just little kids. We were *children*.

What were these people thinking?" He was reading it out loud to his wife Terrye, but finally had to stop because she kept breaking down, weeping, over everything we'd been through. Tim says, "I'll be able to tell you in about 15 or 20 years what I think of it, but right now I'm so upset by it, so distraught and angry over it, than I can barely talk to you." I said, "That seems like a good read."

ME: What about your sister Carol? Has she seen the book?

PC: She will *never* see the book unless she buys it or gets it from the library. We don't talk. By the way, my siblings all agreed that I was way too easy on Carol in the book . . .

Pat Conroy: "Nothing's Off the Record"

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor
Tuesday, 05 November 2013 10:26



Pat Conroy: "Nothing's Off the Record"

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor
Tuesday, 05 November 2013 10:26



Pat Conroy, author of the novel "The Great Gable," is a member of the Pulitzer Prize-winning "The Great Gable" series. The series is a collection of short stories and novels that are set in the South. The series is a collection of short stories and novels that are set in the South.

Pat Conroy: "Nothing's Off the Record"

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor
Tuesday, 05 November 2013 10:26

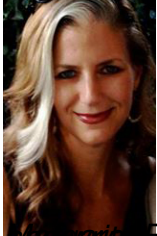


Pat Conroy: "Nothing's Off the Record"

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor
Tuesday, 05 November 2013 10:26



U.S. District Court in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1991. Conroy was charged with the murder of a woman, a charge he later pleaded guilty to. He was sentenced to 99 years in prison, but was released after 15 years on parole. Conroy has since become a successful author and has written several books, including "The Great Gable" and "The Prince of the Pale."



Margaret Evans is the editor of [Country Weekly](#).