



Last issue, we told you all about “Pat Conroy at 70: A Literary Festival Celebrating South Carolina’s Prince of Titles,” coming up in late October. As Beaufort prepares to throw the biggest birthday party anybody’s ever seen, we at *Lowcountry Weekly* have been talking to some of the Southern writers who’ll be heading here for the festivities. We asked them each a simple question: How has
Pat Conroy influenced you?

Katherine Clark (*The Headmasters Darlings*), above

I have wanted to be a writer of fiction ever since first grade, when I read my very first work of fiction, *Sammy the Seal*. But after four decades, I had received nothing but rejections on all the novels I sent to publishers. Then one day as I was reading Pat Conroy’s memoir *My Losing Season*,

I encountered the passage where he quotes his college professor: “Hemingway didn’t know he was Ernest Hemingway when he was a young man. Faulkner didn’t know he was William Faulkner. But they had to take the first step. They had to call themselves writers. That is the first revolutionary act a writer has to make.” It sounded like Pat Conroy was talking directly to me with those words. So I stopped thinking of myself as a failed novelist and started calling myself a writer. A few months later, I began writing the book that has become my first published novel,

The Headmaster’s Darlings.□

In one of the most magical twists of fate I’ve ever enjoyed, Pat Conroy became a reader of this novel, then a cheerleader, mentor and editor, and ultimately a publisher through his Story River Books imprint at the University of South Carolina Press. Best of all, he has also become a friend. This friendship has changed my life. But before I ever met him, this transformation began when he spoke to me through the words in his book and urged me to take the revolutionary step of calling myself a writer.

Pam Durban (*Soon*)



I never had the pleasure of having Pat as a teacher or a mentor, but what I've learned from him is how full-hearted writing looks, sounds and feels, and that's the most valuable lesson any writer can teach another.

Patti Callahan Henry (*The Idea of Love*)

Madeleine L'Engle says that the author and the reader "know" each other because they meet on a bridge of words.

Southern Writers on Pat Conroy

Written by Editor

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Pat Conroy (1945-2016) was a prominent American writer, known for his novels and short stories. He was a member of the Southern Writers Association and the Southern Writers on Pat Conroy project. His work often explored themes of family, love, and the South. He was also a member of the Southern Writers Association and the Southern Writers on Pat Conroy project.