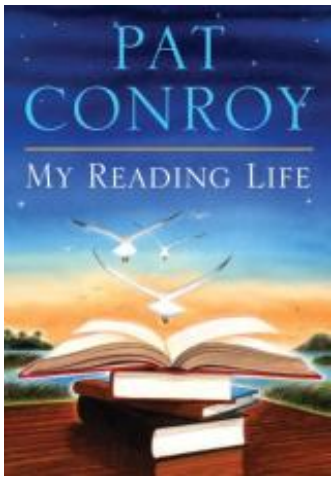
My Reading Life

by Pat Conroy



About the Book

Bestselling author Pat Conroy acknowledges the books that have shaped him and celebrates the profound effect reading has had on his life.

Pat Conroy, the beloved American storyteller, is also a vora-cious reader. He has for years kept a notebook in which he notes words or phrases, just from a love of language. But read-ing for him is not simply a pleasure to be enjoyed in off-hours or a source of inspiration for his own writing. It would hardly be an exaggeration to claim that reading has saved his life, and if not his life then surely his sanity.

In MY READING LIFE, Conroy revisits a life of passionate reading. He includes wonderful anecdotes from his school days, mov-ing accounts of how reading pulled him through dark times, and even lists of books that particularly influenced him at vari-ous stages of his life, including grammar school, high school and college. Readers will be enchanted with his ruminations on reading and books, and want to own and share this perfect gift book for the holidays. And, come graduation time, MY READING LIFE will establish itself as a perennial favorite, as did Dr. Seuss?s OH, THE PLACES YOU'LL GO!

Discussion Guide

1. Conroy claims he became a novelist?or more precisely a ?Southern? novelist --- because of Gone with the Wind. What does he like about that book, and what echoes of it do you see in his work?

2. In ?The Teacher,? Conroy writes that Mr. Norris?s life was ?rich in the guidance of children not his own.? What do you make of this observation? Why might Conroy emphasize the importance of non-familial ties?

3. In ?The Librarian,? Conroy?s teaching colleague Miss Hunter opposes school integration, a cause that is close to his

heart. He writes, ?She and I would clash often over her treatment of my black students.? How is Conroy?s compassion for his black students echoed in the essay?s final scene? Do you think Miss Hunter was deserving of Conroy?s kindness?

4. In the last section of ?The Old New York Book Shop,? Conroy mourns the closing of a store that played a significant role in his life, finding it ?sad beyond commentary.? Considering the rise of e-readers and online retailers, do you think bookstores are necessary, or dispensable? Do bookstores have an effect on your reading habits? Has Conroy?s evocation of the Old New York Book Shop altered your opinion about bookstores?

5. In his chapter on Paris, Conroy writes about his vivid experiences in that particular city, and the ways in which he was profoundly influenced by his surroundings. He learned so much not only about others, but also about himself - his own temperament and spirit. Have you ever had a similar connection to a place? In what ways did it shape you, and what did you learn about yourself as a result?

6. Conroy writes, "Here's what I love: when a great writer turns me into a Jew from Chicago, a lesbian out of South Carolina, or a black woman moving into a subway entrance in Harlem. Turn me into something else, writers of the world." What book has most transformed you into one of its characters? Was this character markedly similar to or completely different from you? How, in your opinion, did the author achieve this?

7. War and Peace is a touchstone book for Conroy. He has read it multiple times throughout his life, and each reading revealed new aspects to him and provided new interpretations he had not considered before. Is there a book that you have returned to and found new meaning in on a second (or third, etc.) read? What is it about that particular book that draws you back to it?

8. Throughout the book, Conroy mentions instances in which books provided a means for talking about and coming to terms with difficult aspects of his own life. For example, when discussing **Look Homeward, Angel** with his mother, he found that "the book made areas accessible to us that has carried the impediment of taboo before. We began to talk more freely about my father's violence and how that family secret had extracted a price from us." What do you think about this notion that books have the power to strengthen our relationships with others, that they can have a measurable positive impact on our lives? Can all books achieve this, or only specific kinds? Has a book ever changed your life in that way?

Author Bio

Pat Conroy (1945?2016) was the author of THE BOO, THE WATER IS WIDE, THE GREAT SANTINI, THE LORDS OF DISCIPLINE, THE PRINCE OF TIDES, BEACH MUSIC, THE PAT CONROY COOKBOOK: Recipes of My Life, MY LOSING SEASON, SOUTH OF BROAD, MY READING LIFE and THE DEATH OF SANTINI.

Critical Praise

"What a delightful little book . . . with a punch far sturdier than its compact size might suggest?Try to resist rereading it!"

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