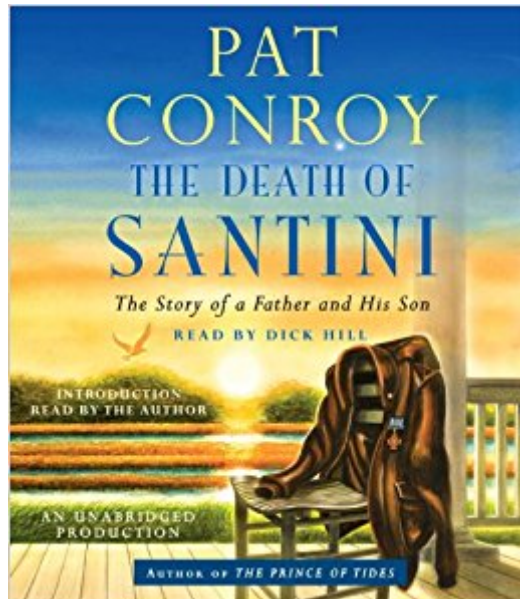


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The Death Of Santini: The Story Of A Father And His Son



Synopsis

In this powerful and intimate memoir, the beloved bestselling author of *The Prince of Tides* and his father, the inspiration for *The Great Santini*, find some common ground at long last. Pat Conroy's father, Donald Patrick Conroy, was a towering figure in his son's life. The Marine Corps fighter pilot was often brutal, cruel, and violent; as Pat says, "I hated my father long before I knew there was an English word for 'hate'." As the oldest of seven children who were dragged from military base to military base across the South, Pat bore witness to the toll his father's behavior took on his siblings, and especially on his mother, Peg. She was Pat's lifeline to a better world—that of books and culture. But eventually, despite repeated confrontations with his father, Pat managed to claw his way toward a life he could have only imagined as a child. Pat's great success as a writer has always been intimately linked with the exploration of his family history. While the publication of *The Great Santini* brought Pat much acclaim, the rift it caused with his father brought even more attention. Their long-simmering conflict burst into the open, fracturing an already battered family. But as Pat tenderly chronicles here, even the oldest of wounds can heal. In the final years of Don Conroy's life, he and his son reached a rapprochement of sorts. Quite unexpectedly, the Santini who had freely doled out physical abuse to his wife and children refocused his ire on those who had turned on Pat over the years. He defended his son's honor. The *Death of Santini* is at once a heart-wrenching account of personal and family struggle and a poignant lesson in how the ties of blood can both strangle and offer succor. It is an act of reckoning, an exorcism of demons, but one whose ultimate conclusion is that love can soften even the meanest of men, lending significance to one of the most-often quoted lines from Pat's bestselling novel *The Prince of Tides*: "In families there are no crimes beyond forgiveness."

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Customer Reviews

An Best Book of the Month, November 2013: Funny thing about Pat Conroy: a prolific chronicler of his own life as a 20th century white Southern male, he writes novels that read like nonfiction and memoirs that read like novels. *The Death of Santini* falls into the second camp, but like the memoirs before it--*The Water is Wide*, *My Losing Season*--it has the heated, emotional language and grand operatic sweep of his later novels, *Prince of Tides* and *Beach Music*. As always, this long and sometimes repetitive book addresses common Conrovia themes--complicated families of epic violence, blood feuds, and passionate connections. (At the center of it (also as usual) are his parents, Peg and Don Conroy, who readers will remember most specifically from *The Great Santini*, which is so realistic (see above) I often refer to it as a memoir but, is, in fact, a novel.) But if the subject matter and style are to be expected--coming to terms with the violent, alcoholic, unrepentantly macho father who beat and belittled his wife and children, calling them "Jocks" and "sports fans" and so much worse--there are surprising details here, too. I was struck by the way Don Conroy took ownership of his "Santini" persona (played in the film by Robert Duvall), for example, attending speaking engagements with his son, winning over crowds and even, eventually, Pat himself. Also, I had forgotten that despite his relentless psychologizing, Conroy actually has a warm sense of humor, sometimes even about himself. Never mind that the author has made a career of analyzing his dysfunctional family; if writing is therapy for Conroy, it's a good excuse for the rest of us also to take to the couch--for hours of big-hearted, old fashioned storytelling. --Sara Nelson --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Conroy has long used his family to great success. *The Great Santini* (1976) was the portrait of his marine-obsessed fighter-pilot father and Conroy's long-suffering mother and siblings, who had to endure the violence, numerous moves, and great uncertainty created by his father. Don Conroy was from a Catholic family from the South Side of Chicago. Pat's revered mother, a real southern beauty, played by Blythe Danner in the movie, was the author's literary inspiration. She, as well as strong teachers, taught him the power of literature. His previous book, *My Reading Life* (2010), expands on these influences. Conroy does some name-dropping as the movie of *The Great Santini* had its premiere in Beaufort, South Carolina, Conroy's home, and Hollywood's biggest names turned out. In spite of the pain and cruelty, there was forgiveness, and a mature friendship

was realized between Conroy and his father before the latter's death. Conroy's eulogy concludes the book and is a fine summing-up of a compelling and readable portrait of a dysfunctional family. **HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** Conroy's many fans will be alerted to his new book by an extensive ad campaign and will welcome it for its honesty, power, and humor. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Author Pat Conroy always writes of his actual life in his fictionalized books. This book, however, is the nonfiction account of his life living with his abusive father, Don (the "Great Santini"), his long-suffering mother Peg, and his damaged brothers and sisters. Conroy himself states, that of the seven children Don and Peg created, five tried to commit suicide, and one did succeed (Tom, who threw himself off of a 14-story building). Writing "The Great Santini" caused a rift in his family, father Don becoming angry and showing up at his book signings, reminding readers that the book WAS fiction. But, writing the book also helped heal the contentious relationship he had with his father, a relationship detailed in this newest book, "The Death of Santini." It is a difficult book to read, full of violence and pain, but also full of the beautiful language Conroy is known for. We do see the "Great Santini" stand up for his eldest son, and readers see that famous line from "The Prince of Tides" come to life: "In families there are no crimes beyond forgiveness." You will grit your teeth in anger, clench your fists with rage, and weep at the power of forgiveness shown in this book. It is well worth your time.

What a bonus! Pat Conroy is my favorite author and I have tickets to see him in November at the Free Library of Philadelphia. So I couldn't have been more pleased to see his latest memoir, *The Death of Santini*, offered through Vine. Very few authors have the opportunity to rewrite the endings to their novels, so *The Death of Santini* is a special book, indeed. As always, *The Death of Santini* is sad, funny, moving, tragic and beautifully written. Pat Conroy grew up the oldest of seven children. His father was an Irish-Catholic from Chicago, and a fighter pilot in the Marines. His mother came from a poor, southern family but had a love of literature that she passed on to her children. Their marriage was toxic, "composed of terror and great violence, storm-tossed and seasoned with all the terrible salts of pain." For years, Colonel Don Conroy waged war against his family. The wounded child grew into a scarred man, and those scars damaged every relationship the author touched. But all that would change with the publishing of his novel, *The Great Santini* in 1976. *The Great Santini* was a fictionalized version of Conroy's father, and most of the hurtful family scenes were true to life. At first, *The Great Santini* caused great controversy among the Conroy family. The Colonel claimed

it was all a lie. But with the divorce of Conroy's parents and his father moving nearby, the book helped to open a dialogue between the two. "There was something in my father that the book touched, and it opened up a place in his heart that I thought had closed off long before I was born. So we began a journey together, set off on a voyage that would take us to many places and shared experiences that I never thought were possible with such an incomprehensible man." Throughout this journey with his father, Conroy also begins a personal journey--one where he tries to make peace with who he is, his anger, his Irish heritage, his broken marriages, his injured siblings, his inner demons, his breakdowns, the death of his mother, and the suicide of his youngest brother, Tom. And although Conroy claims that his parents "never taught me a thing about faking joy," he and his siblings often see humor in the most inappropriate situations. I think there are no more complex relationships than that between a father and a son. Where it might appear that the relationship between Conroy and his father was damaged beyond repair, *The Death of Santini* is a book about second chances. Conroy claims that "Don Conroy had the best second act I ever saw." Their total reconciliation is a miracle of dysfunctional families. Colonel Conroy has appeared in several of Conroy's novels including as Bull Meecham in *The Great Santini* and Henry Wingo in *The Prince of Tides*. After writing *The Death of Santini*, Conroy vows that although he has written about his family more than almost any other writer, that the spirits of both his parents "deserve a rest, and I'm going to grant you a long one, one that lasts forever." While his parents rest in peace, I hope that *The Death of Santini* also provides some well-deserved peace to Pat Conroy.

I first fell in love with the hypnotizing effect of Pat Conroy's flowery language as a tenth grade student at Carrollton High School. I had read books all of my life; however, pure happenstance led me to the bottom shelf of the high school library where I selected *The Lords of Discipline* as my next read. From the age of sixteen until now, age forty, I have been fascinated by how his control of the English language can evoke emotions one never knew existed in himself or herself. I have read everything I have been able to find in order to embark on those tragic, epic journeys with his characters; I have read each of his books (including the cookbook), the introduction to *War and Peace*, the introduction to *Gone With the Wind*, the introduction to *If Holden Caulfield Were in My Classroom*, as well as various magazine entries posted on the internet. Pat's newest book, *The Death of Santini*, lives up to what has become expected of him throughout his career. The beginning of the book summons the sensory details to become active participants from beginning to end. As I was reading stories about his life, I realized by page 100, I had become one of them. A Conroy. An honorary Conroy. Many people either love Pat Conroy's writing or hate it. I think this is the greatest

compliment in all of the world. Mediocrity and indifference are not a result of a literary journey led by Pat Conroy. My father-in-law is convinced Pat is as far from pious as a person could be. A co-worker of mine is convinced Conroy's voice whines its way to the end of each novel. Those people are wrong. It is a shame there are those people who are not set afire by and for literature. It is something I require of literature I read, and it is something Conroy never fails to enact. I have taught a Conroy novel at least seven times in my career as an IB English teacher. At first, students are daunted by the bulk of the task before them. Before they realize it, they are lost in the world of Pat Conroy one hundred percent. Very seldom do students fail to be moved by Pat's artistry. Once in class, one of my students said he enjoyed Pat Conroy so much because he felt like Pat trusts the reader, like he has entrusted his most private information about himself to the reader. He also challenges the reader to a personal quest. By forging that relationship, the reader has a responsibility to further understand the message conveyed. This is where readers feel uncomfortable. The more forthright Pat Conroy's writing is, the more readers see the disappointment in the world, in their families, in their parents, among their friends, amidst their co-workers, as well as themselves. The sincerity, the soul, and the passion that leaps from each page in Conroy's novel also begin to course through the veins of readers' blood. We can all taste the salt air and the wind-blown breeze of the Atlantic Ocean. We can see the deer, egrets, and blue crabs. We are invited into a part of South Carolina that is as close to heaven as anything on earth. More importantly, we relive the tragedies and celebrations of the Conroy family with every ounce of our very beings. For fans of Pat Conroy, *The Death of Santini* will seduce, anger, frustrate, challenge, and enter your soul. Once it has ownership of your heart, it will allow you to weep for the cycles of life, leaving you with a feeling of serenity and peace. I invite everyone to join Pat Conroy on this rare journey into the depths of his family, madness, love, and commitment, in an effort to be reminded of all the important things that matter in life. Thank you Pat Conroy.

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