

"Libraries are the last incubators for creative people"

*Patrick Rader talks about Hunter S.
Thompson, early days in Umatilla, and how
libraries changed his life*

Interview by Kevin Arms | Photographs courtesy of Patrick Rader

J. Patrick Rader

It is Tuesday at the Leesburg campus Library when a tall, smiling man enters the building. Students are working on research papers, essays and math homework, but they look up sharply when the man begins to speak quite loudly. His booming voice echoes through the building, and his laugh is infectious. After the man leaves, students ask, "Who is that guy?"

"Patrick Rader," is the usual reply. "One of our English faculty."

Patrick was born to young, Motown wannabe parents in Westchester, Pennsylvania. In the early 1970s, Patrick's parents moved to Florida, a place that "was revealing the myth of 'The Fountain of Youth' to be the reality of a place where people went to reinvent themselves," he told the libraries. "My young parents reinvented themselves into an uninterested, teenage father and a twenty year-old, single mom." He attended elementary school in Umatilla, but transferred to Faith Lutheran in the third grade, and began having to write essays on sermons that the students heard. He said that his mother encouraged him to diversify his experiences, and had young Patrick attend different churches, synagogues, and temples every few months. Not long after, Patrick would gain an older sister who would supplement his religious exposure with trips to some of Central Florida's greatest concerts of the 1970s and 1980s.

He went on to attend Eustis High School, and graduated Senior Class President, Editor of the Yearbook, and Top 12 in his class. "As soon as I was handed my diploma from EHS, I sprinted off to the University of Florida and partied my ass off for about 2 ½ years. He would pledge Sigma Nu, and got into hijinks that he described as, "the type of stuff our students only see in movies these days: livestock kidnappings, road trips to rival campuses, alcohol and nudity." Typical Animal House behavior for the times.

Reading and writing had always been a constant, sometimes motivating presence in his life. Growing up as a latchkey kid without cable TV and the internet, he read, played records, imagined and wrote to fill his time.



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"I don't remember learning to read," he said, "but I remember reading Silas Marner in the third grade and telling my mother 'He falls in a hole, Mom. A freaking hole. The end!'" That same year he would write his first, hole-free, story about a trip to the moon - complete with dialogue.

"I have always been a writer," he told the libraries, "No matter how hard I try to be anything else, I have always been a writer. It's an onus. Having read Rolling Stone magazine since age 12, I have cut my literary chops on Hunter S. Thompson since a way too early age." As a young adult, Patrick tried to mimic Thompson's famous gonzo lifestyle. "As an adult student of letters, I have come to appreciate the man's literary works, vision, and more. Now I live The Gonzo Way."

Patrick's life would change forever on June 24, 1999 when he had a terrible, nearly fatal, motorcycle accident in Denver, Colorado.

Patrick described it as visiting the edge. "I've researched and written on my own past, and that particular day, extensively," he explained. "Various versions of the story of 06/24/99, and my subsequent recovery, have appeared in multiple places. I try not to get too hung up on that." He considers his first college experience as wasteful, and when he returned to college he said he took his time at the University of Central Florida a bit more seriously.

During his recovery after the accident, he read anything people would give him. As an undergraduate student, he wrote extensively for The Independent Journal, UCF's last, completely independent weekly. His corporate experience allowed him to find contract work for all manner of companies and industries while he continued his education. While earning his Master of Fine Arts in Creative Non-fiction, he served as the non-fiction editor for the Florida Review. He is also a gifted literary mimic, and with a little effort, he is able to write like anyone, he proclaims.

His mimicry of Maya Angelou's poems were often not well received by his peers and professors, he explained, but he, "finds it is better to ask for forgiveness over permission. And, if you're fast enough, neither is required."

Patrick is passionate about life, and he attributes this to pain. "I wake up in pain, everyday...Years ago, I decided I would use my pain as a motivator instead of an inhibitor. Sometimes, my most painful days are my most productive." He is driven to succeed by the second chance he was given after his motorcycle accident, telling the libraries, "It's an incredible responsibility to recover from the near life-ending injuries I have suffered. A lot of people have done some really amazing things for me. I feel a heavy debt to those people not to affect some positive change given this 'second chance.'"

His favorite thing about Lake-Sumter State College is that LSSC is a community, "a culture. It's a place where free-thinking and expression have a home. For most of our students, it's the last place where they can truly explore their creative and artistic selves before moving into the professional arena. What better place to be part of a Lake County renaissance?"

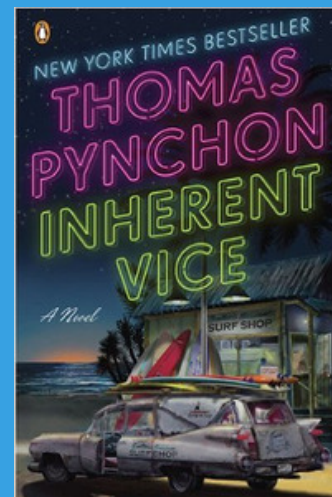


What He's Reading...

"I try to read what my students are reading. I love comic books and graphic novels."

- Sandman series, Neil Gaimon
- Transmetropolitan, Warren Ellis
- American Gods, Neil Gaiman
- Great Shark Hunt, Hunter S. Thompson
- White Noise, Don DeLillo

"I've been trying to finish Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* all summer!"





Finally, Patrick explained that, "Teaching people how to better read and write is the best way I can open their eyes to the opportunities that are available to anyone with an education. I'm a kid from a Umatilla trailer park who has been places and done things I've never dreamed. I try not to forget that kid. I'm still doing some pretty crazy stuff, too."

Patrick is teaching on all three campuses in the fall semester; if you see him, make sure to say hello!

Patrick is also the new faculty advisor to LSSC's very own Angler newspaper, which has enjoyed a five plus decade run and has reported on LSSC news since the very beginning. Patrick has seen a different direction for the college paper telling us, "I would like to see the paper become completely digital and a part of every student's Blackboard and email. I want to create a culture where every LSSC student is a contributing writer. I want to return to the days where the Angler was a recognized and respected voice for the LSSC student body. For LSSC students, the Angler is their soap box, their megaphone. LSSC students do have a voice in what goes on in Lake and Sumter counties. I want to help them exercise it."

Growing up in Umatilla, Patrick volunteered many summers at the Umatilla Public Library. "From a very early age, I was exposed to worlds and people outside of my trailer park's screened-in porches. I knew there was more to the world than what I could see at the moment. I have been to many of the places I read about as a child." We asked Patrick if he thought of the library as a safe haven and a knowledge base and he replied, "As a poor kid from Umatilla, it was the safest. As a curious, young adult," he explained that the library was "a springboard for many, many adventures. Even at my wackiest, I was always curious about where I was headed-both physically and metaphysically. Research guaranteed I wouldn't be ignorant."

Today, he views the library as a Roman forum, stating that the library is, "a place to discover, debate, and share ideas. Dumb people can debate other people. Smart people debate events. Creative people debate ideas. Libraries are the last incubators for creative people."



Patrick Rader is the new Faculty advisor for the LSSC Angler. Follow the Angler on Facebook for more information.