

PATCHETT, from page 1

books. Do you agree?

A.P.: Every time I'm on the floor, I'm either taking a book away from somebody or giving a book to somebody. Or if I see somebody walking within 10 feet of a book that I really like, I must have them back up and take a look at it. It's funny because, it's not about sales at all, on any level. It is my fantasy that, here I am surrounded by all of these books that I feel so passionately about and people walk in and I can force people – and really I mean that – if I'm there, and I say to you, No! You've got to read "We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves", people take me very seriously.

S.Z.: I can relate to the concept of having a book recommended to me, but let's talk about taking a book away from someone...

A.P.: Not all books are good.

A guy stopped me the other day. He said that he was interested in a book. He had some books in his hand and I didn't like any of the books that he had, but I asked him the last five books his book club had read and I thought they were all fantastic. So when he showed the books that he was thinking of, for example he showed me an Ian McKewen book that I thought was not good. So I directed him to a fantastic Ian McKewen book. I asked him to trade it for "Enduring Love". He'd never heard of it. I'd read both books and I knew that "Enduring Love" was a much better book than the one he had in his hand.

I think that taking books away from people is as important as giving books to people. Obviously you don't want to do it to everybody. And my taste is not everyone's taste.

S.Z.: On that note, when I first came to Portland a few years ago, I fell into a great gig working as a street librarian for Street Books, a pedal-powered mobile library for people who live outdoors. We stocked the cart with titles we both liked, then quickly realized that our patrons had different literary tastes than we did. So I'm just wondering, is reading, reading, regardless of content?

A.P.: Absolutely! Reading is reading. Of course the book store is full of books that I don't like, and I don't order them. My partner, Karen, does all of that and you can't have a bookstore that only has books you like in it.

You are absolutely right. The important thing is that people read. I think all books are gateway drugs. Somebody who comes in and buys "Fifty Shades of Grey," may go on and buy Scott Spencer's "Endless Love" later on. That is a really hot, sexy book.

Somebody who doesn't read books is never going to find their way to a good book.

I think this whole generation of people who grew up with Harry Potter and had that experience of breathlessly waiting for the next one and waiting for midnight and calling in sick to school – that is quite literally magic. Those are people who grew up to be readers. You can see this whole uptick in reading right around the time those Harry Potter people grew up.

I interviewed J.K. Rowling live last year. I never read the Harry Potter books, this was an interview about "The Casual Vacancy," and when I started to talk about this I got all verklempt. She changed the world. What she

did was truly magic.

S.Z.: "This is the Story of a Happy Marriage," your most recent book, is a collection of essays. What is the overarching theme of this collection?

A.P.: Commitment – things that I care about and love deeply. Things I'd go to the wall for.

S.Z.: I don't want to be a spoiler, but the title essay to your new book, "This is the Story of a Happy Marriage," makes the point that happy unions aren't modeled for us often. In fact, you say, that "We weren't the products of our parents' happy marriages; we were the flotsam of their divorces." You are speaking about yourself and two friends in the book, but it really struck me – a divorced woman who recently went through a breakup ...

A.P.: It's astonishing what we survive. You knew it wasn't working. You knew from the first week and really, probably, the first date. But you just think of (all of his great qualities), and you think it could work. It's amazing when we're honest with ourselves after the fact. The extent to which we can say, "Yeah. I knew. I knew."

S.Z.: Is putting together a collection of previously published works less complex than writing new content?

A.P.: I wrote a lot of new content for the book. When I started putting that book together – which was more than two years ago – a friend put the book together and then I would read it and take out the pieces I didn't like. I wanted the book to have a novelistic arc. I would think to myself what is missing? So I wrote "The Wall" and other longer pieces. I wrote "The Happy Marriage" and "The Getaway Car" for the book.

I also had what I call the mall complex idea of a book of essays. You have to have your anchor stores. You have to have your

Macy's and Bloomingdale's and you Saks. So while I had a lot of small essays, or essays in the 3,000 word range, I didn't have the anchor stores. And those were all pieces that I wrote for the book.

S.Z.: Another of the essays, "Tennessee" mentions an experience you had witnessing the KKK march in Nashville as a young girl and the impact that had on you. Can you talk about that a bit?

A.P.: When you say marching, it's not exactly the right word. It's just that they would gather on Sunday. And stand out at a particular place and wave at cars. It was like 10 o'clock in the morning on a Sunday. It was weird. But there was a lot of crazy shit going down in those days.

The '60s, early '70s. It was right about the time my father was arresting Charles Manson.

S.Z.: Tell me about that.

A.P.: Well, it certainly wasn't him alone, but my father was one of the members of the LAPD who brought in Manson. He was very involved in that case. My father was the person who connected the LaBianca murders – that was his case. They murdered the LaBiancas two nights after the Tate murders. My father was the person who connected those murders and he was in the group that brought Manson in.

S.Z.: You are a bit of a luddite – at least in terms of social media. Do tell.

A.P.: Getting email was probably the single biggest mistake of my life and I'm not going any further. I'm just not.

I have a cell phone. Four people have the number and I only turn it on when I travel. It has a very aggressive outgoing message saying don't under any circumstances leave a message on this number because I will never listen to it. I don't text. My phone cost \$19 and it's 10 years old.

Lost in the Struggle

by Shanna Robinson

Lost in the Struggle
You can call yourself
A mastermind
But you just can't seem
To find
Your way out of this.

Time is only
A perception of the mind
You can walk
Through life
With no vision
but then you might as well be blind.
Educate your mind.

This goes out to
The rider
The survivor
The savage soul
That kid who went from
9th grade to dope slinging, gang bangin.

I'm in the industry of believing.
There's another way.
All you gotta do is pray.

I've never been on Facebook, so you can just extrapolate out from there ... Instagram and Twitter and all of that. I also don't watch television.

It's not that I'm trying to make a point. It's that it so profoundly doesn't interest me. I don't go to baseball games. It's not that I think other people shouldn't go to baseball games. I'm just not interested.

The only thing I use the Internet for is picking up email.

S.Z.: And research, I would imagine. Or no?

A.P.: No.

S.Z.: How do you do your research?

A.P.: I go to the library and read books. I'm on the Library Foundation Board. The library is a big part of my life.

Part of this – the reason I don't have to do these things – is because I have a husband who is completely obsessed with hand-held electronic devices. And so I'm interviewing Pat Conroy next month. He's coming to the store and we're doing an on-stage interview so I've been reading all of these Pat Conroy books and so I wondered how old Pat Conroy is. So I asked my husband, Carl, to find out how old Pat Conroy is.

If I say anything predicated by, "I wonder", Carl has got his phone out. That's not what I meant by, "I wonder." I wonder doesn't mean, so go to Google immediately.

S.Z.: In 2011, you opened an independent bookstore in an age where print is disappearing ...

A.P.: No it's not.

S.Z.: OK. Well digital media and e-books are taking over.

A.P.: No they're not! They're not. They are declining. They peaked like three years ago.

I'm so glad that there are e-books. I am so glad that people have more choices and more ways to read, but this notion of if 40 percent of the people are reading on e-books, we might as well just throw all the books away – it's a media thing. It's a slow news day story. It's ridiculous.

We're not all going to do this the same way. Yes, it's true. We don't need 30,000 square feet of Barnes and Noble anymore. We don't need the mega super store. That is an unsustainable model. But it doesn't mean that people aren't reading paper books.

S.Z.: You've had the great fortune to befriend and have as teachers and mentors some remarkable writers. What advice do you have for aspiring writers?

A.P.: I think "The Getaway Car" is my 50 pages of advice to aspiring writers. Writing in huge quantities is a good start.

If it's one thing, it's that you've got to read. That sounds so silly and obvious, but it is amazing how many people want to write and don't read. You have to have a real, primary connection to books and read indiscriminately – all over the place, but with thought and care.

I think an MFA program can be great, but obviously this really is a profession that is historically self-taught. You can get an awful lot by staying home and reading



Dignity



Poverty