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ALUM'S FILM AIRS AT GASPARILLA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL APRIL 2



Pete Conrad

USF St. Petersburg alumnus Pete Conrad will screen his film "The Suicide Flowers" at the 10th Annual [Suncoast Credit Union Gasparilla International Film Festival](#) March 30-April 3. The short film is based on his original novel by the same title and highlights the life of metal rock musician Raeburn Messiah, a self-destructive rock star whose career is fading, and Gabriel Dalton, his biggest fan who is terminally ill with Leukemia.

"The most striking thing to me about making this film was the emotional connection that the actors and director had with the characters," said Conrad, 49, an accomplished author and screenwriter with three published novels and seven other screenplays. A native of Haverhill, Mass., Conrad graduated with a bachelor's degree in English, Literature and Cultural Studies from USFSP in 2014.

"I wrote the first iteration of the book in 2006," Conrad said, describing the original copy as horrible, but adding that it had a storyline he worked over the years to refine and improve. "I continued to hone my skills over the years, rewriting the book twice, and the feature film screenplay dozens of times."

Conrad said that the story ultimately is about the death of his own father, who died from emphysema when Conrad was 23, after years of suffering from the disease.

"Each character in the book represents a specific emotion I was feeling while dealing with his death," said Conrad, who added that writing was a way for him to heal the pain he had suffered since childhood while watching his father

slowly die from the disease. "I was working out life's hurt and frustration, and my writing became stronger."

"The professors at USFSP gave me the freedom to express myself, and then gave me the feedback that was critical to my success as an author, without quashing that desire to express that is so vital to writers," Conrad said. "Through example and extensive knowledge, they illustrated the importance of literary devices, which made me think even more critically about the stories I was writing."

Once he found out that his film would be screened at the festival, he reached out to some of his former professors at USFSP to share the news.

Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong, professor of English in the Department of Verbal and Visual Arts, had Conrad in her classes. She said his determination and work ethic were the two traits that most stood out to her during her time as his professor.

"I think these traits represent what is best about our English majors – many of whom, like Pete, follow a non-traditional path," Armstrong said. "He was determined and worked hard to accomplish his goals. We live increasingly in a higher education world that wants students to fit into one kind of mold. Pete's achievements remind students that other models exist and that they should stay true to their dreams."

The film will premiere as part of the block of shorts called "Music in Motion" at Muvico Centro in Tampa on Saturday, April 2 starting at 11 a.m.

Alum's Film Airs at Gasparilla International Film Festival April 2

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