

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Behind the Circulation Desk, a Wake Tech Libraries podcast.

You'll learn about new items in our collection through lively discussions about our new resources with faculty and staff, little known stories about how things run behind the scenes at Wake Tech Libraries and of course, stories about how students succeed because of what we provide here at Wake Tech Libraries.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: I'm your host, Nichole Williams, instructional services librarian at the Scott Northern Wake campus.

Welcome to Behind the Circulation Desk, the web... the podcast for the Wake Tech Libraries.

I'm here today with Dr. Ralls and we're here to talk about some of his favorite books and also his opinion about libraries and how they help with the success of our students.

So, welcome, Dr. Ralls.

SCOTT RALLS: Hi Nichole, thanks for having me today.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Thank you for being here.

So, we'll just get started if you can tell us your what are your top five books that are your favorites?

SCOTT RALLS: OK, well I I struggle with this just a little bit because I love to read so big... the toughest part is figuring out the top five.

So cut me off when I go too long here, but I started first with three books that were... that kind of carry some similar things, but influenced me at different parts of my life and had to go back and look at them again just to realize... to see what what it was what that impacted me.

And a couple of them reread here recently, but one was when I was younger I was a teenager and I read a book that really stayed with me.

I wasn't sure exactly... I kind of had a sense of what I did, but and then I go back and reread it, which is a novel which was written by Robert Pirsig called Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: OK.

And it is... umm, it gets into a lot of philosophy. It's it's not about zen and it's really not about motorcycle maintenance either, but it kind of combines the two and it's really it's about a man and his struggles in life with mental health challenges.

And then his son has come in... is struggling with mental health challenges.

And they go on a motorcycle trip across the country, and a lot of it is about his philosophy as well.

And one of the things that that struck me, somewhat what was it, really... And this is from motorcycle maintenance comes in.

It's not about just motorcycle maintenance, but it is about the craft of being fully engaged at something, and for him it was the maintenance of motorcycles.

Being able to, you know, just treat it more than just a utilitarian tool.

But it's more about the craftsmanship constantly maintaining and preparing and being able to so go on long motorcycle trips but be able to take care of this is really about, you know, engagement and craftsmanship and and when he referred to as quality as a form of philosophy.

So, it's about it kind of struck me in the notion of, you know, there are things about that we strive, you know, there's this element of being a mastery at something.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Uh huh.

SCOTT RALLS: ... It doesn't... sometimes I think this is key with students... it doesn't matter so much what it is, but just knowing what it means to have mastery of something that reach a certain stage to get to a what's called flow state, where that, that, that notion of mastery helps you deal with with other things that come along.

And so I went back and reread the book a couple of years ago, and it's a very complicated book ... OK, it gets mixed reviews.

Some people love it, some people hate it.

But it spoke to me, particularly in that issue of craftsmanship.

I later read another book that had similar as nonprofit, I mean non-fiction called... Uh, it's called Shop Classes Soulcraft, but it's a different, different, similar kind of philosophy of just the notion of craftsmanship and what that means in your life.

It doesn't have to be hand crafts, motorcycle crafts, but just the notion of the engagement in something you see as a craft... could be libraries you know, just that notion of being so wrapped up into that sense of quality of how you do something and the process.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: OK.

SCOTT RALLS: Second book. I'll kind of go through three real quick, which was very influential to me that I hear a lot about different places with the book written by Viktor Frankl, who was a German psychologist and the book is called Man's Search For Meaning.

And Frankel was a psychologist. It was living in Austria but during the Jewish living in Austria and during World War II, or leading up to World War II, his family was taken to a Jewish ghetto and where his father lost his life.

And then then the remaining family was taken to Auschwitz and he... The book is really about at that time he was for different reasons, developing kind of theory of life, which was more about, you know, that you find joy and uh life and purpose in life or you find joy in life and finding purpose and meaning in life in things that are essentially bigger than yourselves... other than yourself.

And so when he was in Auschwitz that became kind of the ultimate test place for this theory for him and it was about, you know, that you can face almost anything... Uh... When you keep control of the one thing that no one can control, which is your attitude, if you're focus, uh, in terms of purpose.

And so, the book kind of gets into just the the horrific, tremendous challenges he had as a Holocaust survivor.

Where he lost all of his family and how the challenges have made... the the prisoners at Auschwitz were in that, you know, their souls were taken before they've lost their lives.

But the notion of that he kind of knows that there's long as you can maintain your own attitude, your own purpose, your own and and something bigger than yourself is the way that I really took it.

Then you can pretty much deal with just about anything.

It kind of goes back, there's a quote they later made reference to Friedrich Nietzsche that you know you could deal with almost any how when you know your why.

And so that book had some meaning to me, and some way to me, you know, about community colleges were kind of like that, you know?

Yeah, it's like a bit for those who of us who work at community college it's much more than just a job.

It's kind of a kind of helps us capture our "whys" and some..

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: It's a calling.

SCOTT RALLS: Yeah. A calling. It really is.

That's that's what it is in terms of that notion of a calling and purpose and something being meaningful.

So, and so as I was kind of going through in life trying to figure out what is that thing I'm going to do in life. It was about, you know, staying true to have... something that's bigger than yourself.

Yeah. So, I think that that was something I took from that book.

And then the third book that has similar to that... that has influenced me more recently, was written a few years ago, by a New York Times columnist, David Brooks.

Who, um... It's called The Second Mountain and it has, you know it... it has some similarities to the first two books about purpose and meaning in life, but it's about different stage in life... and, um... there's some I thought about in terms of what I've gotten to the age I am or I'm in my last 10 years of my career what you want out of your, you know, certain stages of lives.

And because there's a book he wrote before I think it's called Strength Of Character.

But either in that book or this will have some previous book he made reference to something that I often quote sometimes.

Sometimes that graduation speeches or other speeches is that you wanna pay attention that just to your, what you would call your resume virtues.

But all the but really, your ulogy virtues. You know, because what someone says at your funeral is often much different than what's on your resume.

And at a younger stage in life is your kind of aspirational, maybe more focused on status, climbing a ladder of success.

People really pay attention to their what he would call their resume virtues.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Uh hmm.

SCOTT RALLS: But that's not sustaining for the life of meaning and happiness, you know?

And he, he notes, and just book that there's a big difference between joy and happiness.

That joy is really found by that... again, kind of going back to the other two books I was referring

to, joy is found more by being involved in something, whether that be church or community or school or something that's that's bigger than it brings with meaning and purpose, and that's what really leaves him joy.

And that what can happen as you get older, and he makes reference to society, now is you know, is we become much more individualistic.

People separate... you know they're not part of each other's lives as much as they may have been at one time.

And so, people often you know that they reach a certain point in their life where they have achieve career success or economic success.

They're on a constant pursuit of happiness, which is... I having the best trip, you know? It's almost like a Facebook form of happiness.

You know, it's not about the meal, but it's about taking the picture of the meal.

It's about the, you know, the trip you're going on. It's about this, you know, and pursuits of, you know, things or or... But that that, you know, you reach a point in your life that you keep doing that, that's what it's about, you're not... you know... happiness is umm, a pursuit that you won't ever reach.

But Joy is something that comes from something completely different, and that's more through relationships with others.

And being something that you do with others and that and that you've worked towards, you know something, something that brings purpose and connection and a lot of it's about community.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Um hmm.

SCOTT RALLS: You know, being part of a community where, yeah, interaction with others around, something that's the common good and the common purpose and that ultimately is what leads to, as he would say joy, which is much more fulfilling than the pursuit of happiness.

So, you know those three books they have similarities, if you think about their themes.

But for me they kind of were influential at different points of my life want more.

When I was a teenager and I really did, it never could articulate why as much, but it was that notion of finding something that you kind of... That notion of craftsmanship, or quality and the second part was more about finding something in your life that's more of a calling and a meaning that's bigger than yourself.

And now here where I am and older in life that's really about how you keep the connections or community and being a part of.

So, that's why I love Wake Tech, you know, you're just not about me or anybody else.

It's about about that. It's not something about Wake Tech of the college about the purpose and mission of Wake tech, and what that means in terms of the community and how you can get your arms around it.

So, you know... it sounds a little pollyannish, maybe. But those three books, you know, have a lot of influence for me.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Yeah. The the David Brooks one that you mentioned, it talked about being concerned about your your eulogy and not just your with people say on your resume that's interesting.

You know, that's something I would like to check out myself because I I noticed that, you know, I mean, I think that's true that when people do, when I've heard eulogies, it's usually all about how the person treated other people.

SCOTT RALLS: Exactly.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: And not about accomplishment.

SCOTT RALLS: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And, you know I think too... is if you ever go to a funeral that is packed, that's usually because of the connections and how they treated and how they impacted other people, not so much about, you know what their job title was or how big their office was.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Umm hmm.

And you know, that's like that's a good lead into the this next question to get your opinion about how we're doing as libraries, the Wake Tech libraries, how do you feel that you know we play a role in the success of our students?

SCOTT RALLS: Well, first I love libraries because when... so, going back... I love to read, umm I mean reading, I am kind of a geek about reading.

You know, I get excited because last night I was planning out what I'm going to read in the fall, you know?

So, I know what I want to read over the next four or five months and I'm trying to make sure I finish one thing and start the next. I get excited about that.

So, I'm a little geeky about it, but it goes back to the libraries because my mom... if anybody loves reading more than me, it's my mom.

And so a lot of times when, and I'll talk to her every day, and my mom is 85 and, you know... she reads all the time.

And... But when I was younger, it was her. That how was a... she was an elementary school teacher who kind of gave me a lot of libraries and we lived in... the first place I remember is, you know, the town called Waynesville, which is in the Smokey Mountains and we could walk to our library.

And that was like, you know, we would walk to the library, and I could, you know, it's picking out the books, reading the books, seeing the books that, you know, I can even remember some of those books that I loved.

I read a lot of sports books back then... and different types of things, and umm and then it led to a love of bookstore too.

Like I, there's nothing I love more than walking around the bookstore, so I, you know, I kind of attributed that to my mom.

But it's, you know, it's the notion of libraries as... a place where, you know, you can learn.

I mean libraries are, you know... a lot of times learning happens classrooms, but learning happens even more so outside of classrooms and libraries where, you know the resources are there structured learning, but it's really where do-it-yourself learning happens.

And it's that do-it-yourself learning that probably has the most impact.

You know, in college, we learn to learn that the most important thing is not so much what we learned with learning to learn.

But the library, that's where anybody can have access to those opportunities. And through librarians... get suggestions, and advice and... help find what they're looking for.

And so to me, libraries today are important as well, and I think this has been done at Wake Tech as well as any place where they're integrated.

They're not like separate places. They're not like, you know, it's not about... libraries that are more like museums are those that are least relevant, I think.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Yeah.

Yeah, the walk through that beautiful libraries where nobody pulls the books off and nobody's talking and everybody just looking at what's around.

And I was in college one time where the library was treated like a museum, you know?

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Yeah.

SCOTT RALLS: And there was never anybody there.

And I remember one time... I used to be the state system president and the Library Association came to talk to me about who are all the libraries.

I said something that I think kind of made some folks mad, but I mean it in a way that it's completely opposite, but they're talking about... what do you see as like a successful library?

I said I think more what we have to do is figure out how for libraries to strategically disappear.

Now that's a terrible way of saying that. But what I meant was to not be the way I found the library when I got to the first college where I was.

Which it was... you know... it had statues in the library. You couldn't... you never could bring anything into the library like food or drink or whatever.

Or uh, you know, or have any kind of collaboration, you know, it's like the library is the place you got shushed, you know?

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Yeah.

SCOTT RALLS: That was the old school library and the library now, it's not even, you know, it is a physical place, but the the less it's a physical place and more, uhhh... that place where you go to... Have help in your own directive learning to a certain extent.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Uh huh.

SCOTT RALLS: That's what the library... And so it's a lot of that means that the libraries today or they're also about technology.

It's about like rooms we're in right now, where collaboration happens. But it is that place where only so much gets learned in the labs, in the classrooms. And the library is the best place for every other piece of it.



So, I think it's how you... how libraries become integrated with learning and how they support the do-it-yourself learning which is ultimately how we learn most everything we learn in our lives.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Well, we're proud at Wake Tech Libraries to be able to provide that environment for students and all of the resources and services that we provide weekly.

Hope you know to encourage... You know the success of our students to be able to, you know, go into whatever pathway they decide.

SCOTT RALLS: Yes.

Yeah, and when I said that, I've always tried to think back about how I could have been better in saying about 'strategically disappeared.'

Because what I meant to, is that sometimes you wanna sneak up on folks that you know like, in the past I... you know, the idea of going to the library for folks was just like uhhh.

But, it's almost like you're in the library and you're doing things, and you don't even realize you're in the library.

Because it's so integrated with everything else, you know?

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Yeah.

SCOTT RALLS: So, a lot of times I think the best libraries are those that are integrated into campuses, integrated into communities.

They're doing things that are more than just a place where all books are.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Yeah.

SCOTT RALLS: And you can see that in our public libraries now.

Like, one of the best things... I was talking to some folks recently about the public libraries in Wake County and yeah, they're doing things like; providing resource information to kids and families about us and higher education.

You know, it's a it's a way to for for folks to, uh, find what they're looking for.

And sometimes, if you don't know what you're looking for, it's also a way for you to discover those oppor... you know... it's it's it's where the world could be discovered is through libraries.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: Well, thank you for coming in...

SCOTT RALLS: Absolutely.

NICHOLE WILLIAMS: ...and talking with us today.

We're gonna have a full listing.

If you wanted to check out some of Dr. Ralls' favorite books... we'll have a full listing for you... posted and, umm, again thank you for sharing with us today.

SCOTT RALLS: Absolutely. Glad to be here. Thank you.

Thanks for listening to Behind the Circulation Desk.

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Until next time Happy reading.