

**Two Rivers Reading Series**  
**Anoka Ramsey Community College**  
**Coon Rapids Campus**  
**November 4, 2015**

I was privileged to be a guest writer in this Reading Series. Seven English instructors taught IN REACH in their classes. I did two one-hour reading/discussion sessions with a total of 300 students! The whole day was spectacular. Beautiful campus, the undulating glass wall of the cafeteria faces the bend of the Mississippi River, the faculty were warm and gracious hosts, and the students were respectful, engaged, and brimming with intelligent questions. There were a couple sweet highlights.

A young man named Don asked me afterward if I knew the symbolic meanings of the flowers I used in the story “Solitary Confinements.” I said I’m a gardener, and I knew they were in season, but other than that, no. He told me that geraniums symbolize foolishness, except red geraniums which mean comfort. He



was sure I must have written red geraniums into the story for that purpose. Later he emailed me to tell me it wasn’t only the geraniums. Tulips stand for love, so when Ted yanks out the tulips from his parents’ garden, it underscores his feeling of not being accepted. Then he plants petunias, a sign of hope. I loved this whole idea and wish I could say that I knew about all these layered meanings. It’s a great example of how readers bring their own experiences to literature.

A young woman named Elise told me that she has a few literary tattoos, including one by F. Scott Fitzgerald. She asked if I would give my permission and write in my own hand a quote from “Lessons at the P. O.” which she had chosen for a tattoo. Feeling amazed and honored, I wrote “Play it loud, kid. Play it free.” in her copy of IN REACH.