Martin Bucco taught in the English department at Colorado State University for 43 years, but unlike most lovers of great books, his relationship with great literature began when he saw the movie. After watching Mickey Rooney float down the river in the 1939 adaptation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 10-year-old Marty got his first taste of hands-on teaching methods, floating down the Passaic River on some oil drums he’d lashed together in a fair imitation of Mark Twain’s hero, via Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Having accomplished that, he read the book and began what would be a lifelong pursuit.

Bucco was born just after the start of the Great Depression, and while his parents were always supportive of his continued education, their occasional jabs toward the liberal arts inadvertently made him take a greater interest in his studies. His father had once told him a philosopher was a man who sat in the dark and thought. When, in the fourth grade, Bucco repeated that answer to a teacher, it was taken as a metaphor, and he as a deep thinker.

But it was a chance encounter with Sinclair Lewis’s *Kingsblood Royal*—his friend’s mother was a member of the Book of the Month Club—that pushed him into literature for good. After reading Lewis’s *Babbitt*, he was struck by the way literature could work in the world he knew. He was amazed, he says, to learn “you could write a novel about the man down the block.”

Eventually he received his M.A. from Columbia University, and by 1963 he was teaching at CSU. Fort Collins was expanding all over at that time—he was around to watch new buildings go up for the liberal arts and the library—and it gave him the impression that the institution and the town were “going places.”

Bucco was widely published during his career, particularly on Sinclair Lewis and Western American literature, but he always regarded teaching as his primary assignment. He considered it his duty to get students to read closely—to savor the language of a work—and to teach literature that was worthy of that kind of attention. His goal was to create a classroom in which students spoke up from the beginning of the semester—a classroom where students could eventually answer other students.

Bucco didn’t stop working after he retired, and his scholarship continues today. His most recent book on Lewis, *Sinclair Lewis As Reader and Critic* was released in 2004, and recently he completed a brief memoir about his adventure down the Passaic River. It would only be fitting if the movie version of *The Adventures of Martin Bucco* wound up producing another voracious reader.