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My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

A peek inside the personal library of a librarian

by Betsy Griffies

"Personal library" denotes a collection of books. What type of book collector am I? I do not consider myself a bibliomaniac because I do not scour used book stores, yard sales, and flea markets for literary gems. Perhaps I am a bibliophile, a lover of books, but I do not own all the books I have enjoyed reading over the years. That leaves me with the category of lover of reading. Visitors to my house might have a different opinion, but I have not yet resorted to stacking books on the floor; they are in boxes.

I learned to read when my sister (13 months older) was in first grade and read to my mother every day. Even though I grew up on a farm, my parents enjoyed reading when they had time (my father favored westerns). Our small eclectic collection was supplemented by books borrowed from relatives and later the school library. My early favorites included *Heidi*, *Five Little Peppers*, *Little Women* and later mysteries such as those in the Nancy Drew series.

Until adulthood I did not start building a book collection. My first bookcase was made by a high school student for a shop class project in 1965. This contains mass market mysteries by Marjorie Allingham, Elizabeth Peters, Rex Stout, and others. Now I have multiple bookcases/shelves in three rooms of my house.

My job as a librarian makes it easier to learn about authors through new acquisitions and perusal of literature, such as *Library Journal* and *Publishers Weekly*. For several years I was privileged to work part-time in an independent bookstore, where I spent most of my earnings on books. Through both jobs I have derived great pleasure from opportunities to meet authors.

My books are predominantly fiction of all genres, except horror. It is impossible to list my favorite authors, but

contemporary ones include Isabel Allende, David Baldacci, Nevada Barr, Sallie Bissell, Clive Cussler, Beverly Connor, Pat Conroy, Bryce Courtenay, Michael Crichton, Janet Evanovich, Jan Karon, Terry Kay, Ridley Pearson, John Nance, Elizabeth Peters, Deborah Smith, Wilbur Smith, and Barbara Wood. Other favorite authors of historical fiction include Sara Donati, Dorothy Dunnett (Lymond and Niccolo series), Diana Gabaldon, and Sharon Penman. I enjoy most historical fiction, including stories of frontier and pioneer life. Books purchased by contemporary authors have not replaced such older favorites as Catherine Gaskin and M. M. Kaye. I still have books that I enjoyed many, many years ago by Mary Stewart, Victoria Holt, and Phyllis Whitney.

In the fantasy genre, I have all Robert Jordan's books in the Wheel of Time series (supplemented by a treasured autographed map) and many by David Eddings. I have recently discovered Juliet Marillier. However, none top Tolkien's *Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*, which I have read five or six times. The recent movies were not disappointing to say the least. Since Tolkien was a student and teacher at colleges of Oxford University, I went with Callie McGinnis and other Georgia librarians to Oxford for a week in April of 2005. I loved being in the old libraries and pubs, especially the one frequented by the Inklings.

In the science fiction genre, I only enjoy stories that take place in "outer space." I do not own very many but do have most books by Georgia author Jack McDevitt.

Nonfiction categories are primarily biography, history (U.S. and Great Britain), true adventure, and especially travel accounts. My nonfiction reading interests were broadened thanks to the late Bob Richardson, Director of the library at Young Harris College, who arranged for Georgia's participation in Penguin's Appalachian project.

For several years Penguin sent overstock of trade paperbacks to prisons to have covers cut and pages stamped "not for resale." Shipments were delivered to states in Appalachia. Libraries in the designated areas could get the free books. Bob and his staff and volunteers unpacked and sorted books before inviting respective libraries to select books. For several years I spent a couple of days helping to unpack and sort books. Bob, his wife, Jan, and his staff were wonderful hosts. Susan Smith, Head of Acquisitions, also went with me a couple of years. After all boxes were unpacked and sorted, we returned with Associate Director Mark McManus to select books for Ingram Library. Duplicates were available for staff and students. Through this project I was introduced to new authors, such as Jan Karon, and interesting books such as those in the Nature Library series. Penguin discontinued the project about a year after Bob's death.

I have derived perhaps the greatest pleasure in enlarging my collection of books by and about some of my favorite illustrators, including Cecily Mary Barker, Jessie Wilcox Smith, Tasha Tudor, Beatrix Potter, as well as contemporary illustrators. I have all the books illustrated by Debrah Santini, an art professor at the University of West Georgia. I have an extensive collection of books illustrated by Michael Hague, and the most treasured item is his autograph and a bear sketch he drew for me as we talked when I ran into him a few years ago. The top shelf of this bookcase is devoted to Berta Hummel with a couple of figurines, a couple of large wax figures, framed print, and sample of Hummel eggs from a collection given to me by my daughters. I only have one book about her art. In addition to flower fairy works by Cecily Mary Barker, other books about those fantastical creatures include *Fairies*, *Fairy Folk in Fairy Land*, and *Lady Cottington's Pressed Fairy Book* (not your typical fairy book). The book *Victorian Fairy Painting* was obtained when I indulged this fantasy in December of 1998 by attending the related exhibit at the Frick Museum in New York City.

The highlight of my illustrated book collection is books by and about Beatrix Potter (BP). Naturally I have given my granddaughter BP items like a quilt, bookends, and stuffed animals. My guest room, i.e. my grandchildren's room, is decorated with fairy boxes, figurines, etc. but also a print of Benjamin Bunny given to me by Callie McGinnis. I also have a BP plate purchased in England in 1987. Some friends gave me a teapot, but little Maggie broke the pot. My books about BP include: *The Journal of Beatrix Potter from 1881 to 1897*, *The Art of Beatrix Potter*, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter* (Linder), *Beatrix Potter: Artist, Storyteller, and Countrywoman* (Taylor), *So I Shall Tell You a Story... Encounters with*

Beatrix Potter (Taylor), *The Tale of Beatrix Potter* (Lane), *Letters to Children*, *Beatrix Potter's Art* (Hobbs), and *At Home with Beatrix Potter* (Denyer).

My interest in Beatrix Potter led to a two-week trip to England in 2003 with librarians Caroline Blumenthal, Jan Ruskell, and Susan Smith. We spent a week in the Lake District staying at the Lindeth House, where Beatrix Potter's family had stayed and which she later purchased as a home for her mother. Sites visited included Hill Top Farm in Near Sawrey, Beatrix Potter Museum in Hawkshead, and World of Beatrix Potter in Windermere. We saw farms she bought and donated to the National Trust and scenery that remains much the same as in Potter's day. During the week in London, Jan and I viewed a small Beatrix Potter exhibit at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V & A). We were excited to view additional original art and works by Beatrix Potter at the Blythe House, an offsite archive of material from the V & A. There are many dedicated aficionados who are members of the Beatrix Potter Society and attend biennial conferences in England and Scotland. One such American is retired Carroll County librarian/teacher Ann Crowell, who recently loaned some materials she obtained as a member of the society.

I cannot say that I have read all the books in my house, although some I have read multiple times. I am out of book space, thus books in boxes, but am reluctant to "weed." If I set a goal to read all the books I have, I would not be able to buy any more! That's not going to happen. I have to save all the illustrated children's books for my grandchildren. I will not get rid of any book that I want my daughters, other relatives, or friends to read first. Occasionally I donate books to Ingram Library or the West Georgia Regional Library for their collection or book sale. My daughters, sisters, and I are beginning to consolidate a particular author's works; for example, I gave my younger sister all my books by Dorothy Sayers and Ellis Peters, except for an autographed book.

In the future, I hope to indulge myself in reading and traveling, referring to literary guides in planning an itinerary. I hope to travel to Scotland next year with some librarian friends. I will soon consult my literary guide to Great Britain and investigate further on the Internet. In addition to sites associated with famous Scottish writers, I hope to visit or at least see some of the places mentioned in books by Diana Gabaldon and Dorothy Dunnett, as well as sites where Beatrix Potter's family stayed for many years. ►►

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