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My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

A peek inside the personal library of a librarian

by Carol Waggoner-Angleton

I celebrated a personal milestone last February. Every single book in our house had a place on a shelf. There were no books in bags. There were no books in boxes. There were no “Leaning Tower of Pisa” piles of books in the bedrooms, the living room, the kitchen, the music room or the bathroom. I even had three empty shelves waiting for occupants. I could find the dictionary. I could find our Book of Common Prayer. I could find the telephone book. This was a rare and cherished moment of home organizational bliss.

My personal library is a family library that until last February belonged to a five-member active duty Air Force family. It has been boxed up and moved through seven states, one U.S. Pacific territory and Britain. It has accounted for at least a third and possibly one half of our household weight allowance of 10,000 pounds. We kept our household furniture to a minimum: no end tables, no coffee tables, no armchairs and no decorative pictures. The kids’ clothes and toys, which could have been saved as mementos, were ruthlessly sacrificed on the yard-sale altar to lower the weight allowance and keep the books. I have just shredded the last household inventory provided by Uncle Sam. Line after line reads “1 box — books.”

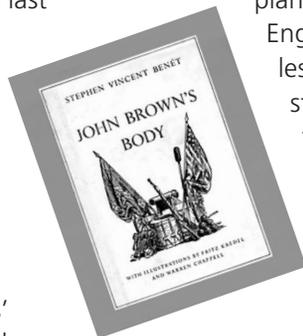
There are books in the family collection on math, chemistry, physics, computer languages, theology and religion. We have Dickens and Poe and Twain, Austen and Shakespeare and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. My husband is a sci-fi fantasy buff, and I enjoy any mystery with a cat as a character.

The bulk of our books are histories. There is a good representation of American, British, Russian and Middle Eastern history. There are single titles for China and Central America, mainly because I was embarrassed at not being able to help a neighbor kid with a school assignment due to a “collection gap.” Sometimes the family library became the research library for my kids’ middle school and high school friends when we lived in places with less than ideal library services.

The library reflects my career changes. When I planned to teach, I collected social studies and English textbooks to supplement my future lesson plans. I have a dictionary and several storybooks written in Signing Exact English from my two-year stint as a teacher’s aide for hearing impaired students.

Now that I’ve finally settled on a career in libraries, my professional reading has a dedicated bookcase. Ironically, now that I can no longer claim the professional collections weight allowance separately from the household goods allowance, I have books that would qualify.

Getting all the books up on the shelves brought back a lot of memories. How can I forget my grandmother who gave me my first “serious book,” *The History of the Horse Through the Ages*? My aunt is memorialized by a beautiful edition of Benet’s *John Brown’s Body*. Thanks to her, I found out that it was wonderful to give beautiful books as well as to get them. To say, “Here, you are important enough to read this book I love.” The children’s books on the shelves run internal movies of bedtimes and



story times that don't need reformatting or special preservation to watch. *Is Your Mama a Llama?* was middle daughter's favorite book for a while. We added a copy after she checked it out from the library for the 25th time. I could lose our copy of *Sheep in a Jeep*. All five of us know it by heart, but I'd have to replace it anyway. Books are the only old friends you can replace if necessary rather than regret and mourn the loss.

I had no idea I had so many vanity cookbooks. Thanks to these, my library reflects empirical evidence for important questions on social interaction. I can give you at least 35 recipes for a green bean casserole. Apparently, it's an unwritten rule that no cookbook put out by a PTA, spouses club or church can be published without a green bean casserole recipe.

My shelving project also pointed out that I have books I haven't read yet. To be honest, there are a few I have no

intention of reading. I only bought the second volume of Robert Caro's biography of Lyndon Johnson to complete the set. But I will, one day, read the biography on Margaret Thatcher that I snaffled from a bargain bin and the books on William the Marshall and Eleanor of Aquitaine from my son's British history class. He took the class, but I claim the books by right of MasterCard (by virtue of having paid the book bill).

After 24 years, my library has become a professional resource and a teaching tool, my memento box, my photograph album and my walk down memory lane.

My library is proof of the wisdom of saving the books and selling the washer and dryer. ▶▶

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