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My Own Private Library: A Peek Inside the Personal Library of a Librarian

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My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

A Peek Inside the Personal Library of a Librarian

by Stacy L. Brown

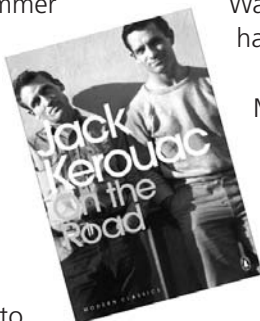
For many years, my mother, who taught high school English, made it her mission in life to ensure that my brother and I received a proper education. One way of achieving this goal was to take us to the neighborhood public library during our summer school breaks. I always looked forward to going there, as they conducted field trips, taught us how to make potholders out of old fabric scraps and volcanoes out of baking soda, showed movies, and had scheduled summer reading sessions.

Obviously the reading sessions made a big impression on my mother, because she began constructing summer reading lists for my brother and me. These lists consisted of approximately 10 titles of her choosing, and she required us to give her a report after finishing them. We dreaded this aspect of summer break, as it cut into precious time that could be better spent outdoors. Our fantasies about staging a revolt were frequent.

It wasn't until I entered high school that I came to truly appreciate her efforts. English was always my preferred area of study, and I was exposed to classical and contemporary literature, fiction, prose, and poetry. Since my mother was a teacher, she had scores of books for me to peruse, and I would immerse myself in the dark tales of Edgar Allan Poe; William Shakespeare's complex, yet thrilling plays; or the despondent poetry of Charles Baudelaire and Emily Dickinson. Fortunately, many of these gems have since been passed along to me, and I've happily integrated them into my ever-expanding library.

College saw a tremendous growth spurt in my collection. I majored in English and history, and some of the books from courses I liked quickly began to fill my bookcases. I saved most of the anthologies, poetry books, and novels

that I read for my studies. The works of Virginia Woolf, Mary Shelley, Henry David Thoreau, James Joyce, Oscar Wilde, and Charles Dickens lined my shelves, as well as the poetry of Homer and Milton, William Wordsworth, e.e.Cummings, Walt Whitman, William Blake, Pablo Neruda, and Rainer Rilke. I gave Jack Kerouac, one of my most beloved writers, an entire shelf devoted solely to his short stories, prose, poetry, biographies, letters, autobiographical novels, and photographs from his beatnik years. The fictions of William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, Kurt Vonnegut, early Stephen King, Alice Walker, Vladimir Nabokov, and Ralph Ellison also have a section all to themselves.



Many of my history books were salvaged and incorporated, too. Dreadfully verbose texts, which contained vivid depictions of historical heroes and villains, famous battles of defeat and victory, peace treaties and accords, and tales of corrupt officials and dictators being stripped of their power. Maps were of great interest as well, and two of my most cherished books are a couple of old world atlases: extremely large volumes that detail rivers, islands, seas and oceans, latitudes and longitudes, mountains, and many country and continent facts.

I continued to build my personal library by visiting every flea market, garage sale, Goodwill, secondhand bookstore, and Salvation Army I could find. Used books were usually cheap, priced between a dime and a few dollars, so I was able to return home with bags full of literary treasures.

These jaunts eventually morphed into running contests with my friends, in which all of us tried to find the most

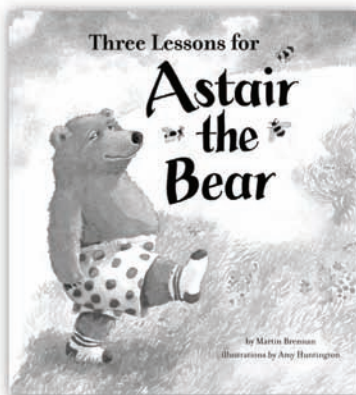
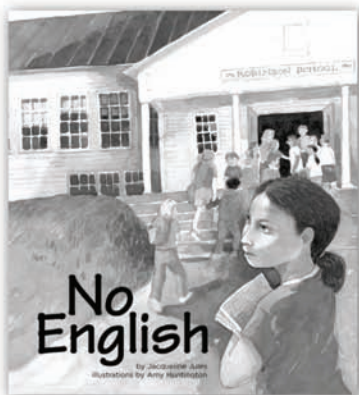
desirable and interesting books to discuss at parties, weddings, or over a nice meal. It was during this period that I managed to acquire a slightly worn copy of *Parker's Astrology*, great edition of Dante's *Inferno*, complete with seven illustration plates by William Blake; a first edition of Marianne Moore's *Selected Poems*; a signed copy of Derek Walcott's *The Odyssey*; and a sailboat plan book containing actual blueprints, entitled *The Rudder*.

Additionally, art and photography books mingle with their shelf mates. Taking photographs has been a passion of mine since my early teenage years, and I have gradually acquired biographies, personal writings, and collections of photographs from masters such as Ansel Adams, Margaret Bourke-White, Annie Leibovitz, Diane Arbus, and Dorthea Lange. Moreover, I've obtained numerous books about particular artists I admire: Edward Hopper,

Georgia O'Keeffe, Gustav Klimt, Alphonse Mucha, Frida Kahlo, Erté, and Wen Cheng-ming, to name a few. These books discuss their eccentric personal lives and reveal the inspirations behind their masterpieces.

Needless to say, my private library is a colorful mix that remains in a state of continual growth. In recent years, as I pursued a library science degree, most of my time was consumed with library-related reading materials. Now that I've graduated, I have begun to reacquaint myself with the texts that line my bookcases, and as I continue to build a collection filled with special works that evoke memories from my past, I eagerly await the arrival of the next great book that will find its way to my shelves. ►►

Stacy L. Brown is assistant librarian for Public Services at Georgia Highlands College (formerly Floyd College) in Rome, Ga.



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