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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 Ginger Williams

It's a good thing I am not a collection development librarian; there is absolutely no focus to my personal collection. My literary preferences are a microcosm of my diverse interests, meandering and diverging at every bend. I love books of all shapes, sizes and styles, and I'm a lifelong generalist. I never had a favorite subject as a child (unless talking during class is a subject), nor did I through college and beyond. The idea of selling back one's textbooks was always repulsive to me, but as a student of letters, I was fortunate enough to study some of the truly great thinkers. Basically, I'm just that kind of nerd who is curious about anything and everything.

Anyone perusing my bookshelves would notice that I like novels of all varieties. From Hemingway and Fitzgerald all the way to J. K. Rowling, I have a bit of everything. I probably shouldn't admit it, but for those times when I am exhausted by work life and just want something light to read, I do enjoy young adult novels. Yes, I have read the entire *Twilight* saga. I do not have to admit to owning them at least — I checked them out from a library! The Harry Potter books, however, I hold in high esteem. I own all seven: the first six in highly acidic paperback versions and the last in hardcover. I just couldn't wait for that one to be released in paperback, and I'm sure my friends would have spoiled the ending before then, too.

Aside from Harry Potter and *Twilight*, I am not usually one to read an entire series. I like to read the first book or two and then move on to something completely different. That said, my library includes portions of Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle*, Alexander McCall Smith's *Isabel Dalhousie Mysteries*, and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials Trilogy*, to name a few.

Like I said, I do read novels of a weightier variety as well. One of the best I've read in a while, *The Story of Edgar*

*Sawtelle* by David Wroblewski, is based on Hamlet. It was a gift from my mother-in-law, an English professor at North Georgia College and State University. We have a tradition of giving each other a present *and* a book for the holidays, and I have acquired more than a few of my best treasures in this manner.

Another book I cherish, and one that just keeps coming up in conversation with friends lately, is *The Last American Man* by Elizabeth Gilbert. I only dabble in nonfiction when the subject matter really makes an impression on me, and in this case it certainly does. It's the story of Eustice Conway, an outdoorsman with skills you wouldn't believe. I came across this book by chance; my mother left her copy for me among a pile of goodies the last time I visited her. I was only planning on borrowing it, but it's passed hands so many times by now that I can't keep track of it. If you're reading this and you have a copy with a return address label for Patricia in Oklahoma inside the front cover, I want it back!

I am proud of my quartet of autographed books. Of course, they're as diverse as can be. The first one I acquired was *Oyster* by John Biguenet. It was a gift from someone to whom I had given a copy of *The Torturer's Apprentice*, also by Biguenet. Next came *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* by Philip Bobbitt. This one is quite a piece of work at over 900 pages. I took a seminar about American imperialism with Bobbitt when I was an undergraduate at the University of Oklahoma, and I wanted the book as a memento. Admittedly, it's one of those relics on my shelf that might not get read unless a natural disaster incapacitates our electric grid. As I was finishing up my degree there, *The University of Oklahoma: A History, 1890-1917* was released. Because the author is a friend of ours, my husband and I played violin duets for the release party.

We made sure to snatch up an autographed copy. I am also delighted to have a signed copy of *Breakfast with Socrates: The Philosophy of Everyday Life*. I met the author, Robert Rowland Smith, at a breakfast lecture he gave at The School of Life in the Bloomsbury neighborhood in London. I happened across The School of Life because it was near the gym I went to while living in London last fall. Inside I found the most amazing refuge from everyday life: part bookstore that only stocks books their professors have read and recommended, part academy for practical philosophy. If I had only discovered them sooner, I would have been a regular devotee of its philosophy breakfasts.

Of course, many would consider it indulgent to bring hardback books home from overseas. When I finished an internship in London last year, I was not prepared to part ways with my textbooks, let alone such prized possessions as *Breakfast with Socrates*. I had to leave several of my favorite pieces of clothing behind, even a few pairs of shoes, but I was determined to bring my copy of *Delia's Complete Illustrated Cookery Course* back to the States with me.

At nearly 5 pounds and almost 600 pages, it was a struggle to make room for this one. Still, it had to come with me. This book is full of some of the most delicious British recipes you could imagine, and I couldn't wait to get home and try to replicate Delia's bangers and mash for myself. I love a good cookbook, and another of my favorites is the *Lee Bros. Southern Cookbook*.

Although I was only recently transplanted to the South, I developed an affinity for Southern cooking right away. All it took was a chance visit to the Dillard House in northern Georgia to cement my passion for mass quantities of meat and vegetables cooked in even more meat. The Lee brothers' cookbook makes it easy to replicate that kind of cuisine at home.

One of the more peculiar items in my collection is the complete works of Nietzsche. This one is signed, too, but by the giver: an acquaintance who showed up on my doorstep bearing this one-of-a-kind gift. I'm a fan of philosophy, but I'm still not sure what inspired this spontaneous act. My shelves are jammed full of other great philosophers, too: Kant, Rousseau, Bacon, Mill, Hobbes and Aristotle, to name a few.

Out of practicality, I've started collecting books on my Kindle, too. I will always love books as physical objects — after all, my first jobs in libraries were in special collections. That said, there's nothing quite like the feeling I get from being able to instantly download whichever novel I've been lusting after and cozy up to it immediately. I just finished reading *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro on the Kindle, and I'll soon be moving on to Jose Saramago's *Blindness*. Some of the other gems in my Kindle include: *A Walk in the Woods*, *Tales of the Jazz Age*, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, *Dracula* and a couple of Lemony Snicket's *Unfortunate Events* books.

My favorite books of all are full of random facts and general knowledge. *Schott's Original Miscellany* and *The Visual Miscellaneum: A Colorful Guide to the World's Most Consequential Trivia* represent two ends of the spectrum in this genre. An elegant little volume with its understated letterpress cover, *Schott's* contains precious little textual morsels of information. *The Visual Miscellaneum*, on the other hand, is fun and colorful and

loud. Its pages are overwhelmed with graphs, patterns and all kinds of

visual representations of trivial information. As a librarian I'd be obliged to check any of the "facts"

presented in these books; *The Visual Miscellaneum*, for instance, makes no bones about citing Wikipedia as its source for most of the information contained within.

If I suddenly came into a large sum of money, I would love to begin collecting fore-edge paintings. If you haven't seen one, they are beautiful, intricate paintings on the fore-edge of a book that you can only see when you bend the text block a certain way to fan the edges. The first time I saw one I thought it was magic, and actually, that assessment still seems pretty accurate to me. I may not work in special collections anymore, but in the end I still love a beautiful old book.

My internship supervisor in London, Dr. David Parkes, once remarked that I'm "something of a bibliophile" before reassuring me that he meant it as a compliment. I think he must have been onto something. ►►

*Ginger Williams is a reference/outreach services librarian at Valdosta State University's Odum Library.*

