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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

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**By Carla Beasley**

In my adult life, I have moved eight times. Each time I've moved, my private library has shrunk. The thought of packing and lifting the same books one more time has made it easier to bid goodbye to titles that seemed important only one move ago. I am down to two bookshelves from an all-time high of eight. It's not that I can't add more shelving; rather, it's that I'm at a place in my life where less is more. So, I keep the most special and donate the rest to the Friends.

Let me introduce you to some of the survivors.

Many years ago, I fell in love with three premier writers of early 20<sup>th</sup> century mystery – Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, and Dorothy Sayers. I read everything by all of them (as close to series order as I could find, of course). Out of those, I have four of the Lord Peter Wimsey books by Dorothy Sayers, the ones that feature Lord Peter and his intended, Harriet Vane. The first three volumes follow Lord Peter and Harriet through a rocky courtship – *Strong Poison*, *Have His Carcass*, and *Gaudy Night*. The fourth book, *Busman's Honeymoon*, showcases their wedding, whereby – wouldn't you know – they find a dead body in the basement of their newlyweds' cottage!

For my favorite Agatha Christie titles, I've chosen DVD format. I own all of the Hercule Poirot "classic" series, which were shown on public television in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the Miss Marple series starring Joan Hickson. These made-for-TV movies adhere closely to the books, and I find that I like the movies just as well or better than the print.

Ngaio Marsh's books, featuring Inspector-Superintendent Roderick Alleyn, were great reads, and I borrowed most of them from libraries. Setting was one of Ms. Marsh's strong points, and I began early in my reading to copy out sentences and paragraphs that I particularly liked before returning the books. Here is an example from *Death and the Dancing Footman*, in which Alleyn finds himself snowed in with other guests at a house party, during which one of them is murdered: "...all three [guests] walked over to the long windows to look at darkening hills and vale. Naked trees half lost their form in that fading light and rose from the earth as if they were its breath, already frozen."

Thus started my practice of recording favorite passages from many good reads into blank books, which are now no longer blank, and re-reading the jottings in these "quotes scrapbooks" takes me back to the enjoyment of the books themselves.

Besides mystery, I read adventure and suspense fiction. My keepers are the three Robert Ludlum Bourne books: *The Bourne Identity*, *The Bourne Supremacy*, and *The Bourne Ultimatum*. The contemporary Matt Damon movies bear little resemblance to these original masterpieces. I prefer the Warner Brothers 1993 movie of *The Bourne Identity* starring Richard Chamberlain and Jaclyn Smith, which I own on VHS.

Moving down the bookshelf, I have several nonfiction book sub-collections. One of these collections is about writing, written by writers. Titles include *Walking on Water* (Madeleine L'Engle), *On Writing for Children and other People* (Julius Lester), and *The Artist's Way* (Julia Cameron).

I also subscribe to *Writer's Digest* magazine. If an article has reference value, I tear it out and file it in a three-ring binder with tabbed pocket-folders. This binder is a new addition to my library. Like the quotes books, it provides a way to save a page or two from a magazine and let the rest of the magazine go to the recycle bin. The articles from *Writer's Digest* are filed under the "Writing" tab, and articles from *Reader's Digest*, *Real Simple*, and other personal subscriptions are filed under "Health," "Things to Order," "Exercise," and "Cleaning Tips."

Although I check out materials on whatever arts and crafts I'm dabbling in at the moment, I have bought the books that inspire imagination and creativity in general. Among these are *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* (Betty Edwards) and *Take the Road to Creativity and Get off Your Dead End* (David Campbell). As a nonprint extension of my bookshelves, I have an app on my iPhone called the *Idea Stimulator* that gives the user new ways of approaching a project with the spin of the idea wheel. It's also a good conversation starter.

Besides "grown up" books, I have a collection of beautifully illustrated wordless or almost wordless picture books. *Alphabet City* by Stephen Johnson and *The Butterfly Alphabet* by Kjell B. Sandved are photo collections of – well -- alphabet letters. Johnson's book features letters hidden in everyday urban objects. For example, the letter "E" is a traffic signal seen from the side. *The Butterfly Alphabet* displays familiar letters within beautifully colored wings. Illustrations from Sandved's book appeared as a graphic feature article in the June 2010 edition of *Kids Discover* magazine. I picked this copy up for 50 cents at our Friends sale and parked it next to the book.

*A Moon or a Button* by Ruth Krauss is a picture collection of objects that children can interpret imaginatively. Is a round white circle a moon or a button? A clothesline full of hanging "Xs" is "kisses drying." *A Hole is to Dig*, also by Ruth Krauss with illustrations by Maurice Sendak, tells children what things are for. "A party is to make little children happy," and "The world is so you have something to stand on."

*Tuesday* by David Wiesner won the 1991 Caldecott award. I laugh every time I look at the quizzical frogs flying on their lily pads. *A Hat for Minerva Louise* by Janet Morgan Stoeke follows Minerva Louise, the hen, in her quest for a real hat. And we can't overlook *Good Dog, Carl*, and *Follow Carl* by Alexander Day. No words are needed to follow the stories as the lovable Rottweiler leads his young mistress through adventures that other children can barely dream of.

All of these titles, and some others, are faithful literary friends. Hopefully, I will not face packing boxes again for many years. If and when I do, will these friends survive? That is a question to be answered in the future.

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