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Kelly Lenz

South Georgia Regional Library, klenz@sgrl.org

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My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

By Kelly Lenz

As far back as I can remember, I've collected books of all types. Some of my first books were collections of Mother Goose nursery rhymes. My favorite edition of these books is the one illustrated by Kate Greenway. I loved the images of children frolicking in their late eighteenth century and Regency fashions. Liberty of London, the London department store, took inspiration from Kate Greenway's illustrations when designing their famous fabric patterns. For good or bad, Mother Goose may be to blame for my life long interest in clothes and shoes. My other early obsession, which all examples of are now destroyed, was pop-up books; I loved browsing through those works of art with their over-the-top illustrations.

Sometime between looking for Goldbug in Richard Scary books and the novels one is made to read in elementary school, I fell in love. To put it simply, I'm a bibliophile. Like so many others I began to cherish the books I owned. It started with the ten magical volumes of my family's edition of *The Junior Classics*. The colorful bindings soon found their way into my room and onto a bookshelf. Luckily, no one objected. I still have them all. Mythology, poetry, fiction, and history are all well represented. I can, with irony, thank *The Junior Classics* for first acquainting me with adult literature. Of course, collected stories for children are often abridged. After realizing there was more to the stories I loved, I willingly sought their original form.

My book collection was mediated by the tastes of teachers and school reading lists. I still own several slim paperbacks, like *The Red Pony*, *Death be not Proud*, and *The Lord of the Flies*. Those early literary lessons gave painful illustrations of loss, death, and disillusionment that we all unfortunately experience. I'm still

not sure why we had to read those particular novels. We could have just as easily read something more uplifting. However, reading about new things allows our identities to expand. We are not always supposed to be comfortable or even comforted by what we read. With this lesson learned, I never flinch when recommending new books to a patron at the library. Most topics have a willing place for anyone needing good books to snuggle up with.

High school was a time to dream of going away to college; and, college was the period when books really began to accumulate on my bookshelves. Notable favorites include *The Magus* by John Fowles. I can still remember sitting in the university library with a Latin dictionary trying to figure out the last sentence. I discovered Anne Rice's *The Witching Hour* during those college years. It will make you forget about vampires and return for more. *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole also stares at me from the shelf. Everyone who reads it is heartbroken and somehow implicated in Toole's tragic story. What made these books important to me is that I discovered them on my own. No professor told me to read those particular books. As with everyone at school, professors paraded authors to be appreciated. Some stuck and others did not. Certainly, professional guidance enhanced my literary tastes. Still, discovery of new literature remains thrilling and always deserves a spot on my bookshelf.

Continuing my education included finding space for an ever-expanding book collection. Books on library architecture joined Melville Dewey's biography. My shelves were filling up, and I realized a discerning touch was needed. I have rarely given away, and never sold, a book; not even a dog-eared paperback one. Once they are

mine, they become familiar friends. I would not dream of selling them. I am not bragging; this is more of a confession. Every collector is quickly confronted with the constraints space imposes on their collection. Now, only books that seem deserving find refuge in my home.

I have been lucky enough to get autographed books by A.S. Byatt, Gloria Steinem, and Joyce Carol Oates. They are good representatives of my women's author autograph collection. In a small way, it's exciting to know the author once held the book you are reading. Besides, acquiring signed books you want slows general accumulation.

The saving grace for all habitual readers is the e-reader. I can place newspapers, whole collections of books, magazines, and Angry Birds on one device smaller than Alan Furst's thrilling recent offering. My e-reader is the ultimate space saver. The only problem is an e-reader is not a real book. It is simply a device that holds lots of pictures and texts.

In our digital age, some things are just never going to be reproduced in their original glory. My facsimile of the *Book of Kells* is beautiful, but nobody would mistake it for the real thing. I do fully appreciate digital facsimiles for research and enjoyment. Among other things, it allows everyone to view images of an author's handwriting, early typography, and medieval illuminations. Many books are impossible to envision as an e-book because they are works of art apart from the information they contain. It is difficult to imagine that the thrill of owning an embossed leather bound volume with fine,

thick paper and hand-colored illustrations is ever going to go away.

Recently, facsimiles of several English nature diaries have become part of my horde. One of my favorites is *A Victorian Flower Album* by Henry Terry. The book was originally made by a father for his children to learn about the wildflowers growing near their home in Oxfordshire. Also, I found first American editions of *The Nature Notes of an Edwardian Lady* and *The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady*, both by Edith Holden. She was a noteworthy illustrator who only achieved fame when facsimiles of her diaries were published long after her death. Collecting facsimiles of interesting and important books is another way to limit a collection.

Books that have become especially dear to me are my professional books concerning library science and information studies. I have enjoyed expanding my library to include books on the history of reading and print culture. My recent additions include volume 2 of *A History of the Book in America*. I now have the whole set. Also, Robert Darnton's *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future* would be considered a must read for every librarian. Finally, the newest addition that I am currently reading is *The Information* by James Gleick. So far Gleick is great. My collection continues to slowly expand. I don't know if Samuel Pepys would like my personal library, but I do!

*Kelly Lenz is Director at
South Georgia Regional Library.*