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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

By Mandy Swygart-Hobaugh

Back in my sociology grad school days, I wrote my master's thesis on female strippers. Yep, strippers. I used Erving Goffman's framework of "the presentation of self" to analyze how the exotic dancers created and maintained "fronts" of the ideal sexual female. You're probably thinking, "What's this have to do with this lady's own private library?"

Writing about and taking photos of my books made me ponder—how do I use my books as props for presenting a "front" of my ideal self to others as well as to myself? Hmm... Anyway, let me tell you about my books and, vicariously, about me.

My husband and I, between the two of us, have about 500 books—probably a modest collection compared to most librarian folk, but we've moved around a lot in our fourteen years together, so some books have fallen victim to our gypsy ways. What our book collection reveals most about us is probably our erratic tendencies. But each book, when woven together, tells the narrative of our lives.

My hubby built some fabulous bookcases to showcase our books, along with the canopic-jarred ashes of our dearly-departed bunny Daisy and kitty Pooter Tooter (by the way, the latter's portrait on the mantel was painted by my artist spouse, Pat Hobaugh—shameless promotion, I know) and our eclectic and sometimes disturbing tchotchkes (re: the pic on next page, there's a story behind the diseased colon

model; the jar of baby-doll parts just appeals to our twisted nature). The taxidermy chicken was not a pet—we're not that weird.

My childhood books include Lobel's *Frog and Toads and Mouse Tales*, Wells' Morris's *Disappearing Bag* (love the gender bending—girls playing with chemistry sets; boys made up with lipstick—kindling for my feminist future?), Brown's *The Runaway Bunny*, Williams' *The Velveteen Rabbit*, and Howe's *Bunnica*. Yeah, I had a thing for bunnies.

My college lit class text, Abcarian and Klotz's *Literature: The Human Experience*, is one of the few undergrad books I kept—and it's still my go-to book for a quick fix of poetry, drama, and short stories. My freshman lit prof also clued me into Milan Kundera's works, and I own every last one of them—my copy of *The*

Unbearable Lightness of Being, dog-eared and underlined, bears witness to my penchant for reading favorite books over and over. Two other go-to books are Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Short, poignant, and beautifully written—I can't count how many times I've read them, but I know I will never tire of re-reading them. Particularly because they are short...I am kind of a lazy reader.

I have several erotica books, riddled with underlining and margin notes – Anaïs Nin's *Little Birds* and *Delta of Venus* are personal



favorites. Now you're thinking, "What's up with this lady and her strippers and now erotica?!"

Well, in grad school I wrote a paper analyzing women-authored erotic texts as sites for women reclaiming their sexuality. So, it was an academic enterprise. Yes...that's right...purely academic.

Some other books that reveal my prurient—um, I mean academic—interests include Bellocq's *Storyville Portraits*, Rose's *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red Light District*, and Abbott's *Sin in the Second City: Madams, Ministers, Playboys, and the Battle for America's Soul*. To be fair, my doctoral dissertation was about Progressive-Era anti-prostitution crusades, so I think that vindicates me somewhat. And I must mention the first Christmas gift from my then-fiancé-now-husband, *Yalom's History of the Breast*. If I hadn't already known he was a keeper, this would have sealed the deal.

I'm pretty sure I have every published work by and about Dorothy Parker—her poetry, short stories, play reviews, and commentaries, and at least a couple biographies. Confession—at one time, I almost had myself convinced I was her reincarnation. I just told my husband this recently—he now thinks I'm even crazier than he had ever imagined.

I also have creative writing aspirations, which my numerous *Best American Short Stories* and *O. Henry Prize Stories* collections reflect. And,

you know, Dorothy Parker was a great short story writer, and she had brown eyes and brown bobbed hair like me, and, like her, I had a string of terrible relationships before meeting my husband, and we did stay in the Algonquin Hotel during our NYC trip for our eighth wedding anniversary...

We also have a slew of Agatha Christies and Stevens' *The Book of Poisons: A Guide for Writers*—reference for the murder-mystery book we've been developing over coffee at Kavarna but have yet to write a word. I once wrote a short story about a public librarian that snaps her cap and murders a bunch of patrons because it was "long overdue"...sorry, didn't mean to frighten you. It's fiction, I swear.

We have several non-English copies of the first Harry Potter book—a not-so-successful attempt on my husband's part to learn different languages— including *Harry Potter en de Steen der Wijzen* bought in Amsterdam on our fifth wedding anniversary. My husband also has an entire bookcase full of art books—inspiration for his work, but I get the benefit of having gorgeous Dutch masters' still lifes, ethereal symbolist dreamscapes, and beautiful yet gut-wrenching Frida Kahlo works at my fingertips whenever the mood hits me.

And, when we don't feel like reading or looking at art, I just grab my accordion and he his ukulele, and we have our own little hootenanny—any requests?

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