

10-1-2014

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

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### Recommended Citation

Gerson, Tammy F. (2014) "My Own Private Library: A Peek Inside the Personal Library of a Librarian," *Georgia Library Quarterly*: Vol. 51 : Iss. 4 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol51/iss4/8>

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# *My Own* PRIVATE LIBRARY

By Tammy Gerson

As I roam my house, looking for inspiration to write this article, I am struck by the overwhelming number of books that I have accumulated throughout my adult life. How did this happen? Certainly, it was a gradual accumulation. Book titles that I no longer recognize have taken up residence on various shelves throughout my house. I am not a book junkie, am I? I don't buy books for adornment or as conversation starters, for when guests arrive. I always have a particular reason to purchase or borrow them, with the intention of reading when I have time. Does this seem familiar to you? I haven't sought out professional help, and I don't belong to a support group. I work in a library, and that is my support system.

I need to address influences in my early childhood that may help resolve my attraction to books. They weren't what you would call typical. From a young age, I discovered many books around my home. They were not children's books, unless they had something to do with religion, mine being Judaism. With my father being a rabbi, I spent many hours in various synagogue libraries flipping through books that looked interesting, especially the big picture books with panoramas of Jerusalem. My father's home collection contained many theological and historical books. I clearly recall that at a young age, I sat in my mother's classroom as she taught Hebrew to the older children. So, my personal collection



began with a language book with pictures and stories about a family with a monkey. Koopee was the monkey (kof in Hebrew). I enjoyed this book very much.

Moving up the age ladder, I satisfied my desire to read with books from elementary school. Reading was fun, and it took me to new places and adventure every day. "Run, Spot, run!" But I still mostly enjoyed picture books, preferring to use my imagination more than the words on

the page. That might account for my interest in graphic novels today. In my high school years, I began to have a definite preference for other books, some of which still adorn my shelves. My brother's fascination with sci-fi soon turned me to fantasy and some of the books on his shelves. He is seven years older than me. I discovered ancient Sumer and archaeology (and a few adult-themed books that I won't mention).

My reading blossomed in college, where my interests ranged from anything French (my first major) or Judaic Studies (my second major) to cooking, spirituality, and novels of the time ('70s). My best reading experience in college was the night I spent reading *The Exorcist*. I stayed up all night. Every creak in the floor and sound I heard scared me, but it was something I'll never forget.

Becoming a parent offered me the opportunity to read many of the classic children's books that

I had missed as a child. I loved reading to my daughter, and she has caught the book bug herself. She and I loved reading the Robert Louis Stevenson *Child's Garden of Verse*—"In winter I get up at night, and dress by yellow candlelight. In summer quite the other way, I have to go to bed by day."

So, having aired my dirty laundry, I will describe in more detail my interests and the books that are found on my shelves. I have many interests, and my bookshelves reflect them. As I stated earlier, I was a French major in college, and I have a nice assortment of books in French. I can still read them and understand perfectly! But try to have a conversation with me in French, and I'm dead in the water.

I try to be a spiritual person, having grown up in a religious home, so part of my collection deals with spiritual themes. I have a variety of prayer books and Bibles, as well as books about praying and meditation. I have a book with prayers of all nations and religions. It is a very useful book when I'm dealing with life issues and need to seek the advice of others. Spirituality, no matter what religion, can help bring balance back to the soul.

There are miscellaneous books on my shelves that I think might belong to my children: sports books and books that might interest the millennials. There are books about Broadway musicals, Spanish and German language books, and an assortment of novels that I might read in the future.

I belong to a book group at my synagogue, and I'm frequently reading new novels to help the

group decide what to read next. I'm currently reading *Terra Incognita* by Libi Astaire. This novel, predictable so far, is about a Spanish family that has no idea its ancestors were Hidden Jews during the Spanish Inquisition (c. 1492). I'm hoping for a surprise ending. Part of my library job also requires me to facilitate a book group each month. I learned a wonderful

lesson in my adult programming class at the University of South Carolina. You must be open to all genres. Learning this has helped me through some of the selections of the group. Facilitating this book group is one of my favorite tasks at work!

I love collecting cookbooks, and my pantry shelves prove it. There are some cookbooks I prefer to others. My taste is vegetarian, and I'm trying to cook more gluten-free. My husband, on the other hand, loves chicken and beef. Cookbooks give me

some motivation when I'm tired and can't think of anything interesting to prepare. Gardening is another interest of mine. Years ago, before moving to Athens, I loved to grow vegetable gardens. Now, with summer heat, I mostly grow flowers and bushes that need little care. I won't divest of those books just yet. I plan to put more time into gardening in the coming years.

And now with the advent of e-books, my thirst for buying books has not abated. I own a Kindle Fire and have downloaded several books. Through my library and GADD (Georgia Download Destination), I'm able to download and read books to my heart's content. Don't worry, though, Amazon and the rest. I haven't abandoned you. Now, in my new position as grandmother, I have begun to purchase books for my grandkids, Ellie and Liev. Ellie is a



voracious book collector at three years old. Between me and her parents, she has a few small bookshelves, and I am hopeful that we are passing the love of reading to a new family member.

What sage advice can I leave with you? Love books, whether they're print or digital. Embrace the book junkie within.

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