

4-1-2016

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

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Recommended Citation

Freeman, John Mack (2016) "My Own Private Library: A Peek Inside the Personal Library of a Librarian," *Georgia Library Quarterly*: Vol. 53 : Iss. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol53/iss2/6>

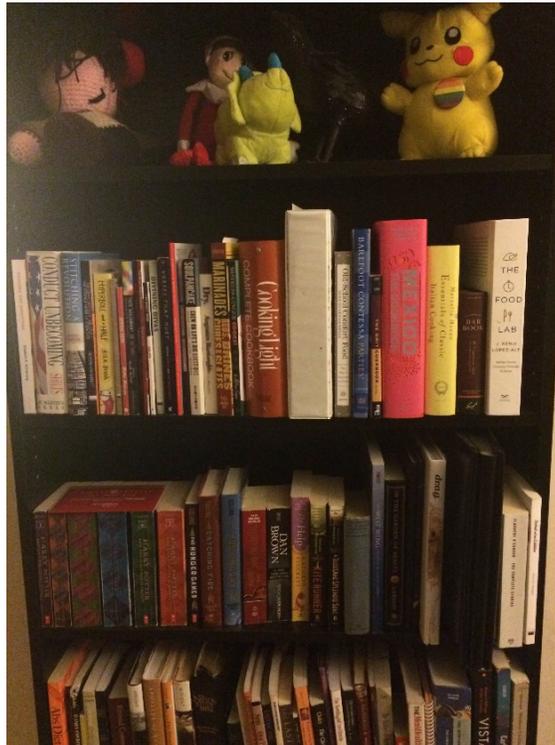
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My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

By John Mack Freeman

When I was approached about contributing to this column, I was a little nervous. This is a column all about librarians sharing their personal libraries and how they collected them. And as I went through the archives of this article, it seemed like many people have book collecting problems that have caused books to encroach on more and more parts of their homes. I, on the other hand, have trouble holding on to any books at all.

My entire home library is held on a single Billy bookcase from Ikea that stands in my living room. And sadly, only two of those shelves hold my books. They contain a large amount of the GLBT-related poetry and nonfiction that I've reviewed for the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table of the ALA. I've also got a growing collection of cookbooks with a focus on Mexican and Italian cooking. The bookcase is rounded out with some fiction and essay collections, and the bottom two shelves hold all the books my fiancé had to buy for his degree in Christianity. And although I constantly tell him that he can get rid of these books because we could find a replacement copy of them if the need ever arose, he strenuously resists these efforts.



Most of what I keep, though, are books I haven't read. There are people that rhapsodize about going back to books like old friends and re-reading them to rediscover a particular moment in time. I hardly ever do this. My to-read list is long enough without spending valuable reading hours trodding over ground that has already been well trod. I refer back to nonfiction, cookbooks, and poetry collections fairly regularly, so they get to stay. Everything else is ripe for a cull.

I cull things out fairly regularly, and the reason I have trouble building up a personal library is related to the life that I've lived. When I was an undergrad, I got my first full-sized bookshelf and promptly filled it up and still had two large plastic bins under my bed that had

scripts and textbooks in them. I collected books and never got rid of anything because that's what I thought people who were getting English and theatre degrees did: you collected books. Otherwise, how could you mark your progress? And truth-be-told, my contemporary drama collection had gotten pretty strong (at least for a student), and I ran a mini-lending library of scripts out of my bedroom for others in the theatre department who were looking for things that were a little different.

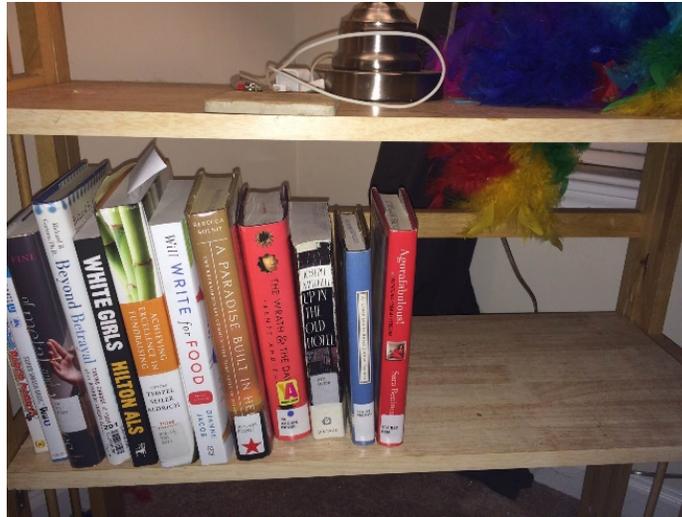
However, immediately after graduating, I joined AmeriCorps and flew across the country to move into an apartment in the Koreatown neighborhood of Los Angeles. My first time in any city, I was travelling broke and light. However, even then, I couldn't go without books. Nestled in the boxes of clothes that I shipped, I hid a few volumes that I knew I wouldn't be able to survive without:

Astonishing World by Angel Gonzalez,
Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil by John Berendt,
my third copy of *Dry* by Augusten Burroughs, and a handful of other books. However, though these books were tethers to my past and the life I used to know, when I fled Los Angeles sixteen months later with only two suitcases, I left them all behind. And over the years since then, I've gotten new copies of them all or know where I can get them when the need arises.

To me, books are objects that are meant for use. They need to be read, to be perused, to be...useful. And once I've read them, it's time for me to pass them on. I give them to people, or I donate them to library Friends groups. In fact, the reason my library is at this smallest of points at the moment is because I just got done culling through most of my apartment using the method described by Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. Basically, she says that if an item isn't actively bringing joy into a space, it should be discarded. And I had acquired a number of books that I didn't mind having, but they weren't providing me joy (however, my fiancé somewhat dubiously says

that all his books bring him active joy, so they are still there, just as they were before the Marie Kondo purge). So those heavy boxfuls found their way to libraries and book sales in need.

My tiny collection is augmented with a shelf in my reading corner that holds all the new books I've bought and all the library books I've



brought home that are meant to be read next. And because they're out and ready to go, I like to think that they are part of my library, albeit the constantly changing face of it. And then there is the rapidly expanding Audible audiobook collection my fiancé and I share that heavily favors memoirs and essays

(me), far-too-sad British books set in World War I (him), and science fiction series and humorous memoirs (both of us). Right now, there are ninety-eight books in that library, which definitely dwarfs my physical book collection.

I live a bookish life. I constantly have several somethings to read, and I am passionate about the power and usefulness of books in people's lives. They saved me as child and continue to save me as I become more and more of an adult. But I just don't have the need to own them. My own private library is in my mind, and its physical manifestation is just a small shard of ice sticking above the ocean's great depth.

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