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

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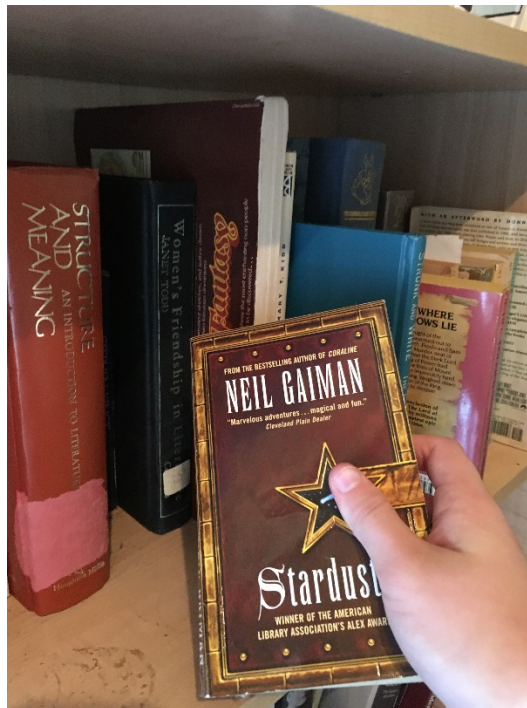
My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

By Amy McGee

“If you have enough book space, I don’t want to talk to you.”—Terry Pratchett

I’m a book hoarder. In the back of my mind, there’s a secret fear that my books-to-be-read pile will topple over one day and bury me alive. They’ll find me squished flat somewhere under *The Lord of the Rings* (I have to re-read it every few years) and Patricia Cornwell’s latest, or maybe—irony of ironies—I’ll meet my demise somewhere beneath the ten or eleven books on organizing that I requested from Paperbackswap.com in hopes of finally getting this place in order. I think there might be cobwebs fastening those to their shelf.

Being a book hoarder is probably not a shameful trait for a librarian, but I do have a shameful confession for a cataloger. Librarians, particularly those in technical services, are supposed to be type-A, highly organized types, right? Me—not so much. I was halfway through my MLIS program when my long-suffering spouse, tired of tripping over tomes, challenged me to prove myself as a future librarian and organize our book collection! I remembered reading once that former First Lady Laura Bush had the books on her bedside table in the White House organized in Dewey Decimal order. I was taking my first cataloging class at the time and thought it might be educational for me to put my thousands of books in order according to



Library of Congress (LC) classification. It took me most of a semester, but I did it! I was so proud. The shelves looked great, my husband was happy, and the project actually did help tremendously with my mastery of LC. Of course, as any shelf-reader knows, library users rarely put books back where they belong, and, in my home library, I’m no different. The books have

shifted and migrated over the past four years, and some are even (gasp) double-shelved! Maybe I’ll put them all right again one day, if I can stop reading them long enough. (My mom remembers how she’d send me to clean my room when I was a child, but in the middle of it I would always find a book, start reading, and get distracted. I haven’t changed much).

So which LC classes were most represented in my library? Well, the P’s were the largest section—although next time, I think

I’m going to shelve all the fiction authors alphabetically instead of by geographical region. I was an English major, and I buy and read fiction more than anything else. I also have an extensive “hoard” of writer’s guides. I always wanted to be a novelist, and I can’t pass up a promising book on the craft. Sample titles include *The Complete Writer’s Guide to Heroes and Heroines* by Tami Cowden, Caro LaFever, and Sue Vidars; *Plots Unlimited* by Thomas B. Sawyer and Arthur David Weingarten; and *On Writing* by Stephen King. Now that I’ve just

begun the Etowah Valley MFA program in creative writing at Reinhardt University, that section may expand even further. After that, maybe the most populous classes have to do with history (C through F)—my husband's favorite nonfiction category. The sports and games section (GV) reveals some of our quirkier interests: a lot of baseball books, a couple of pro wrestlers' autobiographies, *Football for Dummies* by Howie Long and John Czarnecki, and the Dungeons and Dragons manuals that take up more than one shelf all by themselves.

My books on arts (N) and crafts (TT) reflect my optimistic hope that I'll learn to knit someday—or sew—or quilt—or paint—or make jewelry. There's an equal amount of hopeful optimism on display in the RM section with all my diet books. Then there are the M's, where my music major hubby's books on theory share space with my treasured David Bowie biographies. It's clear there wasn't a defined collection development policy governing this library, but I am pleased to note that almost every classification is represented by at least a couple of volumes.

Where did these books all come from? Some were bought new. I can pick up one, for example, and remember the little independent bookstore in Athens where I first saw it. A number of them arrived in those big cheerful boxes with the A to Z arrow on the side. At least half of my books have seen other readers' libraries before mine. They came from Paperbackswap.com or from used bookstores. A large percentage of volumes with black marks on the spines identify them as *ex libris* from one library or another. If only they'd left the call

numbers intact to help me with my shelving! A stray book here or there may have been accidentally stolen from someone who had lent it to me a long time ago (I'm sorry I still have your *Shadowrun* book, Gary). My favorite books are the ones that were given to me as gifts. My family has a long tradition of giving books to each other on every holiday or special occasion. It's a joy to open them and read an inscription on the front cover: "From Mom and Dad, Christmas 1986" or "To Amy on her graduation day." It's no wonder I'm a book hoarder. Who

could part with one of these? If the shelves collapse on me someday, at least I won't lack for entertainment as I wait for rescue.

Entombing myself in a text-heavy crypt is a frightening thought, but perhaps not quite as frightening as the fear of being trapped somewhere with nothing to read! That's why there are books in my office, in my car, and in every room in my house (I'm actually considering putting a full-size bookcase in the bathroom because the top-of-the-tank library is getting overcrowded). Of course,

the Kindle app on my phone is well-stocked in case of long lines and waiting-room emergencies. I even have some titles in both physical and electronic formats, just in case. My mother (a book hoarder herself) says happiness is always having a stack of books by your side waiting to be read. You wouldn't want to run out of milk before you ran out of cookies, so heaven forbid you should run out of books before you run out of breath!

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