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

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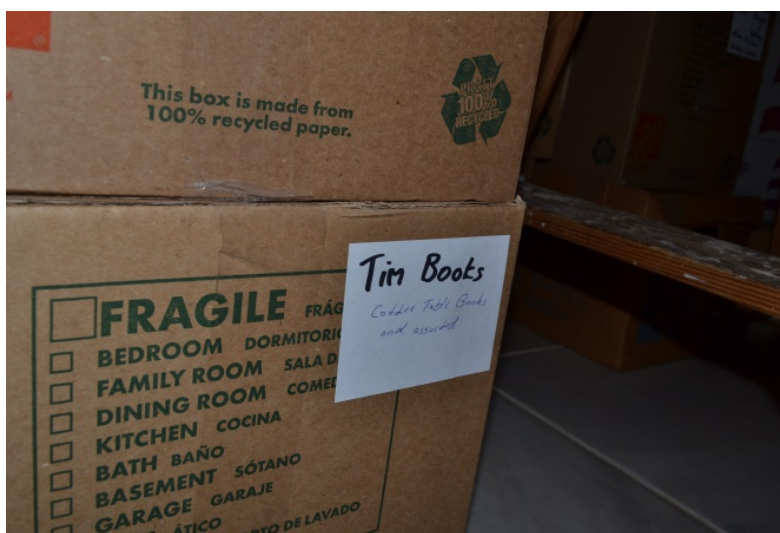
My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

By Tim Wojcik

I hadn't planned on a move. Still, there I was, looking at a pile of boxes as I began to sort out just where exactly was my personal library. I had labeled the boxes: fiction, biography, coffee table and picture books, kids' books, etc. But in the move, well, you know how it is when you are moving someone else. You just try to pick it up and put it down without breaking anything. Books, usually, are hard to break and so often are found at the bottom of a stack (Exhibit A pictured below).

I did take several pictures of the books on their shelves—well, their shelves at the old house.

There is likely to be some new mix n' match. Which of my personal favorites can I prevail upon my wife to place in the one bookcase in the living room? *The Corrections*—probably not. *A Man in Full*—arguably. *How!*—no.



The living room will allow me about twelve to fifteen feet of bookshelves. The real personal collection will be in my room—call it the den. So going from these photos and memory, what is this collection? Allow me another few words to explain.

Before working as a librarian, before working in corporate America, I was a bookseller. It was the 1970s, the golden age of the paperback. I

hauled many a paperback from this era: from North to South to Georgia. Eventually, they suffered the fate of too many books—the garage. And after so many years in the garage, a book fails the “smell” test. So paperback titles such as Paul Theroux's splashy yellow covered *The Mosquito Coast*, Aldous Huxley's desperate soul *Brave New World*, Agatha Christie's knife in his back *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, and my Hermann Hesse novels all went the way of the recycle. However, I did strip the covers of many of these nuggets and laminated them (garage smell entrapped!).

So what paperbacks survived from the bookstore days? David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest*, Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test*, and (oddly) *Health Secrets of the Orient*. And going back even further, I still

have my *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* from high school. It's a Dell version that is slightly shorter than the standard seven inch tall mass market paperback.

My corporate life coincided with the raising-of-the-kids years. I wasn't buying books for myself, or reading for myself nearly as much as in the bookstore days. One volume in particular survives: Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled*. Another title that I read during that time that

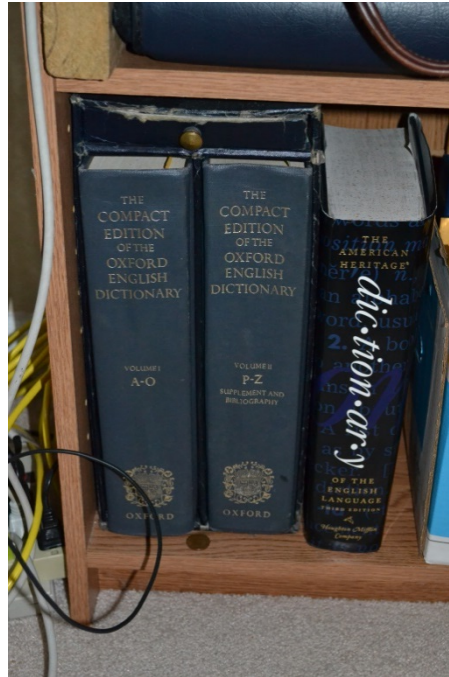
will be re-purchased for my collection (the paperback didn't escape the garage) is Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

So what of fiction? A double book volume of John Updike's *Rabbit Run* and *Rabbit Redux*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (took a summer for that one), two by Tom Wolfe, the aforementioned *Man in Full* and *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, Charles Frazier's *Thirteen Moons*, Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*, Annie Proulx's *Accordion Crimes*, and Don DeLillo's *Underworld*. All but the Updike and DeLillo are hardcovers.

In various sizes of paperback are: Issac Asimov's *I, Robot* (the movie version with a scowling Will Smith on the spine), *Downtown* by Anne Rivers Siddons, Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (I'm a Wolfe fan), Doug Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Tom Robbins *Skinny Legs and All*, and Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News*. There is the purchased copy of a title that I had previously borrowed and read—*V* by Thomas Pynchon. And a title from recent history—Francios Lelord's *Hector and the Search for Happiness*.

Non-fiction falls into several categories: biography and history, a mythology to psychology grouping, nature and the natural world, and poetry/everything else. Histories include two more by Halberstam—*The Powers That Be* and *The Fifties*, two by William Manchester—*Goodbye, Darkness* and *The Glory and the Dream*, Frank Snapp's *Decent Interval*, Theodore White's *In Search of History*, and Seymour Hersh's *The Dark Side of Camelot*. Oh, and Eric Idle's *The Greedy Bastard Diary*.

From the natural world, Paul Horgan's *Great River*, Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, Paul Schneider's *The Enduring Shore*, Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*, and several nature guides: birds, trees, flowers. A dear volume of mine is *Hiking Trails of the Smokies*, which includes my scribbles and dates for each of the trails that I attempted.



Myth to psyche includes Kent Keith's *Anyway*, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, Harold Courlander's *Fourth World of the Hopi*, Susan Cain's *Quiet*, Gordon MacDonald's *The Effective Father*, and a title by Tim and Joy Downs named *Fight Fair!*

The poetry includes the slim title used as a text for an intro to poetry class I took as a college freshman: *Passionate Attention* by Richard L. McGuire. There's a Sierra Club title called *On the Loose*, a late 1960s picture anthology of snips of poetry on getting out, wandering, the open road, and

more (with evidence of garage time). And, my replacement copy of the City Lights paperback *Howl!*—my first copy was borrowed and never returned.

Other volumes include *The Reader's Digest Complete Do-It-Yourself Manual* (mostly theoretical), a found drafting textbook from my father's era, and Dave Marsh's biography of The Who titled *Before I Get Old*. And I hung onto a used grammar text from high school called *Effective Writing*—to which some wag before me added the letter D in front of the word effective (my mother disapproved).

This book deserves its own paragraph. The dense, audacious, and still relevant *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* by Marshall McLuhan. Haven't quite finished it.

I continue to haul around two specialty dictionaries. There is the full-sized thumb indexed *American Heritage Dictionary, Third Edition*—well suited to the physical act of looking up an evergreen word and then browsing around the definition found—with photos rather than line drawings. And I keep the compact two volume (with rectangular magnifying glass) version of the motherfucking *Oxford Unabridged Dictionary*. And while my compact *OED* shows some signs of detention in the garage, the volumes are usable. It stays!

And my kids' books: I found the Arthur Rackham illustrated *Alice in Wonderland*. A repurchase of a lost original Christmas gift from my uncle—*The Day the Cow Sneezed* by James Flora—this kid loved the wild pictures and language, such as Bing! Bang! Crash! Tinkle! And a classic in my own mind, *The Great Escape* by Peter Lippman, which tells the story of Silas, a determined

alligator who was imported to New York and how he made his way back to the Everglades (hint: plumbing's involved).

And that's about it?—not so fast! How about all the books that kept me company on my drive times home via Audible.com. *Teacher Man* by Frank McCourt, Jon Stewart's *America* (wickedly funny), and one big mother of a novel—David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. An aside: what is the word for absorbing an audio book? You don't really read it. You do more than listen to it. What's the word for it? My nomination >> aud— (verb) to absorb the contents of a book via hearing; analogous to reading a printed book. Audding, audded, audookphile. Anyway, happy reading!

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