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

Elizabeth Holdsworth

*Georgia Tech*, [elizabeth.holdsworth@library.gatech.edu](mailto:elizabeth.holdsworth@library.gatech.edu)

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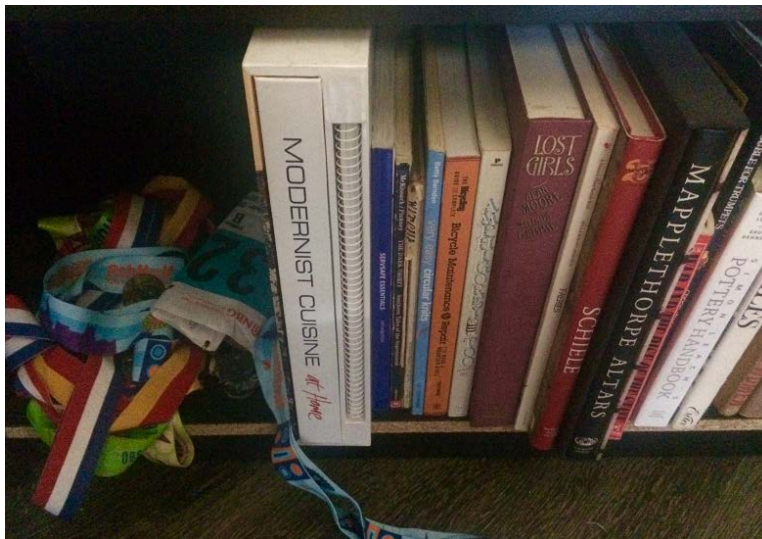
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## *My Own* PRIVATE LIBRARY

I recently relocated from Athens (Go Dawgs!) to Atlanta (Go Jackets!). The professional movers were very kind about, if not weary of, our several stacks of boxes containing books. After they left our new apartment, I scooted the boxes to approximately where they needed to be. My Egon Schiele and Mapplethorpe art books are snuggled up together on the shelf with my textbooks on war and democracy. My treasured Prince fan magazine sits contentedly next to old copies of *Cooks Illustrated*. What is not obvious is that this collection has splintered over time and space.

On April 2, 2008, I moved from Asheville, North Carolina, to the Bay Area with Jacob, my then boyfriend, now husband. In the spirit of adventure, we sold nearly everything we owned, minus two suitcases of clothes and the cat. We lugged boxes and borrowed rides to take our books to our favorite used bookstore. Gone were all of my Vonneguts, which I used to read as a reward after finishing my college papers. Gone were all of Jacob's Aaron Cometbus zines, which depict a life far more fun to read about than to actually live. I left behind my copies of *Tales of the City* certain I wouldn't need them. We shared the trade credit between our two best local pals and merrily bundled off into the epicenter of the housing crisis.



Books I couldn't bear to sell and were going to stay at my parent's house until I could afford to bring them to California (which never did happen): *Daddy Long Legs* by Jean Webster; *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13 ¾* and *The Queen and I* by Sue Townsend; *The Mayor of Castro Street* and *And the Band Played On...* by Randy Shilts; and *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt.

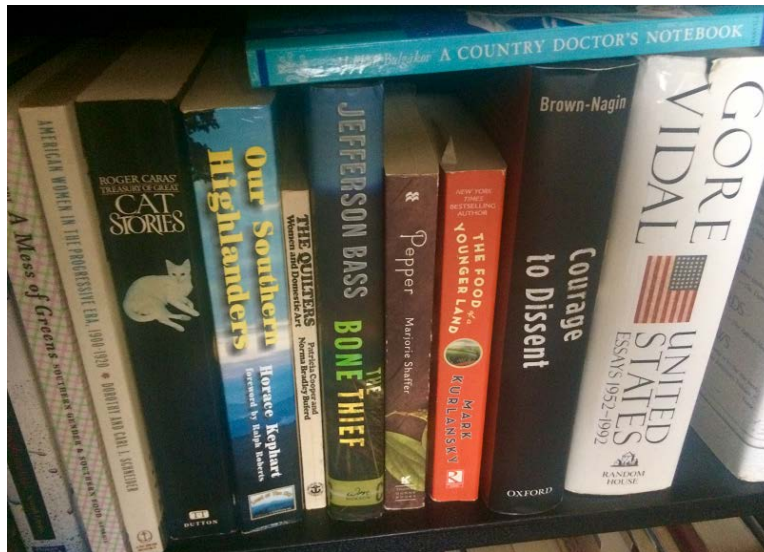
We returned to North Carolina a year later poorer, wiser, and recession softened. Jacob found a job in a used bookstore that offered store

credit in addition to pay. I found work in a food co-op, which kept us fed in discarded vegetables and just-past-the-expiration-date sandwiches. We slowly rebuilt our bank account, minds, and bodies. Anything that came along that interested us, we brought home. Our scavenged bookcase filled with a luxury of things that we would one day read. That summer we married, and I applied to library school. In August 2010, we landed in Iowa City, Iowa. We culled our books before moving but less ruthlessly than before. This time we took the cash instead of store credit.

Books I regret moving to Iowa: twenty leather bound art books that we never read and creaked when opened; and both of our copies of *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy.

Iowa City has a most excellent public library. I would bring back to our apartment as many books as I could carry. I couldn't afford to shop (student loans), so choosing whatever I liked and holding the weight of it in my hands helped curb the desire to spend. I only ever read about one quarter of them. I ate mysteries, romances, and self-help books; the graphic novel selection was especially sustaining. About once a week we drank cheap beer in the dive that Vonnegut visited during his time at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. We hung out with townies and watched old movies on the TV above the bar, then left when the workshop students filtered in. They always made terrible choices with the jukebox.

After graduation and still in Iowa, I learned there is only one creative way to fill in online job applications. I was ready for writing with a capital "W" again, although I couldn't afford it any more than when I was in school. The folksy charm of murder mysteries featuring talking cats ran out in favor of exploring wealth, sailing, and homophobia in *The Starboard Sea* by Amber Dermont. In between applying and interviewing, I discovered Tayari Jones, whose beautiful prose sits uneasily in sharp truths about family and life in Atlanta. I found the courage to start competing in races again and read Haruki Murakami's memoir on marathoning. I loved them, but we were not their forever home. One bleary day I received that important phone call, and six weeks later we rode into North Georgia's spring cloud of pollen.



Our time in Athens was marked with a new financial stability that allowed our collection to grow. I accumulated spiral bound church cookbooks from the 1950s and Lauren Groff's novels. I reclaimed my stash from my mother's house and lifted a few beloved children's books without arousing my siblings' suspicions (until now). My New Year's resolution for 2014 was to

read one nonfiction book for every novel, and it could not be about animals or running. I relied on a massive academic library to fuel my exploration; the year-long check-out period granted to faculty let me inch my way through tomes on French diplomacy and

the Vietnam War, the abandonment of the gold standard, and nuclear weapons systems. With the gift of a tablet computer, I caved into my holdout against electronic format. After three years, packing up our books made for gently swaying towers that frightened and enamored the cat.

Books I lend out only to replace after they inevitably never return: *House of Leaves* by Mark Danielewski; *Lives of the Monster Dogs* by Kirsten Bakis; *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel; and *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel.

Nearly a decade after the first cull and now six gentler culls in, we have mostly filled one large bookcase and three middlin' bookcases. My tablet follows me to my favorite laundromat in Midtown, where I read one quarter of the titles I end up downloading. What we currently have are the hardy survivors from nine apartments over four states. What was turned into gifts for others or food on our table; what I read,

returned to the library, and promptly forgot about; what I cherished but couldn't quite justify buying; what is behind a screen—these things too are part of the collection. They are just invisible.

How to cull a collection with a long-term partner with minimal tears: each partner selects

what in good conscience they will never read or ever read again. The other partner gets veto power on the selection with no justification required.

*Liz Holdsworth is STEM Librarian at Georgia Institute of Technology*