

1-1-2019

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

Kelly M. Holt

University of Georgia, kholt@uga.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Holt, K. M. (2019). My Own Private Library: A Peek Inside the Personal Library of a Librarian. *Georgia Library Quarterly*, 56(1). Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol56/iss1/9>

This Columns is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Georgia Library Quarterly by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

When I was in library school, a professor asked why people wanted to be librarians. He said, “If you say it’s because you like books, you can leave now.”

I get what he meant. There is a difference between the books you own and the books you work with as a librarian. Does that mean they can never cross paths? No. I’m not about to add a German philosophy book from 1963 to my personal collection, but I will happily catalog it and send it to the shelves. However, if a book on Iris Apfel comes across my desk you can bet I will be all over Amazon trying to get that for my collection. I really do like books (sorry, Dr. Curran). I always have. So, my own library is a mix of sentimental and meaningful books—as I’m sure yours is, too.



To me, seeing a book unlocks so many memories or feelings. Sure, you read a book and you feel something, but sometimes books can invoke feelings just by what they are or where they came from.

I have a shelf at work of books that I just want around me. Some of the books are from my father-in-law. He had tons of books that he had collected over the years and when he passed away, we donated a lot of his books to the public library and to the University of Georgia. The books that UGA didn’t need, I kept. I don’t have a clue about textile mills or anything related to textiles, but I keep them as a

reminder of my father-in-law. I also keep a copy of *No Slam Dancing, No Stage Diving, No Spikes: an Oral History of the Legendary City Gardens* at work. This book reminds me of growing up in New Jersey. Just the spine will remind me of bands that I saw there and the many friends that have come in and out of my life. *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, besides being a great book, reminds me that there is a wonderful dog that waits for me when I get home, and I need to appreciate him more.

At home, I currently have several boxes of books that are stored in my dining room. These books are a combination of titles that my husband and I had before we were married along with books from his father and books that we collected over the years. We had a bookcase for these books, but my son’s

LEGO collections needed a home and so we bestowed our bookcase to him. In these boxes are yearbooks, poetry books, and college books that we always thought we would want to read again (ha!). These boxes also include some of my favorite books from my godmother. My godmother has always had an appreciation of books, and I was lucky enough to share that appreciation with her throughout my life. When I graduated from library school, she sent me four books that represented different aspects of life—friendship (*Frog and Toad Are Friends* by Arnold Lobel), fidelity (*Fidelity* by Wendell Berry), love (*Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte), and self (*Iris and Her Friends* by John Bayley). It was such a meaningful gift. She inscribed each one.

Reading her inscription is so uplifting, especially since she is 800 miles away.

I know I have passed the love of books to my daughter. Do we have the same taste in books? Not even close. She loves fantasy. I loathe it. But, she has the same attachment and appreciation for books that I have. She wants to own a book that she loves and read it over and over. Her favorite books are on the end of the bookcase closest to her bed. She has a set of books from when she was younger that she would never read now—"baby books"—but they are special to her and she keeps them where she can see them.

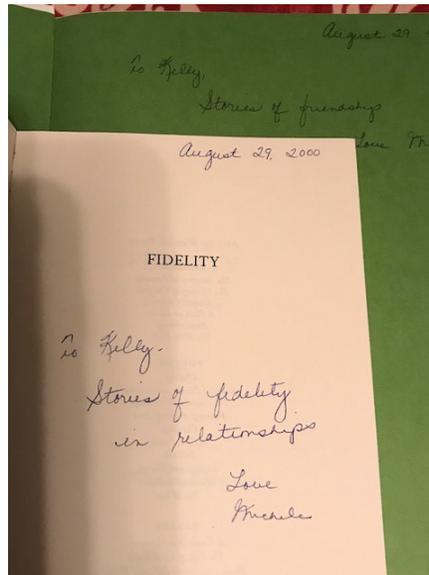
As a cataloger, you might think that I need to organize my own books by subject, publisher, year, etc. No. I do that at work. There is a specific reason for that kind of organization at a large, academic library. I don't need rules-based organization of my home library. I don't keep track of my books via LibraryThing. No offense if you are an avid user of LibraryThing. That's too much like work for me. I catalog every day at work—I certainly don't want to do that at home. I know what I have, and I know where to find it. I enjoy browsing my personal book collection.

Recently, I went and bought a small bookcase for the bedroom. I was tired of not seeing my books. I went through the boxes, selected a mix that reflects myself and my husband and set

everything up. There's a healthy mix of World War II and Georgia football mixed in with Faulkner and *Frog and Toad Are Friends*. There

are also pictures and things that just seem to go with books: dog statues and candles. I just wanted a small sanctuary of books. There's plenty of time to replace the bookcase. That didn't bother me. It was not seeing the reminders of people, places, and things that are/were important to me. This bookshelf is an instant memory trigger. Every day, something different will catch my eye and I will reflect upon what that book means to me. I'm not sure that the bookcase has the same effect on my husband as it does on me. Maybe it does—who knows? I guess I can always ask.

I've always been a visual person. Seeing the books that have meant so much to me over the years is comforting. Would I say that my personal library is a statement on the academic pursuits of a librarian and an accountant? Are you kidding? I don't take myself that seriously. Are there accounting books and books on subject headings in my collection? Why, of course. That's just part of who I am. My personal library reflects me as a person separate from me as a librarian. It tells my story through the many stories that I have collected over the years.



Kelly M. Holt is Head, Cataloging Department at University of Georgia