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

Susan Clay  
sclay@uga.edu

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## *My Own* PRIVATE LIBRARY

My personal library comprises about 200 titles including poetry, massage therapy, religion, race relations, Jim Crow, and African American history.

I have loved poetry since middle school when I had a sixth-grade teacher who introduced me to the works of Langston Hughes. Later, I had an eighth-grade teacher, a WWII vet in his fifties, who was passionate about poetry. The year he taught me, his 19-year-old wife left him and took their baby with her. I think because of her leaving he gave us some heavy poems, like *Richard Cory*, the man who seemingly had it all but, “one calm summer night, went home and put a bullet through his head.” It was powerful and scary eighth-grade reading, but he also introduced our class to the works of Robert Frost, e e cummings, and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

I have a small collection of anatomy and massage books since I spent almost twenty years doing massage and neuromuscular therapy. There is a thorough, spiral bound, manual lymph drainage book, as well as books of other massage and energy modalities, several beautifully illustrated anatomy books, and two big, red volumes of *Myofascial Pain and Dysfunction* written by Janet Travell, John F. Kennedy’s personal physician. It was in Travell’s waiting room that Kennedy, who had chronic back pain from a war

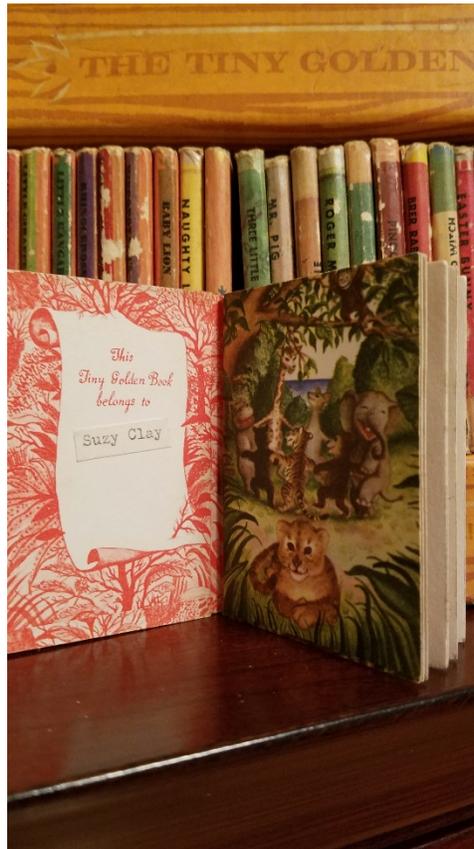
injury, first sat in one of her rocking chairs and realized how good rocking made his back feel.

My religion corner is mostly books by Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk. I’ve recently given away a large part of my other religion titles, leaving me with mostly the Thich Nhat Hanh writings, which, apparently, inspire me more than did the others.

Two years ago, I became interested in a government document with an introduction written by Hugh Dorsey, the governor of Georgia from 1917–1920, and in the process of researching that document, my personal library began to change—and quickly. I found myself reading other documents from the time, as well as books about race, slavery, peonage, leased labor, and the chain gang. One book led to another. I read Ta-Nehisi Coates and Angela Davis, and I finally read Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* and John Lewis’s *Walking with the Wind*, as well as dozens of other books about the diverse African

American experience. I learned of terrible events that took place right here in Clarke and Oconee Counties as well as in South Georgia near where I grew up. I checked out books from the library where I work, then purchased copies of most of them for my own private library.

Sometimes, I take a book off the shelf of my personal library, just start looking through, and—because I tend to jot notes in the



margins—I can see the history of my reading and processing right there from 20 or 30 years ago. It’s like an old friend I can visit, have a conversation with, and be reminded of my past self. Sometimes, I even agree with the younger me!

My most treasured title, though, is *The Tiny Golden Library*. Still in its original box, it’s a gift

my mother bought for me when I was about four or five. She typed out my name on labels and put them in every single book. I have spent hours of my childhood with that collection. I’m incredibly happy they are still with me after all these years.

*Susan Clay is Map and Government Documents  
Original Cataloger at University of Georgia*