

1-1-2020

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

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### Recommended Citation

Barker, A. G. (2020). My Own Private Library: A Peek Inside the Personal Library of a Librarian. *Georgia Library Quarterly*, 57(1). Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol57/iss1/9>

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## *My Own* PRIVATE LIBRARY

This summer I excitedly tackled a task I'd been looking forward to for nearly a year: unboxing our books. My new husband and I had moved into our first house the previous summer but had been unable to unpack dozens of boxes of books due to a lack of shelves. I did keep out a small collection of current reads and well-loved friends to tide me over—*The Lord of the Rings* and Jane Austen's complete works (*Persuasion* is my favorite) were easy choices. My husband's *The Heir to the Empire* trilogy, more commonly called the Thrawn trilogy by Star Wars fans, was a temporary addition that I still haven't finished (sorry, honey). I made do with those, and a handful of others, while we started setting up our first home.

A major project in setting up the house included my husband building me several sets of magnificent bookshelves. (As an aside, I recommend that all book lovers consider marrying woodworkers—it's a natural match.) He completed the first set of shelves in our newly dubbed "upstairs library" in early July, and we decided that it was time for me to get to work. In the meantime, we'd agreed that I could sort, catalog, and weed most of the collection however I wanted, in exchange for a promise not to weed or sort the Star Wars books. In the span of a week, I single-handedly unpacked 40 boxes of books, scanning them into my LibraryThing account and roughly sorting genres as I went. Most of the books were new to me, as I was combining not only my library with my husband's, but also many



books from his father. Hundreds of titles passed through my hands, from popular fiction and recent publications to treasured hand-me-downs from our families, such as his grandfather's copy of *The Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*, 31st edition, and my great-grandmother's self-published autobiography. Some genres come almost exclusively from one person (unsurprisingly, I'm responsible for all the romance novels and my husband for all the Star Wars books), but most are a mix of original owners.

As I found duplicates, I tried to set them aside to consider for later weeding. Many of these were in the science fiction part of the collection, as both my father-in-law and I have a fondness for Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein, and their contemporaries.

Others were the typical story of re-purchasing titles due to wear or simple forgetfulness. Some were easy to discard later, but I knew even as I set aside the duplicate copies of *The Silmarillion* and *The Hobbit*, they would all be staying. Some duplicates were kept for logical reasons, such as simplified versions of classic works for children, but most of these decisions were made for purely sentimental reasons. (There's a reason I'm not responsible for weeding in my professional life!)

Perhaps the most exciting thing about setting up my own personal library was the freedom to define categories as I chose. I ended up settling on an unusual array of collections, separating

science fiction from fantasy, and Star Wars from both (my husband might have a “type” when it comes to reading). We also created a collection of “old books,” roughly those published before 1940, mostly to justify putting them out-of-reach of visiting children. Beyond these, however, we have reasonably common categories such as general fiction, foreign language (mostly French and all mine aside from *The Klingon Hamlet*), mystery and thriller, children’s, romance, comics and manga, young adult, and non-fiction. I shifted some books back and forth between genres a few times before settling on a home. For example, we briefly considered pulling out Asimov as a



separate collection but decided against it when we realized we only have around 60 of his more than 500 works. With collections sorted out I could start deciding which would go where, based on size.

By this time, my husband had also completed the shelves in our “main floor library,” and I determined that the large mystery and thriller collection would fit there (a decision I’m now second-guessing as my father-in-law continues to deliver titles). The upstairs library has foreign language, romance, and general fiction, but is primarily dedicated to fantasy, Star Wars, and science fiction. All the bookshelves are very full, though I tried my best to leave room for future growth. It’s been several months now, and I foresee moving several collections (I know weeding would also be prudent, but it’s quite unlikely). Some collections are completely unshelved for now; we have plans to build more shelves in the basement, but as my husband

must first build walls there, those will be a long time coming.

While I await future shelving, I decided to go ahead and sort the non-fiction, which I am determined to have in Dewey Decimal order. (Since we have libraries on all three floors of our house, as well as an online catalog, I figure there’s no point in stopping short.) This was a

point of discussion with my husband, but he eventually gave in when I promised not to put labels on the spines of books. Instead, I plan to print individual bookmarks on acid-free paper (yes, I’m aware I’m being “extra” about this). We have books in all the major DDC sections, somewhat

surprisingly, but the majority are in the 900’s (biography, history, and travel—mostly my father-in-law) and 700’s (knitting—all me). I’m currently in the process of doing some clean-up work in the catalog while I wait on more shelves. In the meantime, the nonfiction books are piled on the floor in our home office, with sticky notes denoting Dewey sections.

My library is a work-in-progress and always will be. The current titles (numbering 2,907) reflect the reading habits and interests of three different people and include many works I will never read (e.g., all 150 books in *The Destroyer* series). Having organized everything as I see fit, however, makes the entire collection mine in a way no other library could ever be. The curious can peruse my catalog at <https://www.librarything.com/catalog/RogueElf>.

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