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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

Let me start off by saying, I grew up in a library. My mom is an elementary librarian, and my dad is a high school history teacher and football coach. The result of this union was wall-to-wall bookcases in almost every room of our house. Our categorization was based on collection size and interest. When a book made it to a shelf, any spot was up for grabs. We had a history bookcase (a Thomas Jefferson biography also doubled as the family safe—need your social security card? Go check Thomas!), a children’s lit bookcase, a vintage/antique bookcase, a mystery/thriller bookcase, a coaching and biography bookcase, and a loosely defined miscellaneous section that stretched four bookcases deep across our family room walls. We also had our personal bedroom bookcases. My mom instilled a strong preference for hardback covers in us—paperbacks just don’t look as good on the shelf! We often had multiple editions of children’s books and cookbooks ready to give as gifts.

Every time my sister and I had friends over, someone would comment on our house being a library and that was always a point of pride for me. I loved every single one of those bookcases. It wasn’t until I was older that I noticed that I had several friends who lived in houses that didn’t have any bookcases. Or that I didn’t have friends who would wait until their parents went to bed and hide in the closet to read books all night. And now a room feels naked without a bookcase. In fact, if I see an empty space in any house, I immediately think “oh, a bookcase would look great there.” I advocate for everyone to turn their home into a library.

After graduating from the University of Memphis with a degree in English, I moved to Boston, Massachusetts in 2014 to pursue my MA in English at UMass Boston (I would later go on to get my MLIS at Simmons). I was tasked



with only taking what could fit into my Ford Escape. I boxed up my entire life in that car, but space was extremely limited. I was moving from a little town in West Tennessee, so there would be no coming back for a second load. In the end, I decided to leave my mattress so I would have more room for books, shoving boxes every which way in my car. They were my security blanket—I honestly could not think of moving without them or having a home without them. In Boston, I found the sidewalks to be a treasure chest of furniture, cookware, and other essential home items. I scavenged two bookcases (and a desk!) to house my collection,

haphazardly putting books wherever they would fit.

Currently, I am following in my parents' footsteps and have started building my own home library (with the help of my English PhD candidate husband, Christian). I will admit that I am a somewhat disorganized home librarian, so our collection initially started as just one big pile, organized by author's last name. With time, however, we have had the need to create a few dedicated

bookshelves/categories. We have a "books we have taught" case housing earmarked copies of textbooks and novels. Also, we have almost enough for a cookbook case, a Victorian literature case (thanks, Christian), a critical pedagogy case, and my personal favorite: a cocktail bookcase that sits atop our bar cart. We are also working on a collection of vintage/antique books to have a case of their own, and these are currently only organized based on book size.

I love books not only because I love literature but also because books can hold memories. My mom always put thoughtful notes in books that she gave as gifts, a ritual she continues to this day. More than anything, I love grabbing a book off the shelf and seeing a note commemorating a graduation or birthday. Often these books are personal markers for me, measuring my successes and setbacks. I also try to buy unique copies of books when I go on trips. My first time

out of the country I bought a beautiful copy of *The Bell Jar* from the coziest bookstore in Sydney, Australia. Further, I cherish my copy of *Anne of Green Gables* from a trip to Newfoundland, Canada. Even in middle school, I

remember going on a trip to Wise, Virginia, and it was the perfect fall day. The leaves were gold and deep red. The town was cute and bustling, and as we walked downtown, we happened upon a fall festival. There, I bought a copy of *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* by Washington Irving, and every time I

see that book, I think back on that day and remember how happy and perfect it was.

While I am pretty good at weeding my collection and donating those books that no longer excite me, my husband is another story. While I try to only keep books that I would want to read again or hold a special memory (and note), he doesn't like to get rid of any of our books, littering his copies with Post-it notes and scrawling in the margins. We have books shoved in closets because he won't get rid of any, yet somehow, we make it work. I love looking at the shelves and seeing a collection of fond memories and beloved works, and I'm excited to think of the new, preferably hardback, editions we will add to the shelves in the coming years.

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