

5-1-2022

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

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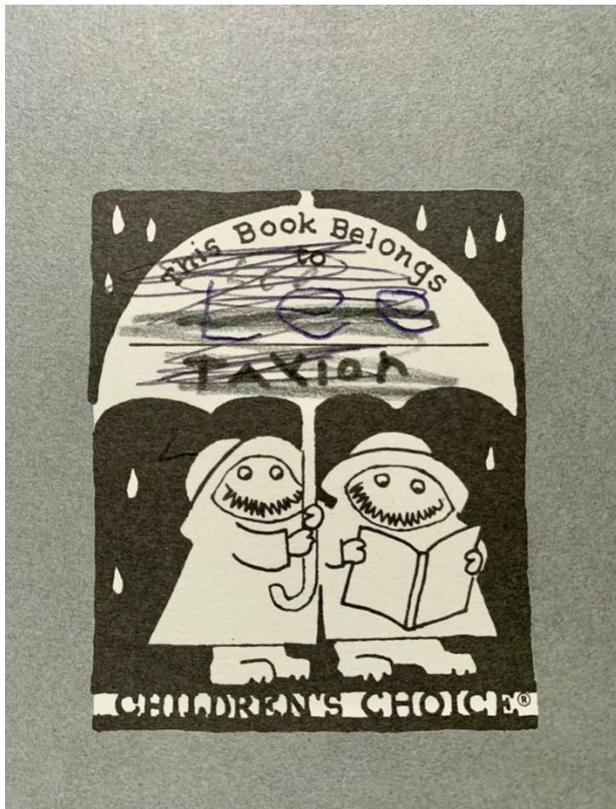
Recommended Citation

Bareford, L. (2022). My Own Private Library: A Peek Inside the Personal Library of a Librarian. *Georgia Library Quarterly*, 59(2). Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/glq/vol59/iss2/6>

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My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

I'd expect that many librarians share my "origin story" when it comes to books and book collecting: it started in a library and has come full circle back to one. My love for books first began at the Richland County Public Library in Columbia, SC. One summer, the library was offering a dragon iron on patch to any child who completed their summer reading requirements. I wanted the iron on patch so bad that I started reading in earnest. That experience established my love of reading and book collecting. In fact, I wanted books so bad, I started fighting with my brothers to claim ownership of mutual favorites. I always have a laugh when I open the ones I still have and see where we had repeatedly crossed out each other's name.



During my school years, I was drawn to history and fantasy books, particularly *The Once and Future King* and *The Lord of the Rings*. It was not

until I took an art history class in college, though, that I started to covet my favorite collectible: art books. Big, expensive, lavishly illustrated art books. While studying art, I became fascinated with photography and was soon obsessed with collecting photography books. I found photography books to be amazing in the sense that, unlike books of paintings, they could reproduce their source material almost identically. I quit my job in a photo lab so I could work at Barnes & Noble and use my employee discount to buy more photography books. My favorites from this time were Scalco's 1993 printing of Robert Frank's *The Americans*, a true classic, and Arena Editions' 1997 *Adam Fuss* monograph, which includes a revelatory essay about Fuss by Eugenia Parry.

Spare money was in short supply while I was in grad school at Savannah College of Art and Design, so I stalked clearance sales for deals. Back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when print runs were generous and expensive art books often couldn't be returned to publishers, I managed to find incredible books at bargain prices. My best find was a first edition of Richard Prince's *Adult Comedy Action Drama* in excellent condition for only \$2.

After finishing grad school in 2003, I moved to New Orleans with some friends. I was able to transfer to the Metairie Barnes & Noble store, so I continued building my book collection. My soon-to-be fiancée Jill worked for Barnes & Noble too, so we quickly amassed enough books to build our own private library in our uptown carriage house apartment. We snuggled on the couch, surrounded by our books, and read into the night—Jill deep into Harry Potter, and me switching between art books and Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series (thanks, Jill). I wish I still had a picture of that room, but I

don't. I lost track of a few things around that time.

I blame Katrina.

Needless to say, the storm upended our lives. We evacuated to Baton Rouge with little more than a backpack each full of clothes and toiletries. Over the next few days, we watched in horror as the levees failed and our city flooded. We knew we would not see our home for some time. The National Guard had moved into the city and closed it to everyone except for essential personnel. A month went by. Then another. Jill and I were going stir crazy. We were anxious to return to our home and assess the damage. In a stroke of luck, a coworker's husband had a work pass to get through the National Guard checkpoint and into New Orleans. Taking a risk, I photocopied it and headed to the city, praying that no one would notice my pass was fake. I got in.

Covered in lake silt from the flood, parts of New Orleans looked like a black and white movie. City Park oaks were upended. Boats had been strewn by floodwaters in the middle of city streets. I passed a Coast Guard helicopter that had crashed on the Lafitte Greenway. Humvees full of armed soldiers sped past, rumbling over coils of downed power lines. I kept a low profile and finally made it to the apartment. Want to hear something *really* funny? I left my apartment keys in Baton Rouge.

One kicked-in door later, I rushed to check on our library. Perfectly, improbably dry.

Unlike many others who experienced Katrina, we were extremely lucky. I began taking armloads of books from apartment to car until the trunk and backseat were full. Then I got out of there. I didn't want to be in the city after dark with all of the power out.

Bereft of options to find wedding venues, and facing skyrocketing rents, Jill and I moved from Baton Rouge to Atlanta in November 2005. We never returned to our New Orleans apartment. Our book collection continued to grow over the years, and on November 2nd, 2010, we welcomed a new reader into our home: our son Sam. He's a *huge* Percy Jackson fan but is absolutely *not* interested in Harry Potter. He is almost perfect.





When we moved to Savannah in 2015, we brought an 800-pound collection of books with us. We rented a third-floor apartment while shopping for a house. There were no elevators. Our movers hated us. When we bought a house six months later, I moved every box of books down the stairs myself. We've downsized quite a bit since then. I guess you could say that we started to wonder whether we owned the books, or if it was the other way around. There are still bookcases in every room, and we keep our favorite fiction and fantasy titles within easy

reach in our bedroom bookcase. My art and photography book collection is housed in two large, lovely bookcases in the den, which I look over continually, pulling and leafing through favorites while we watch *My Neighbor Totoro* as a family for the 300th time. When I go to work, I'm surrounded by books. I wouldn't change a thing.

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