

Against the Grain

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Oregon Trails: You Are What You Read

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faculty and students who are interested in creating digital scholarship, whether they are local or part of a broader effort. For example, providing support to associations and societies that are reorganizing and reframing their efforts for support of digital communication by digital natives is a positive way forward. The nascent digital humanities movement is an exciting part of this effort.

If not-for-profit higher education can demonstrate that it has the capability to reorganize, reframe, and re-establish the creation, access to, and use of knowledge for the continued benefit of all, the advantages will accrue to the organizations who actively participate and to non-profit higher education more broadly. Librarians and libraries are in a position to help lead this effort. Change will happen with librarian leadership or without it. We suggest that a focus on aligning goals and resources with the expertise, needs, and expectations of digital natives is critical for success. Everything else is open for discussion! In subsequent articles, we will further the conversation, balancing as many germane viewpoints as we can to reach a clearer and better vision of what to start doing now. That is our hope — to engage in a discussion, and with that discussion, to arrive at some useful conclusions about what to do. Although it may often seem so in an academic setting, for us this is no Sisyphean task. The intent is to accomplish steps towards real change.

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Endnotes

1. The second author (Kelley) created such a unit called *The Digital Knowledge Center* within the **Milton S. Eisenhower Library** at **The Johns Hopkins University** in 1995. A number of university libraries and some college libraries have followed suit.

The most valuable item on my desk is a 3” x 5” loose-leaf notebook that I have carried around for more than fifty years. It is a record of all of the books that I have read from 1962 to the present, a record of my intellectual development, changing needs and interests, and books that have nurtured me through impressions and re-readings.

I have long known that one’s memory is not to be trusted and when I’ve remembered first running across an author or a particular book, I have been off by several years more than once. I had long thought that the first **Saul Bellow** I ever read was *The Adventures of Augie March*, but it was *Seize the Day* followed by *Henderson the Rain King* and then *Augie March*.

The book has taken a beating over the years, and many of the punch holes have re-inforcements to keep them in place. The early pages contain two lines per entry with the title on the first line and the date finished, author, and number of pages on line two. In 1965 I changed the format to one line: date, title, author. I was a soldier in Germany then, a trumpet player in the 84th U.S. Army Band, and interested in furthering my education through reading and writing short reviews (book reports) in another 3”x5” loose-leaf notebook of each book that I read. That didn’t last long, but the few that I wrote survive and make me wish that I’d written more, that I had continued the exercise. But that last year in the Army became a very busy year for me, and I gradually stopped writing about what I read.

The first book that I read in 1963 earned a C- at **Dartmouth**, where I stayed for my last week as a civilian. I was crashing in the room of a friend from high school who shared the space with a roommate. I had time on my hands. My friend’s roommate did not, so I wrote a paper on *The Old Order* by **Katherine Anne Porter**. I don’t remember if he paid me or not, and I don’t remember if having read *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* about three weeks earlier had any bearing on the paper or the grade. If the roommate was happy with the C, how could a college dropout complain?

Of the thirty-two books that I read in 1962, I managed only eight while in college that winter semester, and among them was the first of four **Steinbeck** books, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, a gift from another high school friend who remembered both my birthday and how much I admired **John Steinbeck** while still in high school. That summer, I also read *The Log From the*

Sea of Cortez and *Cup of Gold*, a serendipitous purchase while in the Ft. Lewis PX. I also owned a copy of *The Portable Steinbeck* and so, in the year in which he won the **Nobel Prize for Literature**, without realizing it, I had the beginnings of my first author collection that has grown to more than 60 items.

Before I left **Chapel Hill** in spring 1962, I bought a second-hand **Modern Library** edition of *Casuals of the Sea* by **William McFee**. I bought the book not because it cost only a quarter, but on the basis of a quote included in a letter from another high school friend.

“Be master of yourself. The world is not an oyster to be opened but a quicksand to be passed. If you have wings you can fly over it, if not you may — yes, yes, I am coming now, my dear! — you may quite possibly be sucked in.”

The wise man speaking to our hero — of late hooked on reading, is a second-hand bookseller who is being drawn away from his first love, books and their wisdom, by his wife. I was overpowered by the book, in part a tale of sea-faring men and their families.

I now own 18 **McFee** books including four editions of *Casuals of the Sea*. One is an Armed Services Edition published especially for members of the **United States Armed Services** during World War II.

When I first read that book, it was only to get to the root of the passage cited above. I am sure that I did not read the introduction written by **Christopher Morley**. The name would have meant nothing to me, and why waste time on an introduction when the entire book was waiting? But in 1975, I discovered *Parnassus on Wheels*, perhaps **Morley’s** most famous and popular book, although *Kitty Foyle* probably earned him more money because it was not only a bestseller (501,000 copies sold including reprints) in 1939-1940, it was made into a popular film starring **Ginger Rogers** in 1940. One of my copies of *Kitty Foyle* is an Armed Services Edition.

Kitty was a modern, liberated woman before her time, but Roger Mifflin, who peddled books from a covered wagon, is my hero. He once refused to sell a book to a man because he wasn’t ready for it yet. But he sold him something to read to bring him up to speed. A good bookseller is also a reader’s advisor.

But I digress. I was going to relate how this unknown writer of introductions (one of **Morley’s** specialties in touting books of high quality) became one of my favorite writers over the years and I advanced from finding reading copies to collecting first editions and related **Morley** items. My **Morley** collection now runs to about 90 items, none of which is exceedingly rare, but their presence comforts me. I’ll continue to read him and appreciate his often whimsical outlook on life, one of

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literate bemusement but with some biting social commentary, too, when called for.

I am dismayed at how poor my recall is of most of the books in my loose-leaf catalog but am pleased at how many memories are connected to either individual entries or a whole year's worth that remind me of a phase of my life long past. The third book that I read in 1963 happened to be the first book I read as a soldier. I was in Basic Training at Ft. Dix, New Jersey in the days when the draft swept up not only high school graduates not in college or college dropouts, but college graduates. When I was seen reading *Jane Eyre* for pleasure (why else would I be reading a high school requirement as a buck private in the Army?), I must be a college man. Being a dropout and reading *Jane Eyre* only added to my status. You are what you read.

The next year in fall 1964, I was a member of the 84th U.S. Army Band stationed in Fulda, West Germany. I was a trumpet player who owned a stack of **Bob Dylan** records and was thus suspect in the eyes of a group made up of professional musicians and those with music degrees from college. I had come from a combat outfit and had not been assigned to a band straight out of Basic Training. I spent more time in downtown Fulda drinking beer with my German friends than I spent socializing with my fellow musicians, soldiers, countrymen. But one day I was caught reading **Thomas Pynchon's** *V*. Don't ask me how I came to know about the book or the author, but I had bought a paperback copy of the book at the PX and liked it from page one. I was asked if I would let a colleague read it when I was finished (September 25, 1964), and thus it began circulating around the band and once again my status was bumped up a notch by a book. You are what you read, redux.

1965 was my last full year in the Army. I skied in the Voralberg in Austria that January and spent a week on leave in Spain that July. The 84th combined with two other Army bands and went to the Netherlands for a week to participate in a **NATO Tattoo**. And in between, I played music for a living and spent as much time as I could find drinking beer and making friends with some German families who helped me improve my German. And I had time to read and a wonderful Post Library to supply me with books. I read **Schiller's** *Maid of Orleans* in English seven years before I read it in German along with **G.B. Shaw's** version. I read *The Screwtape Letters* and discussed it with a preacher's son. I discovered **Willa Cather** (*Death Comes to the Archbishop, My Antonia*) and **Walker Percy** (*The Moviegoer*). There are 49 books listed for that year, the most I was to read until 1971 when I was a grad student.

I may not have read as many books a year while in the Army, but as I look at what I read, including books by **Max Shulman**, **Peter Devries**, and **Simenon** thrown in for pure entertainment, I was really preparing myself to finish college and go on from there. It was not a conscious effort by any means, but what drove me to read those books is the same force that pushed me through college.

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When a soldier gets short, that is, has six months left in the Army, it is the company commander's duty to have a conversation with the short-timer.

"Have you ever thought of re-enlisting, soldier?"

"Yes sir, I've thought about it, but I'm getting out when my enlistment is up."

"What will you do with your life then?"

"I'm going back to college, sir."

"That's what they all say."

You are what you read. 🐾

Rumors
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In this vein (no pun intended), note the interview with **Jennifer Lohmann** (p.31) who had an auction fundraiser for naming a character in one of her novels. Pretty cool!

I was fascinated by the recent **Outsell "Information Management Trends and Benchmarks 2013"** in this issue. **Tom Gilson** and I pored through this report and tried to delineate some "takeaways" for us academic

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