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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

I like to consider myself an equal blend of my mother's and father's very disparate personalities, so it's not surprising that my personal library is essentially a mash-up of the two systems we had going in my childhood home. Dad had a nice office, all walnut and plush burgundy, with several floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and one very nice book cabinet with glass doors. The cabinet held industry-specific books that he had accumulated over the course of his career; they were mostly big, expensive-looking volumes about engineering principles and computer-aided design (CAD). All of his other books lined the shelves, organized first alphabetically by author's last name, and then chronologically by publication date. Mom had a more ad hoc method of organization. There was a constantly fluctuating pile of Nora Roberts on her bedside table, several artfully arranged mini-piles of books throughout the house for decorative purposes, and then randomly placed loner books that she would pick up and put down wherever she happened to be. You might find one under the seats in the car, one sitting out by the microwave, one shoved between the couch cushions, etc.

Neither system ever sat well with me. Mom's books tended to either end up lost or fall victim to some unfortunate accident, like a tumble into the bathtub or a chance encounter with a spaghetti sauce spoon. Dad's books were well-protected, but not well-loved. They were read once and then relegated to a slice of shelf, doomed to sit there, in order, forever. In

arranging my little library, I have opted for a set of middle-ground guidelines:

1. No dust jackets. I know that's going to upset many collectors and purists out there, but let me explain. I understand that some dust jackets are truly beautiful works of art—and I have framed more than one in the past—but if it's not going to hang on my wall, it's got to go. I find it impossible to comfortably read a book while the dust jacket is still on, and I think the plain-spine look is much more aesthetically pleasing anyway.

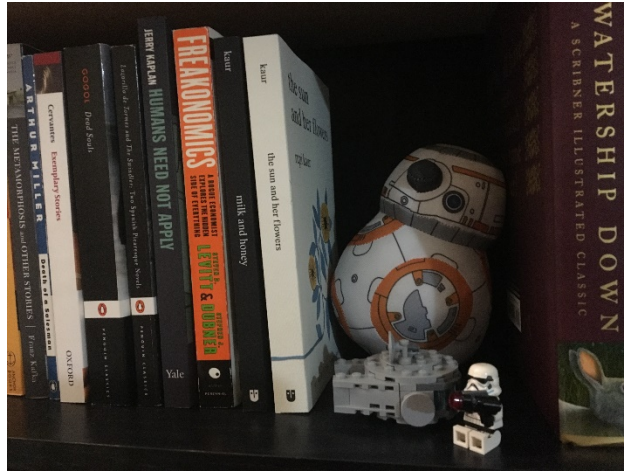


2. No dog-earing, highlighting, or annotating. These page-marring practices were the bane of my existence when I worked for a public library. I hold myself to a higher standard. I accrue plenty of bookmarks, so there's no need to crease any pages, and if a particular passage strikes a chord with me, it usually makes a cameo appearance in my journal. There's no need to permanently record my passing thoughts in the book itself; chances are, next time I read it, I won't be thinking the same things.

3. If I wouldn't give it at least three stars on Goodreads, I don't keep it. Every book Dad ever owned is still sitting on one of his shelves. He's upgraded to a bigger office twice, so he hasn't run out of room yet, but that day is coming. I don't have unlimited space in my apartment, so I don't keep things that don't enlighten, thrill, comfort, or surprise me. Life is

too short to waste shelf space on unfortunate books.

4. There cannot be chaos. I prefer to keep an ill-defined sorting system, based loosely on genre and personal associations/connections I have drawn between books. Most people would intuitively understand the general framework: fiction is separate from nonfiction, the traditional classics have their own section, all of the art books are grouped together, and so on. However, it would be hard to explain why I think *Watership Down* truly belongs sandwiched between a collection of photography from *Humans of New York* and a short biography of the pirate queen Grace O'Malley, but I don't know that I would even want to try. A handful of inexplicable



organizational oddities mark my library as uniquely *mine*.

5. No shelf can be pristine. Perfectly tidy shelves with neat rows of books are ideal for a public library, but in a personal setting they have a tendency to look cold and vaguely aloof.

In order to avoid that, there is a little light-hearted piece of my personality on every one of my shelves. I've got an amethyst geode from the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History plunked down next to *Humans Need Not Apply* and a plushie BB-8 perched on top of *Lord of the Rings*. If nothing else, these

trinkets are a reminder not to take myself or my library too seriously.

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