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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: A Peek Inside the Personal Library of a Librarian

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# *My Own* PRIVATE LIBRARY

Before I get started I must give credit where credit is due. I have been so very lucky that I ended up marrying someone who not only loves collecting and organizing media as much as I do, but also someone who had a very sizable collection long before I met him. My husband, Grant, started our current collection in 1994 when he purchased his first CD (which we still have on our shelves today). I must admit my own book collection as a child was limited to my favorite series, including *The American Girls* and *The Wizard of Oz*. In high school and college I began collecting textbooks and other subject-specific anthologies, which have morphed into my professional book collection that I keep at work. When we married in 2008, our joint collection became influenced largely by our shared backgrounds in music, art, and film.



## Acquiring & Organizing

Grant is my own personal acquisitions department! He regularly weeds our collection of items (especially music) that we no longer have a use for, takes the proceeds of resale items to purchase new media, and makes more room on the shelves. Even with this very consistent method of collection review and management, we still have a sizable amount including more than 1,000 CDs and vinyl records, more than 1,000 cassette tapes, more than 300 VHS tapes, around 500 DVDs and Blu-rays, more than 400 adult books, and more than 600 children's books. We organize each in

various ways depending on format. Our book collection is split into a few different categories including fiction, nonfiction, anthologies, and narrative illustration. The fiction section is by far the largest and is sorted alphabetically by author and then chronologically by original release date of the title.

## Nonfiction, Anthologies & Narrative Illustration Books

Our nonfiction section is further split by subject including supernatural, new age and health, philosophy, counterculture, music, art, and film. My favorite recent acquisition in this niche of our collection is *The Occult Book* by John Michael Greer. Not only is it a beautiful hardcover, embossed

gold-flaked edition, but it is laid out with each historical entry summarizing major moments in western culture's hidden and forbidden knowledge—an excellent reference book with lovely illustrations, packed with sources for delving further into any of the subjects or individuals mentioned throughout. Our anthologies section includes horror and science fiction, and our narrative illustration section is largely made up of graphic novels and comic collections.

## Fiction Books

When it comes to purchasing books (and any media really), we tend to be completists of our

favorite authors and aim to purchase and read all we can that is available. Some of our largest author collections include works by: William S. Burroughs, Yasunari Kawabata, Karl Ove Knausgård, Yukio Mishima, Alan Moore, Kurt Vonnegut, and Haruki Murakami. One of my favorite books in the collection was recently published in small science fiction press Spaceboy Books called *Subterranean*. Not only did the themes of human connection in an increasingly technological world resonate with me, but I was amazed that the one and only friend I made in virtual library school while getting my master's degree was the author, Sarah Colombo. The book is extremely ambitious and basically has everything in it that I love. An off-the-grid tech-terrorist cult is keeping the protagonist's girlfriend captive. As mysteries are untangled by a misfit gang that includes companion robots, we meet all sorts of wild, deep, and dark characters amidst references to 90s culture in a not-so-distant surveillance state future. Needless to say, I bought two more copies after finishing the book to give as a gift and to loan out to colleagues. My personal signed copy will remain a gem in our collection forever.



### Pairing and Comparing Novels and Films

In 2018 I set out to increase the number of books I would read by limiting the reading list to books that were the basis for films I had seen, or could see. After reading many, many novels (most of which I had seen the movie first) I quickly realized how effective it was to compare the two, helping me to pay far more attention to the details of the books and be able to better remember and discuss them later. From the

outset I thought I would almost always prefer the book. While I did prefer the book to the film in some cases, such as Georges Bernanos's *Mouchette*, which offered a much deeper look into the young girl's psyche than Robert Bresson's film by the same name, there were some books that were nearly identical to the film adaptations, like Jerzy Kosiński's *Being There*, Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, and Daphne du Maurier's *Don't Look Now*. Still, what surprised me was that some films were so different and improved upon the novels drastically well. For example, *Elevator to the*

*Gallows* directed by Louis Malle was based on a novel by Noël Calef, whose English translated title is *Frantic*. The film was far more effective than the book, and the two were very different, including the relationship between the main characters. Another example was Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*,

whose director Peter Weir may not have changed the story, but the cinematography added to the atmosphere and mystery of this strange turn of the century horror.

### Movies

Our DVD and Blu-rays are shelved together in two large sections. The larger glass door movie cabinet contains more than 200 Criterion Collection films. These are organized alphabetically by title. We also have a smaller number of special, director-specific box sets. The remainder of the movie collection is split between DVDs and Blu-rays on one shelf and VHS on another, also organized alphabetically by title. With movies, as with books, we aim to collect all we can of any given director's filmography. Some directors we have many

titles of in the collection include: Michelangelo Antonioni, Ingmar Bergman, Michael Haneke, David Lynch, Yasujiro Ozu, Satyajit Ray, and François Truffaut. One of my favorite films in our collection is Antonioni's *Red Desert*. Like much of the items in our collection, the big appeal of this film is not only the amazing cinematography but the sound design. It features a disturbed woman in a highly industrialized landscape with a strong visual focus on architecture and audio that perfectly complements it—noisy, thick, and inescapable.

### Music

As musicians, a large percentage of our music collection, especially cassette tapes, were acquired through trades. Located on separate shelves based on format, items are organized, first, alphabetically by artist and, second, chronologically by release date. Various artist compilations



are shelved separately, as are most box sets and other special edition music releases whose packaging defies the average shape or size. One of my favorite items in our music collection is format-wise problematic: Tristan Perich's *8 Bit Symphony*. Housed in a clear CD jewel case, the case actually contains hardware that has a play switch and a one-eighth inch jack for plugging into your playback system.

### Children's Books

When we first learned I was pregnant in fall 2014, the first items we purchased for our son were books (*The Schincephalic Waif*, *The Great Wheadle Tragedy*, and *Master Snickup's Cloak* by Alexander Theroux). We continued to rapidly accumulate books for him from not only our

own childhood collections but also began regularly buying new books for his future collection. Luckily my mother-in-law, now a retired preschool teacher, kept almost every book from my husband's childhood, in addition to books from her pre-K classrooms. My son's bookshelves are organized into sections similar to our adult shelves. Books by the same author or in the same series are kept together. Some exceptions include his Little Golden Books, which often include titles from other authors or series, and holidays. If books are related to a specific holiday, those items are shelved together. Books which we do not have more

than one by the same author in the collection and which do not belong to another series are sorted by subject. Just a few large sections like this include: cat books, monster and dragon books, train books, and other animal books. There is also a separate shelf for board books, which tend to be more

oddly shaped than the rest. Inside each of these sections we do not attempt alphabetical organization yet, since he loves choosing his own books and is only three. The exception to this is the as of now-complete collection of Elsewhere Editions and a few New York Review Books for children, which we keep out of reach in a glass door bookshelf.

### Children's Movies

Our son's movie collection began around the time we started his book collection (before he was born). We already had a few in our own collection that we knew would become his and started expanding on that. His movie collection is the least organized of all in our total collection, sorted at this time by production

studios. We try to keep Studio Ghibli, Pixar, and Classic Disney together. He loves Winnie the Pooh and Thomas the Tank Engine, so any movies with those two characters are all kept together. There is also a smaller set of Claymation movies kept together including titles from Rankin/Bass, Laika, and Aardman Animation. Probably one of my favorite films in the children's collection is *The Boxtrolls*, a Claymation we saw in the theatre before my son was born. We knew then that this would be one to purchase for our home collection, and it is one of my toddler's favorite movies to watch.

### **Cataloging Our Collection**

For books, my husband uses his Goodreads account to keep track of titles we own, and we have a separate account for our son. For movies, we use both Letterboxd and IMDb to maintain "watch lists," which are mostly films that we own. For music, Discogs is where almost all of our music collection is cataloged, especially our extensive cassette tape collection.

*Rachel Evans is Metadata Services Librarian at University of Georgia Law Library*