

What to Do With All the Books?

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Virginia Tracy and Anna Evans at the Moraga Library sorting facility. Photo Chris Lavin

But for those who prefer “paper,” as Young said, managing books in the home can be somewhat of a challenge. When they start to stack up, unorganized, or disorganized, it can create clutter.

But not in Molly Young’s house in Orinda. She’s not related to Randy Young from the earlier reference, not even close. But they might be similar in their approaches to home libraries.

“I try to keep it simple,” she said at her Orinda home, where her book collections are organized by room, by subject, and by people. “My husband is a non-fiction person, and I’m a fiction person.” And then the kitchen has the cookbooks.

Room by room, Young’s collection is organized by how often each book is looked at, and she usually just keeps the hardbacks. She works at Mrs. Dalloway’s bookstore in Berkeley on College Avenue, so she knows what she’s doing, and her house shows it. From the bedroom to the hallway to the den, her shelves are squared like a well-made bed.

“We try not to keep what we’re not going to look at again,” Young said. “But it’s a problem – my husband likes to keep books, too.”

You wouldn’t know it from looking at the Youngs’ collection – it’s immaculate.

“I don’t like clutter,” Young said.

To that end, most homeowners try to rid their homes of unwanted or under-used books the easy way: by donating them to their local libraries for book sales.

In Moraga, that task usually falls to Anna Evans and Virginia Tracy, who spend about 10 hours a week sorting through boxes of books donated to the library and both of whom ironically don’t have masses of books at home.

“I’m one who reads it and it’s gone,” Tracy said. Evans is more a fan of mysteries, so she doesn’t keep those around, either, because what would be the point?

“I live in a condo so I simply can’t keep books,” Tracy said. “But I love them.”

On an adventuresome visit recently to a sorting facility at the Moraga Library, Randy Young pointed out that many people dump lots of books from their “home libraries” thinking that someone else will want their cast-offs, including encyclopedias. Encyclopedia donations actually led to a sign that’s posted on the donation box now: “Please don’t.” Family bibles are another ubiquitous donation, Tracy said. Those don’t sell so well at the big book sales.

“No one needs encyclopedias anymore,” Randy Young said, and laughed. He bought an online version of an encyclopedia for his children and they used it, he said – once. With the Internet, all things have changed, reference-wise. When he was told that a Norwegian-to-English dictionary was cast off recently, and donated to the library system, his answer was a surprise. “Oh!” he said. “We’d probably put that in the Foreign Language section at the next book sale.” Why?

People like to travel with paper, he said.

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