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## What to Do With All the Books?

By Chris Lavin



Molly Young's home library is organized by subject and by how often a book might be revisited. Photo Chris Lavin

Moraga Friends of the Library, and works in the store there selling other people's cast-off books, and shrugged off the question of keeping books clean in every nook and cranny. "Books are great!"

Right. Home libraries are full of books that have been read, are intended to be read, or are just there because they are great books that might be visited again. Just looking at them can be rewarding. Managing what comes in and goes out seems to be the key to keeping the house a healthy and happy environment. 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."

You've got to have it: That latest book, something from an interview on NPR, or Fox News, or the New York Times best-seller title that seems to resonate. You order it, or better, you end up buying it from an independent book-seller. Then what? If you're like most of us you get the book, think "I can't wait to look at this!" and it ends up in one of three places: the bedside table, next to the toilet, or - in those few homes with open space on bookshelves - on a shelf.

Book buying is still a passion for those who haven't taken kindly to a Kindle or a Nook, but it also poses problems. What to do with a physical book collection is a challenge in many homes - impossible shelves full of books, with more coming in all the time.

Think dust.

"Some people just prefer paper," said Randy Young in a simple way. He doesn't seem to be concerned about dust. He is a volunteer for the

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 lots of 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.



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

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

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