

Time and history

Find an example of something that shows the wear of human action, a history of human events. How much of this history is legible - can you tell the story from the object? What makes it interesting?

I am in the process of moving and have so far boxed up 319 books. Everyone always asks why i don't just borrow books from the library given my addiction to reading. Or given the fact that i have moved 23 times, won't i be ecstatic when books are electronic. My passion for books is just not as simple as my love of reading.

I love the history of books. My favorite bookstore is an antique one in St. Louis where you can smell the bookstore from down the street, smell the past wafting through the air, revealing stories about the books within. I love sitting in a library, seeing all the books, looking at the back where all the stamps of its travel have been marked like a numerical passport.

But more than anything, i like being a part of that history and watching the history evolve; i like owning the library. Every book that i have has a story, a past that i helped create, a past based on friends and exchange of information. I can tell you how i bought my favorite books, that i am begrudgingly on copy #17 of *Stone Butch Blues* and that *Written on the Body* acquired strawberry jam from a French cafe when it went on vacation with my best friend. Rush starts playing in my head when i see my copy of *2001* while the site of my torn and wrinkled *Bastard out of Carolina* sends me back to the plane ride where i finished it and could not withhold the tears. I love the wrinkles of my books, the broken spines, the worn feeling of them. Most of my books contain little written notes, sometimes unrelated to the book but entirely related to where i was when i read it, such as the phone number of a loved one. Pictures, notes, receipts, all markers of time are shoved between pages so that opening up *Nijntje op de fiets* reveals a picture of me with my brother at his graduation and *The Vagina Monologues* contains both a note from Eve and a program from the show. I love the fact that most of my books contain the name of some unknown person at the beginning of them, indicating a former owner (although i admit, i am 100% unable to either sell, donate or throw away any of my own books). I often fantasize that when someone gets ahold of my book collection one day, they will see me through it.

The public library easily allows for a history of anonymous people to be conveyed, but knowing the stories is near impossible. One cannot write in public books, and they are almost always covered in plastic to discourage wear and tear. The items left within the book are inevitably thrown away, considered trash. Numbers are shoved on the binding and in the back, systematically showing its past. And once i release a book back to the library, my memories go with it. It becomes a piece of my history lost.

My book collection has become a collection of my stories - who i am, what i think about, what's important. The wrinkles are crucial - they give character and show love.

So i am a packrat, and particularly a packrat of books. I long for used bookstores; i relish half.com. I look at my bookshelves each nite and the reflection makes me happy. When friends visit, they inevitably go home with at least one good book, even though i know that only 75% of them ever get returned (with a 15% rate for *Stone Butch Blues*). Books are my marker of time and history, and so they surround me.