

## True confessions of a heavy library user

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*Another in a series of occasional essays on how we live our lives.*

I am a suburban librarian's worst nightmare. In fact, I felt guilty when the Minuteman Library Network lowered from 30 to 20 its limit on the number of items that patrons could reserve, and then put audiovisual reserves on hold. I wondered if my profligate reserve habits were partly to blame.

You might even call me a library addict. My husband, Allan, and I currently have 40-plus items checked out on the Newton Free Library account we share for convenience of tracking due dates. That's on the low end, since we recently made a large-scale return. More typically, we're up around 40 books, 20 CDs, and 6 DVDs.

But those numbers don't begin to display the depth of our library relationship. For starters, I've been using the electronic book reservation service since before there was Internet access. Back then, I had to dial directly into the library's computer system. I started reserving books so I didn't have to schlep along with Allan on his weekly Saturday-morning library run. I would read about some interesting titles in the Sunday book reviews and then reserve them. Luckily, my husband's a good sport. He's willing to pick up chick-lit and other unmasculine titles reserved in his name.

I tend to go on reading binges. I hit my heights of literary reading back in high school, when I bought almost all of Henry James in paperback. Since then, my tastes have turned down-market. During the past year or so, I've been on a squirrel binge. I've ordered titles ranging from "North American Tree Squirrels" (my bible on squirrel behavior) to children's books. My squirrel books come from the 40-plus public and academic libraries across Eastern Massachusetts that belong to the Minuteman Library Network. If I couldn't use this network, I'd have to lay out a lot of bucks -- and time -- to locate and buy these books.

That leads me to another advantage of my library card. It's helping me wean myself off of buying books. I ran out of bookshelf space even after giving away 800 books -- to a library book sale, of course -- when we moved into our current house. Now I just reserve the newest and most obscure books from the library so I don't have to find a space to store them after buying them.

I believe I'm a relative latecomer to audiovisual reserves, the issue that has recently roiled library patrons. For many years I wasn't interested in reserving music, and I thought the library wouldn't let me reserve movies. But then I stumbled on the list of most-reserved items on the library website. I read quite a few film titles and quickly added some to my list.

A little earlier, I'd gotten hooked on reserving music CDs to expand my musical horizons. It all started when I sneaked a CD of the Gipsy Kings out of my husband's library haul and learned to play it on my computer. Within a week, Allan was complaining, "You're listening to them again?" So I looked for other Spanish music, which led to "A Mediterranean Odyssey," which interested me in other countries. It seems fitting that in the meantime, we decided to visit Turkey, so I've been ordering Turkish music CDs -- there are maybe seven of them in the entire Minuteman network -- on interlibrary loan. Also, I'm trying to untangle the library's instructions for studying the Turkish language online.

I've gotten hooked on other noncirculating items at different times. When I worked for an investment management firm, it was the hard-copy Morningstar mutual fund reports that weren't in my company's budget. When I could find and quote some highlights of a Morningstar report on a fund that we managed, I won fans among our employees. When my husband or I have looked for work or bought a car or even a vacuum cleaner, we've used the library's reference area for databases, Consumer Reports magazine, and more. Allan was a member of a buddy group that met at the library when he was out of work last year. And over in the Newton Room, we've pored over city directories that helped us trace the occupants of our late-1890s home.

We've also attended events at the library on topics as diverse as racism, local history, travel in Cuba, and Japanese food. I didn't last too long in the library's book clubs, but it was nice to know they were an option. One year I met Kathy Glick-Weil, head librarian, at the annual picnic. "I'm a heavy user," I said by way of introduction.

"Don't apologize," she said. "That's good."

So I guess I don't feel guilty about my reserve habit. Besides, in my flush years, when living the corporate high life, I made significant matching donations to the Friends of the Library. But I do feel very grateful that I can take advantage of all that the Newton Free Library has to offer. Even if they never revive audiovisual reserves, I'll still be one happy patron.

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