

## First Place for Graduate Non-Fiction Essay

### In Georgia's Fields

By Alisha Geary

1.

**To think of education only as what happens in school buildings is to ignore much of what has constituted education, especially women's education, during most of history. ~ *Women in American Society*<sup>1</sup>**

There is an old A-frame house with faded and chipping red paint and a dilapidated old shed that lies to the left of Highway 89 just beyond Richmond, Utah. The shed is all that is left of my great grandmother's old property. The green grass grows coarse and high and it overtakes the old pumps of the gas station and the rusty oilcans and the old worn footpath to the pad of cement by the door. The grass has cracked the old cement and covers a set of footprints. It twines around pumps, long unused, and skewers the oxidized oil cans. It rises above the perimeter fence, obliterating old survey lines and property coordinates. The grass erases the marks of occupation, almost.

There is a field that edges the hot and black Highway 89, where every May the grass loses its toehold as gaudy orange, pink, and red oriental poppies blaze through the coarse, high shoots of green like wildfire. The poppies overtake the house that was not the house she lived in. They frame the cement pad that was not put there by my great-grandfather, and they twine in and through the old shed, embracing and supporting the well-cured pine slats that were hand hewn to house my great-grandmother's garden shears, hoe, and old-fashioned scythe. From the road the field looks like a lush green quilt, bound and embroidered by splashes of deepest crimson, brilliant orange, and pale crepey pink. The poppies are like a set of footprints that help me trace the wandering, burning footfalls of my great-grandmother through a field of green.

2.

**It still seems infinitely mysterious to me that there are some of us who have built not a life but a self, based largely on our hunger for what are a series of scratches on a piece of paper.**

~ Anna Quindlen<sup>2</sup>

Dear Lovey,

Have you seen inside my Treasury of Best Loved Poems, the flyleaf with pictures of the poppies? I have entitled the page . . . "in Georgia's fields the poppies grow." When your mom spoke at my mother's funeral she referred to my mother's poppies, so she would have thoughts that she probably has already shared with you.

My mom was a great lover of flowers. She even helped supply a funeral home in Preston with flowers sometimes (if the director was traveling the highway and noted her gardens had something suitable). Usually when you leave a place, (excuse me—when one leaves a place) one doesn't expect one's presence to survive long. I'm sick about my Clearfield gardens—trees taken out, my treasured plants neglected or dead.

Anyway, it's quite a legacy to leave fields of orange oriental poppies sixty years after her gardens were left. We moved to Ogden the spring of 1942—before the poppies had bloomed that year.

Oriental poppies, at least orange ones, have a personality somewhat like my mother's. They insist on being productive in spite of sometimes unfavorable odds. My mom was determined to achieve. She did not have a carefree childhood, but she labored in the fields. My mom was enthusiastic, eccentric, not especially tidy, had great expectations, could get one's attention, be quite flamboyant at times. Now doesn't that describe her poppies?

Loved the poems. You certainly are pointed in the write direction (pun intended). I love the thoughtful prose. It's such thoughts that (which?)\* make a real poet. Or it's the real poet who can make such thoughts. Bless you, dear granddaughter! I also really enjoyed the rhyming "Imagination."

Couldn't sleep last night—the aftermath of having given an RS lesson and having had the entire family honoring me with their presents (pun intended). So I got up to read at 3:30 am. Yes, my book gets more exciting. Alex has just thoroughly shocked Lester with her blood-red silk dress. Please send me the author and name of the book Dave recommended.





\* I actually like 'which', but I think the clause is restrictive and therefore 'that' is correct. Would not a university senior think so? Ah, that raises a question . . . . why do we not say 'an' university senior?

Love you,  
Your Grandmawther<sup>3</sup>

3.

**Instead of going to Paris to attend lectures, go to the public library, and you won't come out for twenty years, if you really wish to learn.**

**Leo Tolstoy<sup>4</sup>**

My mother attributes my love of words to the fact that while she was pregnant with me she read Russian novels. As a secondary education major with an emphasis in teaching high school English, my mother was privy to the latest information on identity formation and the importance of reading. She was also immersed in classic literature. With my brother, she read Shakespeare. With me, her project was the Russians and she went at it with gusto. She read *War and Peace*, *Anna Karrenina*, and all of the history surrounding the Russian Revolution. She read about Czar Nicholas and Rasputin, Princess Anastasia, and *Dr. Zhivago*. She read them all to me, in utero. She said it set me up at an early age with an understanding of history and of classic literature. The irony is, I am not altogether fond of the Russian novels—I much prefer Shakespeare.

4.

**Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations. ~ Henry David Thoreau<sup>5</sup>**

I am a fourth generation English major. Language is my liturgy and grammar my catechism. Sometimes I wonder if I could have been anything but what I am—a shameless bibliophile and a compulsive proofreader. My great grandmother, Georgia Merrill Allen, began this matriarchal line, this addiction for the written word, and passed it to her daughter, Susanna, who passed it to her daughter, Ann, who passed it to me. Each of us has been to college, each has at least an Associate's Degree, and each of us loves books. But for some strange reason the genes seem to run truest in the originator and the current manifestation of these bibliogenes. My mother and grandmother still love words and reading, but not to the extent of Georgia's, nor of mine.

**Biblioholism: [BIBLIO + HOLISM] book, of books: the habitual longing to purchase, read, store, admire and consume books in excess.<sup>6</sup>**

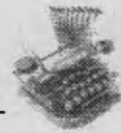
I never had a stark moment of truth in which I knew that I had finally learned to read. Many people remember the exact book, the time, the place, where they were sitting. I don't. I do remember that I was always aware of books. My parent's great oak waterbed frame had a built in bookshelf, which contained a various assortment of books. I remember being put down for a nap, and after exhausting myself thrashing and plunging up and down on the water-filled mattress, I turned and noticed a pink book.<sup>7</sup> I was a girl, predisposed to pink, though I have since taken blue as my favorite color. This book had a picture on the front of it. The cover was seamed and creased, obviously much loved. The picture was of a green hill with a strange tree growing from the center and what looked like purple watermelons dangling from its hoary branches. The hill was more of a mound and the most peculiar thing about this hill was that it had a round green door set in it, and windows peaking out from its rounded sides. Another book had no cover, but the spine had swirly curved letters that held me fascinated.

I often looked for these books, before sleep overcame me. Sometimes they would be jammed tight in line with the other books, but more often, they would be wedged between the mattress and the bed frame. I often asked my mother about these books. She would explain the stories to me and would even begin the first chapters, I knew about chapters, even at three. The pink book was always my favorite to hear, the words were round and smooth, much like ice cream.

In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.<sup>8</sup>

I would close my eyes and envision the door with the porthole in it and the shiny yellow brass knob in the middle. I especially liked the descriptions of the cellars, pantries, and larders—to this day I cannot read this book without getting a ravenous appetite.





Just as I would drift to sleep, I would think, "Now what is a hobbit?" The question never perplexed me; I knew that my trusted book would tell me, and it did: "What is a hobbit? I suppose that hobbits need some description nowadays, since they have become rare and shy of all the Big People, as they call us."<sup>9</sup> My marvelous book would then tell me about the small people who were about my size, with wondrous feet that didn't need shoes and their curly hair and long slender fingers, who like I, were a little shy of Big People.<sup>10</sup>

I trusted my book, it knew so many great and marvelous things. The other book with swirly curvy letters on the spine, that was different from the pink book. Though it had no picture to draw me into another land, its inhabitant left me breathless. I was not all that fond of the first chapter. It contained too many Big People who said too many words that I couldn't quite get my mouth around. I loved words, but only if I could say them. This book tried my patience, but when finally it began to talk of a skinny little girl with decidedly red hair, grey eyes, and too many freckles, I would settle down into the crook of my mother's body and listen. The sound of the words again drew me in, Green Gables, Orchard Slope, the Lake of Shining Waters. Those were names, and I relished them. I remember falling asleep one night repeating Green Gables, Green Gables, over and over, until I fell asleep. It was a comforting sound, and in my mind one word: GreenGables. Though I understood chapters, I didn't understand separate words, they were all syllables to me.

5.

**Formal education was largely restricted to the wealthy and well connected, generally men of the upper class. It was considered irrelevant for most free citizens, dangerous for men of lower status and for women, and even illegal for enslaved black people. With few exceptions, education for upper-class women was confined to a bit of literature, music, and perhaps a foreign language, all taught at home. The purpose of this education was to train women for their station. ~ *Women in American Society*<sup>11</sup>**

Georgia Merrill was the first daughter of the second family of a Mormon pioneer. It was 1904, early enough that polygamy still permeated many of the lives of the early saints, but late enough that the manifesto made the marriage illegal.

From her behavior as an old woman, I could tell that my great grandmother went through a lot of hardship. She would always save the wrapping paper from every Christmas gift, the box, the paper, the ribbon—it would all appear the next year. Her candy was bought the day after Christmas and packed away for twelve months. Mom says it was the Depression that did it to her, but maybe it was more than the Depression and two world wars.

As a child, she worked in the fields and helped in the extensive dairy farms that speckled Richmond like the famous Holsteins they housed. The first family, as the legal family, was given most of the property, the family business—which subsequently would produce the famous ice cream confections of Creamies, Cascos, and Fatboys—and the money for an education. Not only did the first family receive much of the property, but also the sons received every opportunity for education. All of my great-grandmother's brothers had PhD's.

6.

**When the first American colleges opened their doors in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century (Harvard in 1636, William and Mary in 1693), they barred women. ~ *Women in American Society*<sup>12</sup>**

The book is green: imitation leather binding, gold leaf, intricate writing *Fairy Tales by Hans Christian Andersen and Folk Tales by The Brothers Grimm*. The weight is comforting and the size just right to hold on my lap in a sitting position so I can read in the light of the sandstone cave:

This book belongs to my granddaughter.

"Then read from a treasured volume  
the poem of thy choice,  
and lend to the rhyme of the poet  
the beauty of thy voice.  
And the night shall be filled with music  
and the cares, that infest the day,  
shall fold their tents, like the Arabs





and as silently steal away.”

Henry W. Longfellow

Some of my fondest memories of my mother—  
when she read fairy tales to me!

S.A.T

(As I got older I read them to her.)

I look up at my grandmother, who has her usual camping garb on: blue sweat suit, red bandanna around her neck, windbreaker, and the yellow hat with the sunflowers on it. She smiles as she climbs into the sandstone cave, hidden by a rambling juniper tree, and out of the wind. It is Easter and I am sixteen. The weather is so cold that almost everyone else is in their cars or their tents—miserable camping weather. Yet, grandma found where I was. I think she has a special sense when it comes to me. When mom had her two spinal fusions I was sent to my grandma, who took care of me so my mom could rest.

She settles in beside me, and with her graceful hand turns to a certain place in the book: Rapunzel. “I want you to read this to me. When I was young it was my favorite. My mother used to call her Rap-in-zale.” I did my best. Each time it came to call down the fair maiden’s hair, both of us would yell at the top of our lungs:

“Rap-in-zale! Rap-in-zale!

Let down your hair.”

This was our first ritualistic book exchange. Later I would give her the copy of Hans Christian Andersen that her mother had given my mother in a box of books, one of many. This tradition of exchanging books would continue, like a rite of passage, marking the time in my life. In one such exchange my grandma gave me a quartet of themed poetry books. In *Poems of Nature* she wrote:

Cherished will the memory be—  
me and thee  
a favorite—  
nesteled together, reading aloud,  
in our little sandstone parlor! April 1996

That time will always be intensely precious to me. Long after my grandmother is gone, I will always have that magic moment of wind, sand, and magic.

7.

**Every man who knows how to read has it in his power to magnify  
himself, to multiply the ways in which he exists, to make his  
life full, significant, and interesting.**

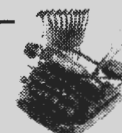
~ Aldous Huxley<sup>13</sup>

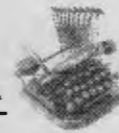
My mother always read to us. After her two failed spinal fusions, she was not allowed to pick us up, or to carry us. She wasn’t even supposed to walk. She would call us over to the bed or the couch and snuggle us on each side of her and read. We read all of the Steven Kellogg stories about Busy Town, *The Magic Pebble*<sup>14</sup>, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Jumanji*, all of the Golden Books, and Sesame Street Books. My grandma sent us some old books of my father’s and we were introduced to *Little Black Sambo*, the Green Giant, Aesop’s Fables, and Pinnochio.

**Cuba: May 14, 1866.**<sup>15</sup>

The sweet smell of tobacco and smoke is in the air that is swiftly becoming oppressive. The cigar factories are full and the workers productive. Boxes of finished cigars, newly rolled, lay awaiting shipment. All seems to be well. The political governor issues an edict to the general populous:

1. It is forbidden to distract the workers of the tobacco shops, workshops and shops of all kinds with the reading of books and newspapers, or with discussions foreign to the work in which they are engaged. 2. The police shall exercise constant vigilance to enforce this decree, and put at the





disposal of my authority those shop owners, representatives or managers who disobey this mandate so that they may be judged by the law according the gravity of the case.<sup>16</sup>

This edict made it illegal to read aloud any material, books specifically. What could make the government so nervous as to make reading a crime that must be vigilantly exterminated?

Workers in the El Fígaro factory could “quote from memory long passages of poetry and even prose.”<sup>17</sup> How could this be when most of the workers could not even read? Saturnino Martínéz, who published newspapers for the workers, conceived the idea. His purpose was to “illuminate in every possible way that class of society to which it is dedicated. We will do everything to make ourselves generally accepted. If we are not successful, the blame will lie in our insufficiency, not in our lack of will.”<sup>18</sup> In seeking to elevate the workers through literature, Martínez had to work around literacy.

The cigar workers in the factories overcame this obstacle by paying a reader, a *lector*, to read aloud to them during their shifts at the factory. This made them work better, faster, and made the time go by more quickly. The *lectors* read from the newspaper, novels, and popular European authors. “So successful were these public readings that in very little time they acquired a reputation for ‘being subversive.’”<sup>19</sup> Thus the edict, written in language that shallowly hides the government fear of these public readings. For, if a man cannot read he can be kept in his place. But if he can read or is read to—he is able to transcend boundaries of class and race.

Mom soon began to take long baths at night to control the muscle spasms in her legs and lower back and we were introduced to “the bathtub books.” She would keep the bathroom door open and we would listen to her read from our beds. The steam would pour out into the hall, baby oil scented, luxurious, calming. Whenever I hear someone drawing a bath, I get all warm and fuzzy and ready to read. From the bathtub, she read all of the *Little House* books to us, *Swiss Family Robinson*, *The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles*, *Treasure Island*, *The Hobbit*, *Caddie Woodlawn*, *The Happy Hollisters*, *Heidi*, *A Secret Garden*, *The Lion the Witch and The Wardrobe*. She read us the sanitized Grimm’s Fairytales, and Hans Christian Andersen, because I got scared easily. My dad would read us Shel Silverstein poems and dog stories from James Herriot. He would also pull out his big physiology book and show us bones, and muscles, and an extremely terrifying picture of an eyeball.

8.

**Most people have learned to read to serve a paltry convenience, as they have learned to cipher in order to keep accounts and not be cheated in trade; but of reading as a noble, intellectual exercise they know nothing or little.**

~ Henry David Thoreau<sup>20</sup>

My brother has facilitated much of my reading, in a roundabout way. He always had a struggle with language, when he was young he was almost totally deaf in one ear. When he began to read, he would laboriously sound out words using the phonics system. F-A-N, were sounds and not a word. My mother said it was elating, yet frustrating, when her three year old would calmly look up and say “FAN,” while her five year old was still sounding out the “a”. Mom used to put all of Aaron’s readers in the bottom desk drawer on the right. After dinner it would be reading time and Aaron would go to the drawer and pull out the next book that he was supposed to read. Often the right book would be missing from its place and would later be found among my dolls or in my dresser drawer.

9.

**Formal education opportunities for women expanded in the 1830s and 1840s. As free public schools were founded, especially in the Northeast, girls joined boys in elementary school—although they were mostly excluded from higher levels until after the Civil War.**

~ *Women in American Society*<sup>21</sup>

Georgia began school when she was six, in 1911. She completed nine grades in eight years, graduating in 1919 with honors. She even gave the “class will” in the graduation exercises, which set the precedent for subsequent eighth grade classes in Richmond, Utah. In high school, she was an active participant in student life. She was a member of the home economics club, a violinist in the high school orchestra, and a charter member of the radio club of North Cache High School. She was determined to get more than just the adequate amount of





education. She must have seen her brothers and the opportunities that they were given. She knew that it was because of their education.

10.

**There is still time to read—if not everything, at least a lot.**  
~ Larry McMurtry<sup>22</sup>

I have always equated reading and the deep love of books to the women of my family. It is hereditary. I feel the accumulation of the written word as heavy as the other legacies that have been given to me. I am not alone in this connection of women and readers. Anna Quindlen, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and self-affirmed bibliomaniac, declares that books perpetuate this sense of women and reading. "There are very few books in which male characters, much less boys, are portrayed as devoted readers. . . . By contrast, friendship and reading are the central themes of much of the best-loved literature for girls."<sup>23</sup>

Many of my strongest role models were the characters in the books that I loved. Jo March, the strong-willed, intelligent, passionate writer who scribbles away in the attic until her stories are sold, who eventually becomes a teacher and mother to children whose parents do not have time for them. Anne Shirley, my vivacious playfellow of childhood, whose stories and poems help finance school where she not only obtains a high school diploma and school teaching certificate, but also a BA in English. Laura Ingalls Wilder, who finds a way for herself through books and teaching. Scout Finch, to whom "the prospect of spending nine months refraining from reading and writing made [her] think of running away."<sup>24</sup> These role models supplemented with the breathing<sup>25</sup> role models of my great grandmother, grandmother, and mother, molded me into an English major long before I ever entered school.

Actually, Scout Finch gave me my first opportunity to voice my own opinion about a book. I have always felt a deep kinship with Scout. She and Jem were the same ages as Aaron and I. We had many similar experiences with our own version of Boo Radley. But even more than this, I felt a kin to the passion for reading and writing. I was indignant when Miss Caroline forbids Scout from ever reading with Atticus again. It was as if Scout were talking straight to me, commiserating with me:

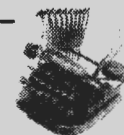
I never deliberately learned to read, but somehow I had been wallowing illicitly in the daily papers. . . . Now that I was compelled to think about it, reading was something that just came to me, as learning to fasten the seat of my union suit without looking around, or achieving two bows from a snarl of shoelaces. I could not remember when the lines above Atticus's moving finger separated into words, but I stared at them all the evenings in my memory. . . . Until I feared I would lose it, I never loved to read. One does not love breathing.<sup>26</sup>

Reading as the very act of breathing. I knew this; lack of reading material was like an asthma attack. Or as Anne Fadiman puts it in *Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader*<sup>27</sup>, having to read the cereal boxes, ice pick instructions, or shampoo bottles, because I had already read everything in the house twice. The right, the privilege, the necessity of reading was being taken away from a girl because of the ideas of the establishment, in this case reading theory in 1930 Alabama. In fact, it was that controversy that sparked one of my own, a definitive turning point in my growth as a student and as a book lover.

My sophomore year of high school we read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I had already been familiar with it since I was nine. Jem and Scout were my old compatriots and I idolized Atticus Finch.<sup>28</sup> I knew and loved the words and themes of this book and was astonished when I was introduced to my teacher's critical and educational theories about characters who were a part of my family.

Mrs. Riggs was a small woman, but boy could she get angry. She presented Atticus Finch as a manipulative, hypocritical man who raised Scout and Jem through dominance and double talk. Her evidence for this character critique was the reading incident. Atticus and Scout have a little talk after the first day of school and Scout informs him that they can no longer read together, because it was wrong. Instead of being angry at this uppity teacher, Atticus calms Scout down, teaches her about compromise and understanding of other people's situations. They make a deal that if Scout will give Miss Caroline a chance, they will secretly continue to read. Atticus may be manipulative, but he is not malicious. When I defended my hero, I was told that I was wrong. I was sophomore, I respected authority, I idolized my teachers, I was polite. I backed down.<sup>29</sup>

What did I do? I, like Scout, after "the Lord sent me more than I could bear,"<sup>30</sup> went home and cried. My mother found me, of course, she was my mom, moms do that. After I had explained the situation, she taught me





something that I will never forget. "Alisha, you are an intelligent female who is capable of doing anything. Who is to say that you are the not one who is right and she the one who is wrong? Can you prove your position?" (She was a debater.) I knew I could, it was right there in the book. "Literature is subjective, you can interpret it any way you like, as long as you can back your opinions."

Armed with this affirmation and my evidence, I went back to school. I found a test waiting for me, figuratively and literally. One of the essay questions was on Atticus Finch. I had page numbers and direct quotations on this test question. If she hadn't watched me write the test, she might have thought I was cheating and had a book. But I knew my stuff, and I proved my point and . . . I scored low on that essay. The world didn't change, I didn't get an "A", but I knew that I was an intelligent female who was capable of anything, and that Atticus was a hero, no matter what.

11.

**The 1830's saw the beginning of coeducational colleges. Oberlin College (Ohio) opened its doors to men and women, whites and Blacks in 1832, followed in 1847 by Lawrence College (Wisconsin). ~Women in American Society<sup>31</sup>**

During the summer of 1923, Georgia attended Ricks Normal College and Seminary in Rexberg, Idaho. She lived in the home of her uncle Harrison Maughn. In return for her board and lodging, she assisted him in the College Chemistry Laboratory. In the lab, they studied water samples drawn from various collection sites in the Snake River Valley. Her work consisted of counting the number of colonies of bacteria and pollutants taken from those water samples. She also took many classes through college correspondence from Brigham Young College of Logan and Utah State Agricultural College in Logan.

Georgia passed the Idaho State Board Teacher's examination and received a Third Grade Teacher's Certificate. She taught school in Montana in Fergus County and Petroleum County. On May 6, 1925 she was married to Marion Allen in the Logan Temple. They lived their first summer together in Blue Creek, Utah, where Marion trucked grain to the Southern Pacific railroad at Lampo. Georgia was cook for six harvesters. After the harvest was over she moved to Cove, Utah, where her husband had been born.

12.

**Although opportunities for formal education increased during this period, women's education lagged behind men's in two respects: 1) Women still received less education than men, and 2) even if they went beyond the elementary level, their education continued to be oriented mostly toward producing good wives and mothers. Few educators thought females' education and males' education should be the same. ~ Women in American Society<sup>32</sup>**

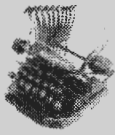
The full flowering of my grandmother's book collecting, I surmise, did not truly begin until middle age. Many of her bookplates have the Layton address where she lived until she died, the house that I remember. Even dying of pancreatic cancer, I remember her as present and imperial. I often thought of her as a strange queen from a faraway place. She lived in a three-story house with an acre or two of rambling gardens and fields of raspberry canes. These gardens were terraced into decline, like the back of a mountain. I remember she would open the gates of the back balcony and let Duke and Queenie, her Doberman and pitbull, race down the six flights of stairs, then down the zig-zag pathway past wild strawberries, iris, hollyhocks, and poppies to the canes below. Grandma and mom would go berry picking and I would often stay inside in the cool dimness and the smell of books.

13.

**In no other country of the world is the nation so much and systematically instructed outside the school as in America . . . one more lively testimony to the tireless instinct for personal perfection. The background of all of this is the great national stock of public library books. Even the poorest person can study them in the most delightful surroundings. ~ Hugo Münsterberg<sup>33</sup>**

My mom knew it was time for us to do our own reading when we would steal the book from the bathroom and finish the chapter, or the whole book when she was gone. She began letting us come and choose our library





books for ourselves, no suggestions even, we could choose. A whole new world was opened to me when I could go to the library and get any book I wanted. My library card was my passport to knowledge.

**“That a famous library has been cursed by a woman is a matter of complete indifference to a famous library. Venerable and calm, with all its treasures safe locked within its breast, it sleeps complacently and will, so far as I am concerned, so sleep for ever. Never will I wake those echoes, never will I ask for that hospitality again, I vowed as I descended the steps in anger.” Virginia Woolf<sup>34</sup>**

In 1929 Virginia Woolf was asked to be a guest lecturer at Cambridge addressing “Women and Fiction.” The subsequent essay spawned from these two lectures has become a classic essay on feminism, “A Room of One’s Own.” I read this essay my junior year of college. In the essay Woolf writes about the fictional Oxbridge, an obvious hybridization of Oxford and Cambridge, whose halls were still overshadowed by male dominance. It seemed at first ridiculous when our fictional narrator was waved off of the grass because she was a woman, but then horror of horror—she was not allowed to enter the famed library because she had no letter of introduction or male escort. A library—a place of higher knowledge, ultimate garner of wisdom and books—was refusing to let a woman enter? It made my book-loving blue blood burn.

I can just imagine that library, pine paneled, marble halled, columns to the ceiling maybe in the Tuscan or Corinthian style. There would be rooms, silent and pure, housing the wealth of ages—books. What a marvelous smell it would have, the combination of must and dust and old paper, ink, ancient wood, and age. The furniture would be the inevitable leather, with deep overstuffed depths where one could curl by a fireplace and read to one’s heart’s content, if one’s heart were male.

14.

**Ever since there have been books, there have been bookworms. That’s more than 4,000 years of voracious reading—and a lot of it accomplished by women. The making of books was a scary new technology: marks made on clay or silk or paper became time capsules of knowledge. They conveyed secrets. They ignored distances. No wonder that, early on, books became sacrosanct in ways we cannot even imagine. ~ Vicki León<sup>35</sup>**

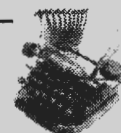
In 1929, Georgia Merrill Allen was twenty-five; she had two children, my Aunt Jackie and Uncle Merrill. In five more years she would have my grandmother, Susanna. She was a teacher in the youth auxiliary of her church, teaching life skills and religious doctrine and running a class on genealogy. She had been living in Richmond since 1927, when her husband decided to build and run a gas station off the highway.

She had already begun planting the poppies. Georgia had spunk and she was as flamboyant as her flower choices. The garden was old fashioned, even at that time, and she cared for it passionately. She loved books about plants, and many of her books show that she read in the garden, rich black soil stains and plant cuttings sprinkle her books, like her spidery pencil marks, and her peppery opinion. In one book she scribbled next to a poem about fringed gentians, “I much prefer dandelions, especially when they are brought in from the sun by a rosy red child.”

15.

**Women’s share of advanced degrees did not grow until after the rise of the women’s movement, with its efforts to encourage women’s education, and the institution of anti-discrimination policies in the 1970’s. ~Women in American Society<sup>36</sup>**

When my great grandmother died most of her literature books went to my grandmother. There were literally hundreds of them. These books were acquired through her years of school teaching at Wasatch Elementary and from her graduate school days. My great aunt and uncle let my grandma take just about anything she really wanted; she was the reader in the family. Most of the books were kept in boxes in storage, some went directly to my mother, and some of have seeped their way to me. Sometimes I wonder if my grandma is actually smuggling books to me. I know that Georgia put my mother’s name in many of her books; they skipped over my grandmother and went straight to mom. I think Georgia’s daughter learned from her mother’s wiley ways. The books always come directly through my mother, but I feel like some of these books have just been waiting to get to me.







One of these was *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* by John Livingston Lowes. On the flyleaf is this inscription: "One of my most loved books! G. Allen—Associated with 'The Ancient Mariner.'" It sits next to my 1898 Macmillan Pocket Classics *Coleridge's Ancient Mariner*. This book has been the key of knowing my great grandmother. The address on the bookplate is the Sycamore Circle address, which places it around 1960, the time she was writing her thesis for her Master's degree. My grandmother e-mailed me a copy of that thesis and I discovered that this book was one of her references for that final paper which was on *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

This book also taught me that my propensity for writing in books was also passed down from the great readers in my life. When I first began my obsession with books, I only wanted hardbound books that were in mint condition. Tom Raabe, author of *Biblioholism: The Literary Addiction* says that this is a variant of biblioholism, better known as biblionarcissim.<sup>37</sup> The first time that I wrote in a book, I felt so guilty that I had to go confess to my mother what I had done. She smiled and took me over to the bookshelf and pulled out *The Road to Xanadu*, which is sprinkled with not only my great grandmother's round spidery hand, but my grandmother's impeccably straight capitals. Mom turned to a page where a third hand showed the loops and curls of my mother's cursive. That alone would make this book my treasure.

There is more. I also found that I am not alone in my extreme distaste for dust jackets. Tightly jammed between page 368 and page 369 is the front cover dust jacket of this book, folded lengthwise to make a bookmark. Page 196 reveals the inside flap of the dust jacket, also trimmed to bookmark size. Page six hold the spine of dust jacket, the perfect size to mark pages. My mother is aghast every time I hastily take a dust jacket off a new book. I roll my eyes and tell her that it just impedes the magic that seeps from the real skin of a book every time one holds it. Of course, some of her book habits bug me, she does read in the bathtub—all her books are swollen with baby oil scented water marks.

In the notes section of the book, Georgia had folded a yellowing piece of loose-leaf paper. On it were the classes she was planning on taking her last year of her Master's: Reading and Comprehension, Elementary Administration, Education Management, Philosophy of Education, Psychology, Language Instruction in Elementaries, Grammar, and English. My propensity for taking way too many credits a semester seems to be hereditary also.

My grandmother can recite Coleridge's poems by heart, my great grandmother owned three different versions of the book, and my mother learned that she should never cross great grandma when it came to Coleridge. In 1961, Georgia received her Master's in Education from Utah State University. I know of two papers she wrote during graduate school, one on Coleridge, a confirmed opium addict,<sup>38</sup> and the other on changing conceptions of grammar in the elementary school classroom.

#### 16.

**The period from the 1970's into the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed tremendous growth and transformation of women's education due to the actions of advocacy groups, changes in law and eventually, the development of cultural values that now created expectations that women would enter the labor market and needed to be prepared.**

*~ Women in American Society<sup>39</sup>*

My mother thinks that polygamy has bred great strength of character in the women of our family. Georgia was the granddaughter of an Apostle of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints; he had eight wives. As one of many wives, each woman had to learn independence; they were given their own house and ten acres of land. They ran their farms; they worked in the dairies, and raised their children. It also taught them to make their own decisions. My great-great-great grandfather only spent one week in eight with each family. The women learned how to live without a man most of time. The women had to work for their own education. My mom says that Georgia scandalized Ogden City by going to town in pants. She played the stock market, she traveled all over the world, and she got a Master's Degree when her teaching certificate was "enough."

Education is hereditary too, then. "Only in the 1980's did women and men reach parity in the number of bachelor's and master's degrees earned."<sup>40</sup> This just happens to be the year that I was born. Twenty-three years later I graduated from Utah State University with a major in Literary Studies and minors in British and Commonwealth Studies and Women and Gender Studies. I was awarded with the Russell Fellowship, ten thousand dollars to go towards Fall 2003 when I started my own Master's Program in the Literature and Writing. I can walk into any public or private library, I learned to read as a young girl, I am not faced with martyrdom every time I open a book. I owe everything to women who are not afraid to push the boundaries of gender roles, who love reading and





use it to elevate themselves, who love me enough to teach me that I am an intelligent female who is capable of anything.

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Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Virginia Sapiro, *Women in American Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1999), 141.
- <sup>2</sup> Anna Quindlen, *How Reading Changed My Life* (New York: Ballantine Publishing Group, 1998), 15 .
- <sup>3</sup> This is an actual email. I didn't make it up. This is how we talk to each other. Really.
- <sup>4</sup> Otto L. Bettman, *The Delights of Reading: Quotes and Anecdotes* (Boston: David R. Godine Inc., 1987), 37.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.
- <sup>6</sup> Tom Raabe, *Biblioholism: The Literary Addiction* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1991), 1.
- <sup>7</sup> It was actually white, but the hills in the background were pink, so I thought of it as the pink book.
- <sup>8</sup> JRR Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 1.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>10</sup> I actually found this particular edition of *The Hobbit* while doing research for my minor's thesis on Tolkien and medievalism in *The Lord of the Rings*. It was a happy reunion.
- <sup>11</sup> Sapiro, 143.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.
- <sup>13</sup> Bettman, 7.
- <sup>14</sup> I know that the title is *The Magic Pebble*, but when as a twenty-one year old I asked my grandmother to get this book for me as a Christmas present, I spelled it pebble in the email. It has been that way ever since.
- <sup>15</sup> Albero Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking Press, 1996), 111.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.
- <sup>20</sup> Bettman, 7.
- <sup>21</sup> Sapiro, 143.
- <sup>22</sup> Larry McMurtry, *Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 100.
- <sup>23</sup> Quindlen, 27.
- <sup>24</sup> Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York: Warner Books, 1960), 28.
- <sup>25</sup> I say breathing instead of living because those characters were alive to me, they just didn't breathe.
- <sup>26</sup> Lee, 17-18.
- <sup>27</sup> This is the best book! I loved it so much it was hard to take it back to the library where my fine is getting so big that I should have kept the book anyway.
- <sup>28</sup> In fact, I was in love with Atticus Finch. This might account for my strong reaction at school.
- <sup>29</sup> What a coward I was.
- <sup>30</sup> Lee, 15.
- <sup>31</sup> Sapiro, 144.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.
- <sup>33</sup> Bettman, 41.
- <sup>34</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Virginia Woolf Reader*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1984), 173.
- <sup>35</sup> Brenda Knight, *Women Who Love Books Too Much: Bibliophiles, Bluestockings and Prolific Pens from the Algonquin Hotel to the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* ( Berkeley: Conari Press, 2000), ix.
- <sup>36</sup> Sapiro, 149.
- <sup>37</sup> Raabe, 77.
- <sup>38</sup> I think the opium connection is ironic, after all Georgia's favorite flowers were poppies.
- <sup>39</sup> Sapiro, 149.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

