

A Time for Rhyme

My husband, Fred Cole, was a Librarian. After WWII service and University, his professional career was spent solely with what was, for much of that time, National Health and Welfare. In WWII, he had served in the RCAF as a radar mechanic and was posted overseas for about three years to air bases in the UK. Fred was a voracious reader. On every 48 hour pass, he would take the train to London, check in for a room at the YMCA hostel and head straight for the Old Kent Road and other London areas noted for their used book stores. He was very organised, he would pack up his many purchases and arrange for them to be mailed to his family back home in Ottawa. His Mother often spoke about his room being stacked with packages of books when he returned post war.

One of his many Librarian skills was in estimating necessary shelf space. He did so for a number of Libraries in his long career. Not long before he died in 2011, he did what he said was only a rough estimate of the number of books we had in the house on our bookshelves and stacked in the many boxes still to be shelved. His broad estimate? 5 to 6,000! I am working on it!

Fred's passion for books was deeply embedded in his psyche. He told me of how, as a child, he would hide a flashlight and a book in his bed and when all was quiet, he would read for hours. I, too, had a habit of reading in bed. We made a pact when we married, that neither of us would take a book to bed. In 49 years, we never broke that rule. Not only did Fred love books and spend most of his life managing, reading, rereading and collecting them, he also loved playing with words and rhyming words.

In earlier pre computer days, Libraries recorded their collections by various means that invariably included 3 inch by 5 inch index cards. The cards were of standard design with a slightly deeper first line for the title and ten lines below for other related information. Typically, both sides were similarly lined. Fred always carried a bunch of 3 X 5 cards in his pocket (including on our wedding day). He would jot down on the cards anything that needed to be remembered, from grocery lists to appointments to random thoughts. At bedtime, he would always check the cards before getting into to bed, saving some and discarding others.

As I believe was typical in those days, we did not co-habit before marriage. When we returned from our honeymoon in 1962, we settled in Fred's apartment. A couple of days later, I was reading at the table and Fred, a very shy and gentle man, tapped me on the shoulder and handed me a folder, saying that he thought perhaps I might want to read the contents now that he had someone with whom to share them. I was almost hysterical as I read them. He had such a wonderful, gentle but sometimes, totally quirky sense of humour and a skill with words that fascinated me. Yet he was never really interested in writing although he was particularly good at Limericks.

A few days ago, I came across one of Fred's "jottings", as he would have called them. Needless to say it was on a 3 x 5 card. It follows:-

How Green Was My Valley

1. Gone Ski-ing with my Valet
2. How clean was my galley
3. How lean was my pally
4. That scream was my Sally
5. How mean was McNally
6. How keen was the rally
7. The Dean checked my tally
8. In Aberdeen Will I Dally
9. Did the Queen Dilly-dally
10. Between is my Alley

Enjoy!

Audrey D. Cole