

THE FUTURE OF READING

A personal history of reading

I used to be an avid reader of all sorts of material: fiction and non-fiction, books and journals, biography, history, and how-to books.

A large chunk of my childhood was spent wandering around in my local library (Hornsby) on Friday nights, when Mum and Dad would take us there for an hour or so. Later in my youth, I can remember riding my bike up to the library in the holidays to find some books. I discovered all sorts of material, particularly on my then favourite non-fiction topic of electronics. I read books from the teen fiction category, which helped me get through those turbulent years. And I used the library for various other topics, mostly to do with DIY bicycle maintenance, computers, and science fiction.

Around year 9, my interests seemed to drift from reading to dreaming to chasing girls. Later, in year 11, my friends and I started a band at school, and my library activity was at a low. But after year 12, and a fairly poor HSC effort, I had a job as a library assistant back at Hornsby Library. "You've always

been a good reader," Mum said, showing me the advertisement in the local paper. Sure enough, I was soon working a 35 hour week as library assistant, while still doing gigs with the band on weekends.

I liked the library job, but mostly because of the human contact, not so much for the books. One of my supervisors (a really great colleague) at a branch library one day said to me, "Andy, have you ever thought about doing the library course?" She was a very encouraging, wonderful branch librarian, and she was looking out for me.

Grudgingly at first, I took up the degree course and started attending night classes. Pretty soon I was doing better than I expected, and started to feel pretty good about myself. The band was still active, and I was starting to pass my subjects with credits. The library often was useful, too, both as an income source, but also as an information source. I still found myself reading the electronics books occasionally, but now it was so that I could build an amplifier for the band, or learn more about music. I still valued the information resources highly.

I got a lot of self-esteem back from before the time I had done my HSC, and started throwing a bigger effort into my studies.

Before long I was getting better marks, even distinctions, and I felt like I could really succeed.

Meanwhile the band was closing down – the guys were starting to find alternative life pathways (as I was), and after some of the original members quit, my heart just wasn't in it anymore.

Fast-forward about 25 years, and here I am, still working in libraries, still reading, but still romantic about 'the band'. These days I tend to read fiction only when I have a long holiday break, or just when I have nothing better to do. I still read a lot of non-fiction material, mostly DIY books, car maintenance, and the like, or the history books that my wife loves to read.

I think as we grow up we all will continue to read, so long as we have found it to be useful or enjoyable in the past. But there will be times in our journey when we have other things to do that are perhaps a bit more exciting than books at the time. I'm just glad I've had such great libraries at my disposal along the way.

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Currently reading *Ray: stories of my life*
by Ray Martin

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