

THE FUTURE OF READING

To Sir with love...

Shortly after the death of Sir Winston, the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust – a not for profit educational institution was established. The Trust administers funds initially raised by the Australian fundraising appeal in 1965 as well as the annual Churchill Fellowship Award scheme.

As a recipient of a Churchill Fellowship Award, I am excited and a little daunted by the plans I am currently finalising for a world tour of seven and a half weeks across the UK, Europe, New York, and Washington DC investigating reading promotion organisations and cultural institutions that support reader development.

The itinerary includes meetings in the United Kingdom with folks from The Reading Organisation, the Reading Agency, the Literacy Trust, Opening the Book, the Edinburgh City of Literature and Scottish Book Trust, Booktime, and Super Clubs Plus, as well as visits to the British Library, Seven Stories Picture Book Museum, and various public libraries in England and Scotland. Similarly in Denmark, Amsterdam, Germany, and Slovenia I plan to visit with library and national reading promotion professionals. In Croatia I meet with the IFLA Chair of Reading and Literacy and also offer a virtual digital presentation at the Libraries in the Digital Age conference to be held after my visit to Zadar. In Paris I celebrate my 'half-life birthday', (which incidentally dates from 1965) as well as visiting the Bibliotheque Nationale de France. Finally across the Atlantic to New York and a road trip to Washington DC to the Library of Congress and the Centre for the Book, upstate to Massachusetts to visit the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, and down again to the NY Public Library, meeting with authors and visiting with Dave Eggers' 826 Valencia and the national Children's Book Council – an organisation that funds and supports the national Reading Ambassador program in partnership with the US Centre for the Book.

The Fellowship is a truly extraordinary opportunity and one I feel extremely privileged and honoured to be experiencing. I join my esteemed reading promotion colleagues in the list of Churchill Fellowship recipients who have been awarded this opportunity before me – Judith Ridge (Western Sydney Literature Project) and Susan Hayes (Director, Literature Board at the Australia Council for the Arts). In due course a report on my fellowship will be available and I hope that it will contribute to recommendations for the development of a national reading promotional organisation for our country.

Churchill Fellowships are awarded to Australian citizens and aim to provide an opportunity for Australians to travel overseas to conduct research in their chosen field not accessible in Australia. The merit of the project and the applicant are the critical factors in the assessment of applications including the ability of the applicant and the project to make a difference to the broader community or the field of the proposed project. The Trust awards an average of \$25 000 per fellowship. Further information and application details can be found at www.churchilltrust.com.au. I would be happy to provide any further information about my fellowship. I am indebted to the Churchill Trust and graciously appreciative of the support of the State Library of Victoria where I am employed as Reader Development Manager, as well as for the encouragement and support of my family, friends, and colleagues in this adventurous endeavour.

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Currently reading *Mr Chicken goes to Paris* by Leigh Hobbs

Me, myself, and my e-book reader

Travelling on the bus one day, I noticed an elderly woman reading from a hand-held computer screen similar to an iPhone. As I discreetly peered over to see what she was doing, I saw in large font "Chapter 15" and realised to myself that, in fact, she was reading a book. Although the youth of today are so-called technologically-savvy, I had no idea what the device was. It was a librarian who explained to me that the device was an Amazon Kindle, a type of e-book reader. This made me question what is happening to the future of reading. Like televisions today, will reading be switched to digital? Would this mean the end of books?

The future of reading is not in doubt. Reading is needed in all aspects of life, whether it is choosing our favourite meal off a menu or understanding the instructions to operate a new camera. Yet the mediums used for reading have changed and will change over the years as new devices are brought onto the market. E-book readers became increasingly popular in 2009. But according to the Gartner Hype Cycle, e-book readers also reached their peak of inflated expectations last year. In other words, the media created hype and great anticipation around the product even though much of the technology is pointless. Undeniably e-book readers have plenty of benefits. They are relatively inexpensive, are portable, and can access many e-books on one reader. An e-book reader would save my back as I lug my textbooks to and from university. However, as quickly as new devices are available just as quickly they become redundant. Why have an e-book reader, iPhone, mp3 player, and computer when they can all be combined into one Apple iPad, the most recent toy on the market?

It is creation of countless superfluous devices that has sustained the survival of the book. Just as the hype cycle explains, once a new gadget appears on the market, people become excited. But after a while people realise that this gadget barely improves or enhances their current lifestyle. So they return to something safe, genuine, and tangible. In the case of reading, that device is the book. Books will still be there when the computer crashes or when the e-book reader screen scratches. Accessing information from books is quick and unproblematic. As a current university student, I have come to appreciate books more. Reading a book is less eye-sore than a glaring computer screen. Moreover, books add a personal dimension which e-book readers and other technologies do not provide.

Picture yourself sitting under a shady tree, sipping on fine wine and munching on brie and biscuits. You are reading Jane Austen's classic, *Pride and Prejudice*. Smelling the musky pages of your book could take you back to the lawns of Pemberley. This ambient situation just would not have the same feel if you were reading from an ebook. I am sure you would agree that the future of reading and books is safe, for now at least.

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Currently reading "To the best of my ability" *The American Presidents*
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