



Love Of Books Brings A New Career

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“I live in a book world.”

Helen Wilson began her close association with books about the time she was 12. Now she has her own book shop.

“I’m happier than I’ve ever been.”

Helen’s father, David Mitchell liked books and liked to read. He collected Arthur Conan Doyle, Ellery Queen, Zane Grey, E. Phillips Oppenheim, among others.

Helen began reading too. The interest in her father’s reading material coincided with the concentration on literature in her school English classes.

“I guess I began collecting Nancy Drew first. Then I jumped to Taylor Caldwell and de la Roche (Jalma). I liked science fiction and collected Robert Heinlein.”

Helen grew up in Washington, D.C. She worked for the Maritime Commission during the war.

The family came to Orlando after the war and then to Jacksonville. William and Helen Wilson have lived in St. Petersburg for about 18 years.

For awhile she was a classified advertising writer for the Times Publishing Company. And she was in central filing for Home Federal Savings and Loan Association for 10 years.

“I continued to pile up books at home and read. My husband loved to read too. I always had this idea in the back of my mind that when I retired I would open a book store.

She reads classified advertisements like they are news. A year ago she spotted an ad for the sale of 30,000 books.

She went down to the antique dealer who’d gotten them with an estate purchase. There they were. This great mountain of old books. No rhyme or reason to them. Just 20,000 books. She chickened out.



But talking about it that evening with her husband, he said he'd go back with her the next day and they'd talk some more.

They decided it was now or never for Helen. The books were piled in an empty store and it seemed easier to rent that store and save the trouble of moving them someplace else. At first, Helen thought she'd just store them there until she got around to opening a business. But she found herself thinking more of those waiting books than her other duties. So she began working with the books. It got to be a family affair almost immediately. William began building miles of shelving, her mother began cleaning and wiping the books with a bit of mineral oil, the Wilson's three sons helped stack and sort. Evenings and weekends were spent in the store.

Then, last summer, she spent her three weeks vacation sorting and cleaning.

"People kept coming in all the time. They'd pick up the books we thought no one would

consider buying. So I decided to quit my job and open the book store."

More shelves were built. The shop opened officially in October. "There is a little of everything. Old books, recent books, childrens' books, new and used paperbacks, a magazine room just grew. There are encyclopedias, reference books, collector's items."

People are looking for religion books. Not just the elderly. Young people are searching for books concerning Jesus.

Collectors are looking for children's' books – for the charming illustrations. Art books are in great demand and so are antique books.

"People love to browse. A lot of them are here three or four hours. One man came in here this week and was here all day looking for a particular German book. We found it."

Helen keeps buying up estates. Dealers buy an estate and are not interested in the books in them. Helen doesn't pick over the collections. She takes the whole kit and caboodle and sorts them in the back of the store.

There are 37,642 books on the shelves. (She keeps a perpetual daily inventory.) And there are 30,000 books piled in the rear in various stage of bding cleaned and sorted. From the unsorted piles after cleaning they are stacked in large brown paper bags marked by

category and eventually make their way to the proper shelf.

Now she has rented the shop next to the one she has. She's painting and William is bracing himself for another carpentry job.

"I'm planning to put all the paperbacks in there and keep the hardbacks in here."

She reads a lot. "I try to read a book a night. I'm on a Dorothy Eden kick now – historical novels. Gothics."

The days go fast at the shop. All books are interesting to Helen. Even mathematics books. William likes historical novels. Fortunately, he reads a lot too. He loves Hornblower.

The boys? Two don't read much at all.

But, ah, Jeffery. Jeffery works Saturday mornings at the book store. "And he's been reading like mad ever since he learned to put words together."

Helen looks with love at the shelves filled with books.

"They take you anywhere."

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