

Actually, it is amazing how much and what we read across our lifespan. I have read a wide variety of texts and books, some worth reading and some definitely not. I have been influenced by them and have internalized messages and ideas that have shaped my life and outlook, and even guided my decisions. In any case, reading was an activity I could always take for granted, or so I thought, more like breathing, at least for those who unlike me have not suffered from asthma.... and other breathing difficulties. At some point during this journey of exploring trauma I realised that I could not take reading for granted anymore. As I surfed mindfully through the experience trying to understand causality I discovered that reading and breathing were intertwined, interdependent, inextricably linked, woven together like a colourful rug or fabric. And then I remembered incidents and events forgotten or simply brushed aside, denied, underestimated or simply misunderstood. I remembered the times I had been read stories, my first fairy tales, nursery rhyme books, old magazines, school books - my small mental arithmetic books. Yes, I was very keen on Maths at primary school. But I also remembered been subjected to violence as a child and the time my school library book was torn to shreds and I could not bear telling the teacher what had occurred. And I remembered how I went to great lengths to hide my library books henceforth. And I also remembered Greek high school experiences and being chastised for my literary preferences. The first teacher who taught me Contemporary and Ancient Greek literature, highly concerned about my literary preferences, suggested I should take up reading the dictionary, the ideal bed time reading book, as she had pointed out at the time. I further remembered an assignment we were asked to write based on our extra curriculum readings during the last year of school. The topic was about influential women whom we admired. On returning my essays the teacher, flabbergasted, had commented harshly on my choices. To her horror and amazement, one of the women I had chosen to research and write about was German and the other had been born out of wedlock. As she handed back my work she advised me to reconsider my choices and perhaps write something about Virgin Mary. The power dynamics in a school setting are rarely in favour of a teenager... I still remember the tears welling up in my eyes and my confusion at her reaction, the sense that it was unfair, but also that something was eluding me, something that would have required too much effort from me to understand and would have shattered the life narrative I was desperately trying to cling on to. These school memories also brought back memories of the tiny neighborhood bookshop I often visited after school in order to purchase cheap editions with my pocket money. The owner wrote poetry and often gave me signed copies of his books, which I recently found forsaken on a shelf among poetry anthologies.

Anyway, since that distant adolescence my family and I have accumulated quite a few books over the years, and recently, I decided to recycle and throw out books to provide storing space for new ones. It has proved an interesting experience, which I may write about in another post, since it is still underway. Meanwhile, a few days ago, I read an interesting story in a monthly, crafts, travel and decorating, magazine (*Country Living.uk*, April, 2016) about a woman, Sarah Henshaw, who left the media world and turned her love for books into a business venture. She opened a waterside floating bookshop called *The Book Barge* and wrote a book, *The Bookshop that Floated Away*, about her

experience, her self-discoveries and journey along the many canals and 707 locks.

Tonya Alexandri, March 26th, 2016