

## Finding “Gold” on the Living Room Bookshelves

by Barbara Brabec

Adapted from [\*The Drummer Drives! Everybody Else Rides\*](#), Chapter 11, “A Man of Many Interests and Talents”

**Harry Brabec (19927-2005)** was a legendary Chicago Symphony musician and Chicago show drummer greatly admired by his peers. In 2010, Barbara published the above memoir about her life with him. A year earlier, she had begun to sell his lifelong collection of books, CDs, and tapes on Amazon.



*Just a sampling of some of the beautiful books in Harry's collection . . .*

**HARRY'S PARENTS** couldn't afford to buy books when he was growing up, so it was a thrill, he said, when the bookmobile came around to his school. Because he had been denied books of his own as a child, he vowed never to be without them as an adult.

Harry and I had always bought books and shelved them artistically in our living room and offices midst pieces of art and craftwork, so books were as much a part of our daily lives as clothing, and I took them for granted. But books meant much more to Harry than just something to read and learn from. To him, they were real treasures that needed to be cared for accordingly.

I like to highlight content in my books so I can go back later and find the passages that spoke to me the first time around. But Harry never turned down a page or made a mark in his books, and if I so much as picked up one of them, he'd sass me about handling it with care. He bought some books second-hand if he couldn't get them any other way, but mostly he bought books new, and then kept them in

like-new condition after reading them. If a book had a dust jacket, he always removed it so he wouldn't wrinkle it. If the book was heavy, he would read it on a table so as not to damage it. He turned pages very carefully, and I never once saw him lick his finger to turn a page. If the book was a paperback, he was always very careful not to crease the spine. Thus, most of the books in his collection were still like new decades later. Neither Harry or I could have imagined when he was buying those books that some of them would ultimately sell on the Amazon Marketplace to other book collectors for up to ten times their cover price.

**HARRY WAS A TRUE BIBLIOPHILE**, but I never thought of him that way until I began to study his book collection after he was gone. Funny how you can look at something for decades, yet never really see it. Although I had looked at Harry's books on our shelves and handled many of them each time we packed up for another one of the many moves we made during our years together, I wasn't aware of the vast range of topics represented there. The librarian in Harry insured that all books were arranged alphabetically by title within their particular category, and woe was me if I took a book off the shelf and didn't put it back exactly where I got it. Although I identified more than three dozen topic categories in his library, most of them fell into the broader categories of music, show business, circus, art, history, war, humor, the English language, and trivia books such as *Who Put the Butter in Butterfly*, and *Why Do Dogs Have Wet Noses?*

Harry's large collection of big band and jazz books included several memoirs by musicians, and I was surprised to find that several of them were personally inscribed to Harry; autographs I'd never seen before. I wasn't interested in the books Harry was buying, just as he wasn't interested in the books I was adding to my collection, so maybe that's why he never brought his autographed books to my attention. In spite of his gregarious nature, he was a very modest man, and maybe he simply thought it would be bragging to show me these signed editions. The only thing I'm sure about now is that he appreciated the special inscriptions in those books because they were clearly written by musicians he knew or had worked with at one time or another.

Harry also had a passionate interest in military bands and band books and music, particularly those related to the U. S. Marine Band and the circus. Nostalgic books on his shelves included all of the books written by Norbert Blei, a Czech who wrote about many places and things familiar to him. He also had a good collection of books about Czechoslovakia, fine art, literature, and many history books, particularly those relating to ships and the sea, the Civil War, and World War II.

He was fond of Custer, too, and I recall one time when I came up with an original Custer joke that he liked. “What state was Custer in when he died?” I asked very seriously.

“That’s easy,” he said. “He died in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in Montana.” “Nope,” I said with some smugness. “He died in a state of PANIC.”

I usually played the straight man for Harry’s jokes, so when I could “get him” with one of my own, he was very proud of me.

To buy any of the out-of-print collectible books and CDs from Harry’s collection, click over to my [Barbara-Brabec-Books-catalog](#) on Amazon and scroll through it. (Most items, but not all, were entered in clumps, by category, but you can also search for books by title.) I started to list the collection on Amazon in 2009, and am still adding a few items from time to time. So far I’ve sold more than two-thirds of all items listed, and I put all this money into landscaping and other improvements to the house, which I think Harry would have approved of.

If you happen to have a collection of older books in very good condition, you might like to [read this article](#) about selling a collection on the Amazon Marketplace.

## **NOTICE**

Harry also left Barbara with a mint-condition collection of nearly 5,000 vinyl LP records, of which some 3,000 big band, jazz, and classical albums still remain. If you’re a vinyl collector, [contact Barbara](#) for more information about her plans to sell these records privately in 2015.