

Archiving Your Work: What You Should Know Now

You may not think about archiving your work unless you've won an award or are far along in your career. Yet, curators of major archives of children's books, including the Arnie Nixon Center (CSU Fresno), the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection (USouthern Mississippi), the Kerlan Collection (UMinnesota), the Mazza Museum (UFindlay, Ohio), the Northeast Children's Literature Collection (UConn), say it's never too early to learn about archival care.

"Authors and illustrators can contact archivists for advice at any point in their career, but earlier is better," says NCLC curator Terri Goldich. "Archivists can give advice about home storage and organization prior to donating materials, which can make the donation process smoother and help preserve materials before they leave home." Arne Nixon Center librarian Jennifer Crow adds, "There are a number of reasons why authors might donate papers early in their career. Proper storage and preservation should be done before damage might occur. Home storage space and conditions are often problematic for optimal upkeep of materials." "In fact," says Ellen Ruffin, curator of the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, "many of our donors find it a relief to pack up boxes and send them to a place that will organize, preserve and protect their work."

Key factors to consider when choosing where to place your work are your comfort level with the facility's ability to care for it; your accessibility to the material once donated; if your work's a good fit; and how you will relate to the curator who will advise on the process.

You should also ask the facility about how your material would be used by scholars, students and others; what its current acquisition goals are; and what it will do to promote your work within the collection. "Many archives have active online presences (website, blog, Facebook page) announcing new contributions and generally making a splash," says Ruffin. "The de Grummond also has a newsletter in which we recognize new contributors, and a gallery in which we exhibit the original works." The Arne Nixon Center issues a press release and announcement about donations, and tells visiting classes. The NCLC has a similar set-up, and Goldich says their material also travels quite a bit to exhibitions and to publishers for the purposes of reprinting."

"Activity can vary quite a bit," Mazza Museum director Ben Sapp explains, "so, it's important to find out in advance what'll be done. Some institutions exist to house and protect the material and are not concerned with making it available to the public, others are concerned more with viewing material than with archival care."

As to benefits, Tomie dePaola says, "When I started out in the early 60s, there were 'horror' stories floating around about original art from well-known books disappearing into unknown hands only to turn up for sale on the open market without the knowledge of the illustrators who created it; about original art being lost forever, and even just thrown away. These types of abuses

were more common when illustration was “work for hire”, being paid a flat fee instead of royalties.”

But, even now, material that’s not protected can be damaged or lost. “Emotionally, it makes me VERY content to know that my work is safe, well cared for in a protective environment, available to researchers and especially schoolchildren who are welcome to visit and see original art and manuscripts and will be long after I’m gone and books are out of print,” says dePaola whose work is at NCLC.9:10/12