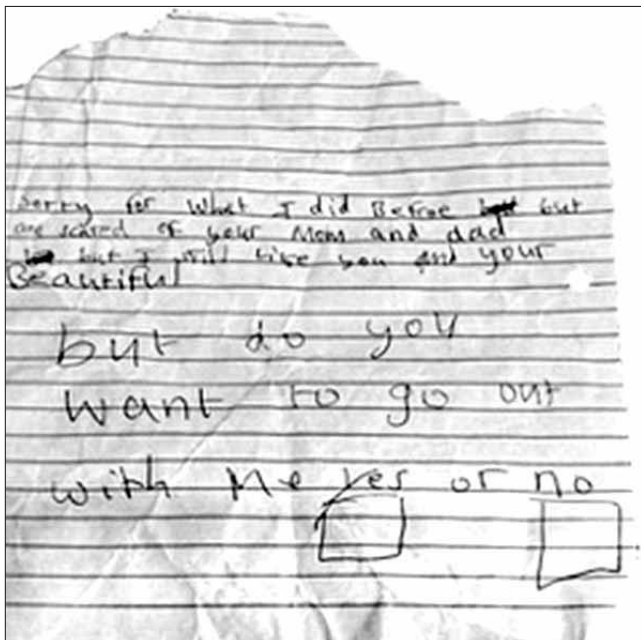


Books & Writers



What's in your (old) books?



photo/buzzfeed.com

Someone found a note from a young reader stuffed into the pages of an old book—although the question is timeless.

By David R. Altman
Books & Writers Editor

Do you have some (very) old books around your house? I bet you do.

Have you ever opened one of them and found a note inside or scribbling along the margins put there, perhaps, years ago by a family member or someone who owned the book before you?

Talk about something fun to do on a rainy (or hot summer) afternoon—this is it. Grab one of those old books and thumb through it—and you'll be amazed what you find.

A few examples from books around our house:

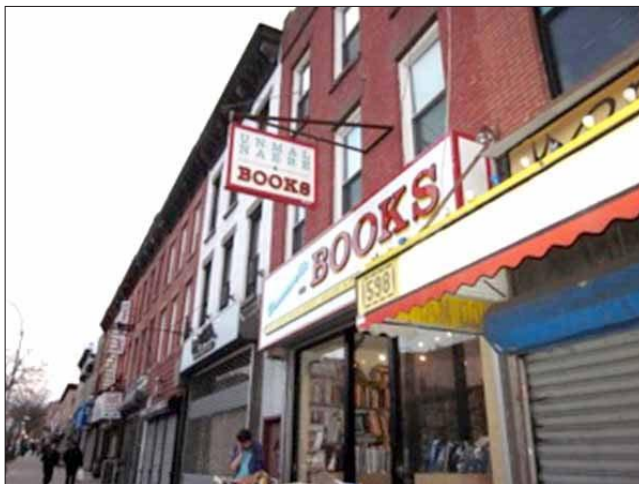
Found inside a book called *English and American Literature*, by William J. Long, in the middle of a chapter of *The Pilgrim's Progress* I found a short newspaper note that had this headline: "Possum Hunt Held on Thursday Night."

The article went on to de-

scribe an "enjoyable possum hunt...by a group of young people." There was no name of the newspaper or the date, but on the back of the clipping was an advertisement for Blue Plate Mayonnaise for 10 cents a jar. That book was published in 1913.

From another book, *The Greening of America*, by Charles A. Reich, came a note from my late father in 1971, when I was 19, on a clipping from a New York Times column by Peter & Brigitte Berger called "The Eve of the Bluing of America," and Dad had scribbled: "Dave, this is not very well written but he has a point which could have been said in 15 words. See if you can tell me what the point is."

Actually, I do understand the point of the article now, but I'm not sure I did back in 1971 (which puts me in mind of the Bob Dylan lyric, "I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now,").



photo/UnnameableBooks.com

One of the country's oldest independent bookstores, Unnameable Books, in Brooklyn, NY, once had its store window display filled with items people found in old books.

There are thousands of items found in old books every day, including one where a reader found a Civil War's soldiers letter home describing the looted house outside Savannah where he was stationed with Sherman's troops.

At the website www.abebooks.com, comes the following note by another bookseller in Irvine, California.

"Inside a volume, one of eight bought at a local garage sale, I found a charming child's Christmas Card with the inscription 'Merry Christmas to Harry from(fairly illegible). About two years later while trying to decipher the signature, the name suddenly revealed itself....' from Frank Baum.' I sold it about a year later on AbeBooks.com for \$2,500 to an investment banker in Massachusetts as a Christmas present to his father, a passionate collector of Oziana."

Other not-so-notable items from abebooks.com readers included someone finding a baby's tooth in one book and a (used) Q-Tip in

another. Other odd items range from things like old theatre tickets, bookmarkers, love notes, old photos, postcards and occasionally money. In fact, the folks at Unnameable Bookstore in Brooklyn had so many items they ended up putting them on display in the store's window.

There are many websites dedicated to items found in old books, including these two: forgottenbooks.com and librarything.com.

If you find something in those old books, send us an email here at the Progress and let us know—and we might include some of the more unusual items in a future column -- news@pickensprogress.com.

[David R. Altman, is a member of the American Academy of Poets and the Georgia Writers Association.

When Altman is not writing poetry—or this column—he is writing about tournament bass fishing. Check out his blog at georgiabigsticks.com.]