

## **Appreciating American Classics - MY JOURNEY**

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My passion for reading and collecting was started by the contents of an old bin in my grandparent's guest bedroom.

The old bin happened to be full of comic books. For hours on end my brother and I would pour over the comics, he being interested in the saga of Scrooge McDuck, while I read Classics Illustrated. Classics Illustrated were printed from 1941 to 1971 and were classic stories (i.e. Uncle Tom's Cabin, Red Badge of Courage) in comic book form. I loved the stories these comics told, especially those set in America. However, at the tender age of seven, I came to the tragic realization that the bin was not refilling itself with new material, and I should assemble my own collection of Classics Illustrated.

Collecting Classics Illustrated is one of the best memories I have. At the time it was all about collecting each of the 169 issues (which I did), but, looking back, it was more about the time I spent with my Dad and Brother. We must have gone to every comic shop in Michigan, and dozens of others around the U.S. and Canada.

It took me a few years to figure out that the comics were adaptations of stories and did not convey the full effect of reading a novel. My first attempts at branching out to unabridged classic American novels could be described as discouraging. It turns out I may have not been ready for Melville or Hawthorne when I was in elementary school. But then I tried London and Twain and a love of the American story was born. I can actually pinpoint the moment I switched allegiances from comics to novels: It was in *The Call of the Wild*, when Buck returns to find Thornton dead. The emotions conveyed by London can only be appreciated in their original form.

Since that moment I have been reading classic novels and short stories as rapidly as I could. At first it was the older classics from Cooper and Poe, but then I evolved to the more modern and began to appreciate the variances of the modern language; from Hemingway's staccato bursts to Capote's almost poetic dictation.

Collecting books wasn't something that immediately consumed me like Classics Illustrated had in my youth. I had always gotten books at the library. But after checking out *Ethan Frome* for the third time I decided that if I loved a book enough to reread it, I should own a copy. Library book sales, garage sales and auctions have been prime destinations ever since. I find it hard to beat the rush of finding a classic where you least expect it.

What I am most proud of about this collection is that every work I've annotated is American, one I've read, enjoyed and would recommend. To me, my collection is invaluable, and each piece fulfills Webster's definition of a classic in my mind:  
*Classic- an author or a literary work of the first rank.*

An annotated bibliography of the this collection can be found at  
<http://www.lib.msu.edu/events/contest/2009contest.htm>