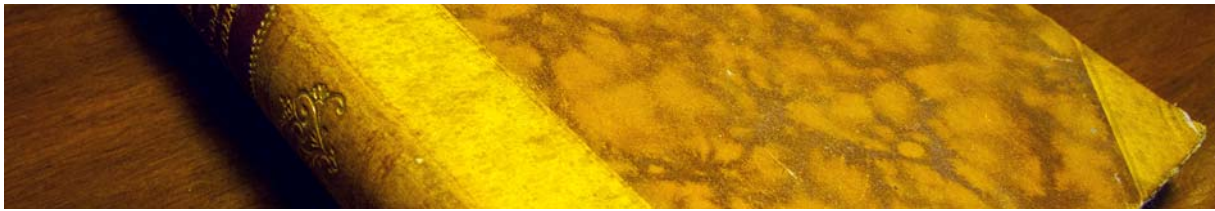


From the Kitchen

18 May 2011



I came across an artefact some months back – a book. I haven't seen one of these, outside a museum, for more than thirty years. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw it at a recovery sale. It was very old – mid-twentieth century – with a hard cover. It took me back to my school days when we still learned to read. I must say I struggled somewhat to make sense of it. I have had no need to read for many years. However, persevering has paid off and I started to enjoy the experience.

One thing which kept distracting me was my omni pumping away with news and intertexts and the latest from Andornetto.

The last physical books were printed around twenty years ago and now you almost never see one, certainly not with a hard cover. They became obsolete, first because everyone read electronically and then that was eventually replaced with spoken words. All I need to do is clip my omni behind my ear and I'm connected to everyone everywhere. There are very few places around the country where I'm not connected.

Having found this old book, I wonder how the storytellers like Andornetto produce their work. Does she speak it straight into her omni or does she still have to use one of those old keyboards? If it's just speech, how does she make corrections later? I must find out some time. When I was little I had a 'computer' with a screen and a printer. I used it for reading messages and information on what used to be called the Internet and for doing work for school. With the printer I put text onto paper. That was so long ago. I still have a screen at home, on the wall, for watching 3Ds from the Cloud – "any 3D any time".

I listen to most of my literature while I'm in my Lec – we used to have to control these vehicles manually but they do it all by themselves now. I love short tales and verse. I can also listen to almost any 'book' which was originally printed in the old way. It costs a bit, though – fifty cents per minute – but it's worth it. In bed at night my wife and I often sync our omnis so we can listen together or we pipe one of them through the house soundwave. Like me, she loves Alexandra Andornetto and Alec Greven and some of the new young tellers, like Fiona Targon and Ric Spring.

I'm thinking it might be interesting to start collecting old books. Some psychologists say that using your eyes to input data should be brought back because it's good for brain balance. I don't know how that will go with the students, because I know that when I am reading now I cannot take in data from my omni or from the wall screen. My son and two daughters think that I am crazy for bothering with such old technology and say that they have no interest in learning to input that way. I would like to get my wife interested in reading again, but she is happy to have me read to her from time to time. My children cannot understand the attraction for me of struggling with printed text when we have such easy access to fiction and nonfiction, simply by voicing a request.

I understand that there are still some institutions where printed books are kept as archival material for historical purposes but, as all of them have also been voiced, their contents are

readily available. Some years ago there were debates about the value of keeping printed books, as it was becoming clear that there would soon be very few people who would be able to decipher their contents and this may well be the case, as reading is no longer taught. There are some museums with collections of discs embedded with musical or visual entertainment but there are very few devices in existence to decode them. Fortunately we have had people dedicated to converting the information to new formats so that we may still enjoy the contents. However, as the pace of technological development accelerates, it is becoming ever more expensive to keep the conversion up so that we do not lose the content. This expense is passed on to all of us, such that an ever growing proportion of my income is going into keeping our omnis and screens pumping. It is already the case that an increasing number of people are missing out because they can no longer afford the cost. I hate to think about the boredom they must experience much of the time.

I feel it would be a worthwhile endeavour to connect a group of people to create a cloud-wave to have our leaders institute reading classes and even reintroduce reading as part of our schooling, so that printed text may once more be a viable form of entertainment, at a reasonable cost. This would also be a useful insurance against the day when the amount of electronic noise interference becomes so great that using an omni will cease to be a pleasurable experience or useful for work and education. Unless someone comes up with a radically new way of disseminating information, electronic communication may well grind to a halt through saturation. The printed book may be the only thing that can save us.