



## COLLECTING VINTAGE CHILDREN'S BOOKS WITH Evonne Moslein

The magical words 'once upon a time' had this Jo'burg collector hooked; today she lives happily ever after with a library of 2 500 volumes

“Can we ever forget *The Story of the Three Bears*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Cinderella* and the delight we found in the escapades of *Peter Rabbit*? asks Evonne Moslein, probably South Africa's most prolific collector of children's and rare illustrated books. “Just

first editions in their glaccine wrappers housed in specially made miniature cabinets watched over by original porcelain Beswick figurines of Peter Rabbit, Gemima Puddleduck and others. This is but a whisper of other first editions on her groaning library shelves.

to think of the words 'Once upon a time...' fills the mind with the delights of childhood and of a never-never land so far, far away. A long time ago many of us lived there and believed it to be true. These books probably brought us more happiness and peace of mind than anything we have ever read since, or will ever find today.”

For Evonne Moslein, the wide-eyed innocence of the stories and tales of children's books that live on in all of us long after the novels and romance of adult life have faded and are forgotten, is one of the reasons she was drawn to collecting them. The extraordinarily beautiful artwork contained within the pages of each book, especially those covering the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th century are her passion and her collection of 2 500 children's books in English, Dutch, German, Afrikaans, French and Russian fill her beautiful Jo'burg home.

After a life-time of collecting, Evonne knows where every one of her 2 500 books can be found and when asked about the first book she ever bought, she immediately pulls out *Christmas Once is Christmas – A Christmas Carol* by Phillips Brooks in its original dust wrapper and can recall exactly where and from whom she bought it. Among some of the rarest of the books she owns is a complete set of the first four books written by A. A. Milne and illustrated by E.H. Shepard with their dust jackets: *When we were very young* published 1924; *Winnie the Pooh* from 1926; *Now we are Six* from 1927 and *The House at Pooh Corner* from 1928. All four books slide into a special leather slip case made by Baynton, the famous bookbinder from Bath in England. She also has the handwritten and illustrated *Alice's Adventures Underground*, printed before the publisher decided the book should be called *Alice in Wonderland*.

A prized collection is Beatrix Potter's first editions in their glaccine wrappers housed in specially made miniature cabinets watched over by original porcelain Beswick figurines of Peter Rabbit, Gemima Puddleduck and others. This is but a whisper of other first editions on her groaning library shelves.

### The history of the children's book

Although children's stories and folk tales have existed ever since man could speak, it was only in the mid-1700s that children's books came into their own. Although adventure stories such as *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* and fairy tales from Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm were popular, they were considered inappropriate for children and most children's stories tended to have a religious and moral storyline. These early children's books didn't have pictures, only occasionally black and white woodcuts. As printing technology improved in the mid-1800s, children's books began to feature bold and colourful illustrations, some featuring panoramas, pop-ups and movables. The magical, superbly illustrated children's books with their full-page colour illustrations by Arthur Rackham, Edmund Dulac, Willy Pogany, Kate Greenaway, Walter Crane, Richard Doyle, Kay Nielsen, William Timlin and Beatrix Potter, to name but a few, are highly sought-after today by all collectors – if you are lucky enough to find them!

### EVONNE'S TIPS FOR ASPIRING COLLECTORS

- While the stories and their authors are important when collecting, book illustrations that have been looked upon for many years as a minor art form have now become a highly respected and a serious form of art.
- Never buy a book thinking and hoping it may become a sound investment for the future. It does not work that way. Buy those that appeal to you. This way your library will become your 'best friend' and in time will give you the dues you deserve.
- Collectable children's books should be in fine to near mint condition.
- Although the more traditional collecting areas remain desirable, the more modern first editions can be just as valuable – first editions of *Snoopy* or *Disney* are highly prized and today can easily fetch more than antique books.
- Build up long-term relationships with dealers specialising in books who can help you in your search for that elusive gem and who have your interests at heart.
- Great sites to visit are [oldchildrensbooks.com](http://oldchildrensbooks.com) and [collectorsweekly.com/books/childrens](http://collectorsweekly.com/books/childrens).

### TIPS FOR LOOKING AFTER YOUR BOOK COLLECTION

- Handle all books with care and as gently as possible, especially very old ones. Regular dusting is important but make sure you handle them carefully. When taking a book from a book shelf, never pull it by the top of its spine. Take it with both hands holding it in the middle.
- Make sure books are stored in a room that is neither too humid nor too dry as humidity causes foxing (small brownish spots or blotches) and too dry air can cause books to become brittle.
- Keep books away from direct sunlight or any strong light. GH

RIGHT: The Beatrix Potter books in Evonne's library are housed in specially made cabinets, where she also keeps her collectable Beswick figurines.



THIS PAGE: 1. A rare 1935 first edition *Mickey Mouse Story Book No 2*. 2. This rare 1904 first edition 'stump' book *Puss in Boots* by Louis Wain with wooden boards and an ivory clip was bought in London. 3. The first book Evonne bought was *Christmas Once is Christmas – A Christmas Carol* by Phillips Brooks. 4. *Peeps into Fairyland* published by Panorama Picture Books in 1882. German publisher Ernest Nister produced many movable picture books at the time in Nuremberg. They provided a lot of designs for a variety of novelties including pop-up, panoramas, revolving picture and 'slot' mechanisms that replace one picture with another. 5. A rare *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter, published in 1916 by the Saalfeld Publishing Company, New York.

Don't miss the National Antiques & Decorative Arts Faire at the Sandton Convention Centre, Jo'burg from 19–21 July. This year, the theme of 'Crossover Collecting' will give you the chance to mix and match antiques and collectables across different genres and periods, so there's bound to be something for everyone. Visit [naada.co.za](http://naada.co.za).

WIN tickets! See page XX.