

Andrea Kempf is one for the books

Andrea Kempf, professor/librarian, is a die-hard reader and writer of bibliographies.

Twenty-five years ago, Andrea Kempf, professor/librarian, was having lunch with Carolyn Kadel, professor/director, international education, in the faculty cafeteria, when Kadel expressed the need for a list of novels, located in the JCCC collection, relating to political science. Shortly thereafter, Bob Perry, now a retired sociology professor, requested a bibliography of novels relating to African social issues. Kempf was happy to oblige. Michael Frisbie, the library's systems administrator, has put Kempf's bibliographies online and linked them to the Billington Library card catalog.

Today, 1,234 books later, Kempf's love of reading and sharing books with others through 42 online bibliographies in the JCCC library database remains unabated. And that impressive book count is just a part of Kempf's work. She has compiled another 40 unpublished bibliographies; reviews about 10-12 books a year for the Library Journal and 10 books for the Kansas City Jewish Chronicle; and, in her spare time, reads for fun.

"If I have a focus for my bibliographies it is international and multicultural fiction," Kempf said. "My bibliographies respond to the needs of JCCC curriculum, questions people ask me and, every once in a while, to my own particular interest."

Kempf, who has a bachelor's degree in literature from Brandeis University, a master of arts in teaching degree in literature from Johns Hopkins University, and a master's degree in library science from Simmons College, has a missionary's zeal about the need to read fiction in order to understand the world.

"I believe if you read a novel carefully, and you read around the plot to the 'back stories,' you understand a country's

culture and people in a visceral way – a way you can't get by reading a newspaper or a textbook."

Kempf has taken two sabbaticals to write bibliographies, reading approximately 400 books during each six-month period. (She used her first sabbatical to write a book about romance authors.) Bibliographies include library-catalog information, descriptive one- to two-sentence annotations and a rating of reading difficulty.

Kempf also has been reviewing books for the Library Journal since 1975. Yet-to-be-published books arrive by mail, and Kempf has 10 days to read the book and return a 180-word review to the journal. The Library Journal named her Fiction Book Reviewer of 2000. Her selections for Jewish Chronicle reviews are of her own choosing.

A true bibliophile, Kempf guides others to books that prove useful or enjoyable. Traveling to the Netherlands? Want a creepy mystery? Consult with Kempf; she welcomes calls.

While Kempf reads almost constantly, she admits to going through periods when nothing interests her. That's when she turns to re-reading her favorite romance novels.

She never watches television. She does read The Kansas City Star and The New York Times every day and the Sun once a week. She owns about 3,000 books in her private collection.

Last year, Kempf's family bought her a Kindle wireless reading device so she wouldn't have to pack 14 books for a vacation. The Kindle is okay with Kempf, but the technology makes it harder to indulge in a little secret: She flips to the back of a book and reads the ending first. ■