

## Bookcases Empty of Old Friends

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*Published in the IEEE-EMBS Pulse, vol.3(4), p. 66, July-Aug. 2012*

I gave away most of my books. It wasn't an easy thing for me to do, because I have never before willingly or knowingly gotten rid of any of my books. I still had many of the books I had acquired as a youngster and all the books from my college education. Many books that I had bought to update my knowledge and support my writing were also there.

This wasn't an easy thing to do. I had always cherished my books, from the paperback novels by Zane Grey that I had bought as a kid to the highly technical biochemistry books only a few years old. They were all treated well. I did not write in my books and I protected them all from the elements. The pages were not dog-eared nor were they visibly worn. Many of my books had plastic covers.

Books are a treasure to me. They have knowledge, ideas, methods, and entertainment. Books can expand one's mind and free one's imagination. Books have been the key to my professional and personal life. But, at least for the books I gave away, their time had come and gone. It had been years since I had opened many of them, and it was now time to pass them on to others who could appreciate them anew.

In *Ecclesiastes*, it says that there is a time for everything: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to love, and a time to hate. *Ecclesiastes* says nothing about books; however, it does say that there is a time to keep, and a time to cast away. I knew that it was time.

The opportunity came through an email from an organization called *Books 4 Cause*. This organization collects books and sends them to be used in Africa. This was what I had been waiting for; this was the way that I could say goodbye to my old (and not so old) friends and feel good about it. So, it came to pass that my books are now on a long journey halfway around the world.

Of course, I still have some books. Even with most of them gone, the books most useful to me remain. The vacancies on my many bookshelves are slowly being refilled.

Of what use are books these days? There is so much information available online that it is easy to forget the need for books. When I need something fast, I go to the internet, and there it is, right in front of me. And, if I don't understand some of the words that are used, I can explore their meanings with just a few clicks of the mouse. But, as Annie Murphy Paul said in a recent *Time Magazine* article (15 March 2012, p. 65) "You can't Google context". When I need more depth, that's when I turn to my books. They tell me everything, although they lack the convenience of *Wikipedia*.

The other day, two of my grad students came to me to ask if they could clean out many of the old journals that I had accumulated for many years. Among them are forty years of *IEEE Transactions on Biomedical Engineering*. “Why keep them?” they questioned, “Everything’s on line these days”. And they have a point, but that would mean getting rid of more old friends and removing more of my history. It will take just a little time to get used to the idea, so I said to them, “Give me a little time, and I will eventually catch up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although it is now the 21<sup>st</sup>”.