

Riddance

My love of books dates back to elementary school. I can still smell the paper and ink and book binding glue from over a half century ago when I wandered among the stacks at our school library. Often mixed in was the wonderful essence of an orange based perfume worn by a young pretty librarian's assistant. She was kind of orange all over. Red hair, an orange hue to her make up, and usually a scarf or other accessory of that same color. I was in the fifth grade, and so she didn't smell as good as lunch, because when the lunch bell rang my ten year old heart chose the cafeteria over her presence.

Yet a mere decade later in college I was continually distracted in the school's library by a red haired young woman who would not have guessed the way she held her chin or moved her wrist to flip through pages absolutely transfixed me with yearning, lust and at least a dozen other emotions we humans were not designed to analyze, but to which we were meant to respond. My response was to invite her home to my nest of books.

I grew up to become a book-loving adult with a voracious reading habit that has now reached and passed its apogee. Age has left my eyes with less acuity, and my mind tends to fall asleep when I get too settled and comfortable in a favorite chair.

When we lived up north in the Big House, books just seemed to accumulate in various rooms and my wife often complained about the piles. She wondered why I couldn't keep them all in the bookcases I had built in every room of our home. But I didn't like to shelve a book before I finished it. I wanted my reading out where I wouldn't forget it, no matter how many books I'd begun. I usually had as many as ten books started, jumping from one to another. It's quirky way to read, but that's how my mind works.

I was running out of book shelf space, too. I had books on shelves in the every room including the kitchen and was in dire need of another solution when an astounding thought occurred to me: I didn't need to keep every book I had ever bought. Now that I think of it, I'm not entirely certain the thought sprung first to my mind or my wife's. But in any event, there certainly had to be a few books I could give away and not feel the loss. It was a revelation, and I figured my largess would also open up space for new books.

Finding a place to donate them was easy. I volunteered at a drop-in center where I could easily place them on a table in the Free Store. But first I had to go through the agony of selecting which to give

away. I had to be in the right mood to let go of any of my books. Unlike the new moon, the urge didn't occur on a regular basis. Frankly, it didn't happen often.

Eventually, the desire to rid myself of at least a few books struck me as I rose from my bed one morning. I ate a hearty breakfast and planned how to go about the process. I had arranged all the books according to my unique system of categorizing subject matter... History went High on the wall, Religion to the Right, Middle Ages in the Middle and Technology Anywhere. Dewey's anal scheme never impressed this bibliophile. I still carry a resentment toward a cleaning woman who one day decided the shelves in my office looked messy and rearranged half of them by book height ... tall to the left, short to the right ... before I came home and stopped her. I've had trouble finding what I want ever since.

But now, fortified by a wholesome breakfast, I finally decided to begin sorting out the books to give away by choosing a color. Orange seemed appropriate, for no particular reason. And so, in the same spirit as the fireman in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, with my finger I began to ruthlessly hook any of the orange books I found, roughly pulling them out of line like teeth from their sockets and slamming them to the floor. After a few minutes of such activity, I returned to the kitchen to treat myself to a donut. It is nonsensical to become famished in the middle of a big book elimination project. Later, I sat down on the floor and mulled over less than a dozen orange books. How to decide which would go or stay? Was the book a gift from a dear friend? Would I ever read or refer to it again? If yes, had I done so in the past 25 years? If not, was it only because I couldn't find it?

Finally, I had two or three books I was willing to part with. And so, with the morning's work out of the way, I figured that was enough self-sacrifice to keep me feeling righteous for the next five years. And it must be time for lunch.

You may think I did nothing but read and busy myself with books, but that would be far from the truth. For one thing, I married a redhead ... the girl from the college library ... and they have a tendency to keep one busy guessing what they'll do next. Another hobby was eating, but recently I've had to cut back and it's left a lot of time in my schedule. Of course, I had many other pursuits, although none come to mind except woodworking. I built shelves. I can't remember ever building anything but bookshelves. I've finished them all with the beautiful wood stain. It has sort of an orange color to it.