

## Books - Burden or Friend

As I look at my bookshelf, I can see my genealogy research in heavy binders. My physical geography and positive psychology book that I pick up now and then I have memoirs I have read that I don't want to part with. I have books on writing such as *How to Grow a Novel*, *Plot and Structure*, *The Artist's Way*, *Character and Viewpoint*, and *Steering the Craft*, to name a few. Cookbooks and reference books about birds, plants, trees, and perennials in Canada and the US. I even have history books about Canadian Prime Ministers, books about France and both world wars.

*What would I do without these books?*

Just the other day, when friends asked about the route from Winnipeg to South Dakota and across Montana and Idaho, and up to British Columbia, I jumped from my chair to run downstairs to a large crawl space—our basement with no windows—to get a map. I was lucky this time. I knew exactly where it was.

“Why don't you get rid of some of these books,” Larry often asks.

I cull them every once in a while. I take them to a second-hand bookstore where the owner gives me a discount on books in her store, but this seems to defeat the purpose.

"I don't need any more books," I say as my eyes survey the tall shelves for books.

I am about to leave the store when I ask, "Do you have any books about kids playing hockey?"

"I think there is one in the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books in the room over there," she points to a small room to the right.

I locate the books. *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, *Hooked on Hockey*, and I found *Chicken Soup for the Writer's Soul*. I had to get those. I brought ten books in and left with two.

I cannot take my nursing books into the secondhand store because she doesn't sell textbooks. I have lent them to Filipino nurses who need to upgrade their nursing when obtaining their Canadian licence. I am lucky they didn't bring them back.

*How many heavy medical-surgical books do I need?*

When I need to look up adverse effects of drugs, learn about the latest types of surgeries, and look up diseases my friends want to know about, I go straight to my computer where I find up-to-date research articles.

One day, I recall sitting in the crawl space, with a lamp and a makeshift seating area, reviewing my university term papers.

*Do I need to keep these?*

One term paper and notes about religions in the world caught my eye. As I sat and read notes I had carefully written in class, I found I couldn't understand what the professor was trying to get across. That was fifty years ago.

*I thought things were simple then.*

Disgusted at my lack of understanding, I threw my notes into the garbage and moved on to my boxes of nursing education meetings.

*I finally found something I can throw away. What about confidentiality? All those names. I can't just throw them away into the garbage and there is too much to shred.*

I stacked the boxes on top of one another, made it up the stairs, went to my backyard, built a campfire and slowly fed them to the flames. First, it was one page at a time as I reluctantly let them go. I sit there all afternoon, reviewing meetings for the last time as the hot embers lap up the words.

Now I stall. I cannot bear to throw any precious memories away.

Recently, I picked up "Bus 9 to Paradise" by Leo Buscaglia.

*I will read this, then throw it out.*

It didn't happen. After I read it, I put it back on the shelf.

It has too many inspiring ideas; I can't throw it away.

And so it goes....