

UP FRONT Moving sometimes helps us reconnect with old friends

[Moving sometimes helps us reconnect with old friends](#) By William L. Spence of the Tribune The Lewiston Tribune | [0 comments](#)

There's very little about the process of moving that can be called fun, but one thing that comes to mind is rediscovering favorite books as you pack and unpack.

When I relocated to the Palouse a few weeks ago, at least half my boxes were full of books. Putting them back in place was like getting re-acquainted with old friends. I don't know how many volumes I have, but just seeing them line the shelves gives me a feeling of contentment no Kindle or electronic reader could ever match.

One of the best books I've ever read was "Ship of Gold in the Deep Blue Sea," by Gary Kinder. I may have mentioned it in an earlier column, but if it's good enough for a second and third read, it's good enough for a second mention.

The nonfiction book talks about efforts to salvage 21 tons of Gold Rush-Era gold from the SS Central America, a steamer that sank off the Carolina coast in 1857, in 8,000 feet of water. Part adventure story, part historical narrative, part high-tech treasure hunt, it's just a rousing good read. My only complaint is that ... wait, I can't finish that without spoiling the chase.

Another fascinating book is "The Emperor of Scent" by Chandler Burr, which talks about scientist Luca Turin, his new theory of smell and how it's received by perfume companies and the scientific community.

"Start with the deepest mystery of smell. No one knows how we do it," the book begins. "Despite everything, despite the billions the secretive giant corporations of smell have riding on it ... despite the most powerful sorcery of their legions of chemists and the years of toiling in the labs and all the famous neurowizardry aimed at mastering it, the exact way we smell things - anything, crushed raspberry and mint, the subway at West Fourteenth and Eighth, a newborn infant - remains a mystery. Luca Turin began with that mystery."

Author Don Stapp deals with scientific mysteries of another sense in "Birdsong: A natural history."

Like Kinder and Burr, Stapp focuses his book around a single engaging personality - in this case Don Kroodsma, one of the world's experts on birdsong. While following Kroodsma around on predawn bird recording sessions, the basic question he investigates is why birds sing.

"If the functions of birdsong are only to claim a territory and attract a mate, why do chipping sparrows sing one song but marsh wrens sing 50 or more?" Stap asks. "Why do mockingbirds continue learning new songs throughout their lives? Why in some species ... do females sing as well as males?"

Kroodsmas's own book, "The Singing Life of Birds," is more in-depth but just as interesting. It also comes with a CD recording of the songs of different bird species.

I'm not much of a fisherman, but the opening few paragraphs of "Spring Creek" by Nick Lyons are enough to make anyone reach for a rod and reel. The writing is Hemingway-esque and gorgeous in its simplicity:

"Every morning, at the bluff that ended the last bench, we would stop the car and get out, and then look down into the valley stretching off in front of us as far as we could see ... Except for the willows on the inner rim of the bench, near the headwaters of the East Branch, and the ragged line of cottonwoods in the distance, there were no trees; the river lay open and exposed and I knew at once it would be hard to fish, with no cover, no breaks from the sun, with every movement of rod or line or person taken to be one of the trout's great predators here - pelicans, osprey, kingfisher, merganser, heron, gull."

And what list of favorite books would be complete without at least one geology tome? Check out "Snowball Earth" by Gabrielle Walker, which discusses geologist Paul Hoffman's theory that the entire Earth froze solid on multiple occasions about 600 million years ago, producing the environmental stress that resulted in the evolution of complex life.

"Earth looked set to stay locked in slime forever. Why did complex life appear at all, and why did it wait to emerge until that one point in time, just a few hundred million years ago?" Walker writes. "To answer this, Paul Hoffman seized on an idea that was first proposed 60 years ago, and was then dropped, half-heartedly resurrected, and dropped again several times ... He marshaled new evidence, restored and amalgamated old ideas, and employed fierce arguments to persuade the people around him. According to Paul, life's richness, diversity and sheer overwhelming complexity arose from a mighty catastrophe. It's called 'Snowball Earth.' "

It's a good thing I'm finally settled in after the move. I have a lot of reading to catch up on.

Spence covers politics for the Tribune. He may be contacted at bspence@lmtribune.com or (208) 848-2274.