Paleontologist Neil Shubin has explored “one of the great transitions in the history of life: the invasion of land by fish.” He opened the 2009-10 Library Society season on October 28 by sharing his discoveries.

Professor Shubin’s compelling and intellectually challenging book Your Inner Fish: A Journey Through the 3.5-Billion-Year History of the Human Body won the Best Book Award from the National Academies. His key discovery, Tiktaalik roseae, a fish with a neck and wrists, has been hailed as the “missing link” between land and sea animals.

Shubin is the Robert R. Bensley Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Organismal Biology and Anatomy and Associate Dean of the Biological Sciences Division. Well aware of the rigors of fossil hunting above the Arctic Circle where Tiktaalik was found, he nonetheless told the Chronicle of Higher Education that he is looking forward to getting back into the field, where he hopes to discover a “fish with fingers.” We hope that when he finds one, he will return to the Library Society to tell the tale.

On February 24, the Library Society will welcome back 19th-century Italian opera specialist Philip Gossett, the Robert W. Reneker Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Music and the College.

Professor Gossett has devoted his career to raising the profiles of Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi. When he received his Ph.D. from Princeton in 1970, many musicologists believed it was beneath them to stray from the study of Renaissance and earlier masters such as Beethoven and Bach. In 2004, Gossett was awarded a Mellon Distinguished Achievement Award for his discipline-shaping work. The Library Society is honored to have him speak during this final academic year before his retirement.

To round out the season, on May 12, the Library Society will welcome Eugene Fama, Professor of Finance at the Booth School of Business and a leader in the study of finance management.

Professor Fama revolutionized the field of finance when he developed the efficient market hypothesis, articulating the relation between risk and return.
The Value of Gifts-In-Kind

The Library Society most commonly supports the University of Chicago Library through annual contributions by members that help to fund the purchase of databases, manuscripts, and other research material recommended by the Library’s bibliographers. But this past spring, as I was preparing to move, I took pleasure in giving to the Library in another way—by donating a portion of my own book collection.

Many people make valuable in-kind donations to the Library. Faculty members are encouraged to donate their research papers for the University archives. Students and alumni may have wonderful ephemera or club papers that document University history. Book collectors who want to ensure that their assembled works are kept together and made available to researchers frequently turn to the University of Chicago Library as an outstanding steward and curator of their collections. Gifts-in-kind are often made as collectors prepare to move or via a bequest.

Collections donated to the University in the past have greatly benefited students, researchers, and exhibitors at the University. Many of the Web exhibits described in this issue of Libra make heavy use of in-kind donations, among them, the B. Heller & Co. Collection, which includes materials donated by Sally and Herb Loeb; East European Jews in the German-Jewish Imagination—From the Ludwig Rosenberger Library of Judaica; Images of Prayer, Politics, and Everyday Life—From the Harry and Branka Sondheim Jewish Heritage Collection; and Printing for the Modern Age—Commerce, Craft and Culture in the RR Donnelley Archive. Each of these exhibits gives researchers around the world access to images of materials that previously had been seen by only a lucky few.

We expect that Barbara and Bill Yoffee’s generous donation of African American and children’s literature, described on the front page of this issue of Libra, will be of enormous value to researchers and students of literature, history, African-American studies, gender studies, and sociology.

If you or someone you know may be interested in donating in-kind to the Library’s collection, please contact Scott Perry, Head of Budget, Gifts-In-Kind, Vendor Relations and Program Acquisitions for the Library, at 773-702-8734.

With warmest regards,

Philip M. Burno
Library Society Chairman