

The Evolution of Charles Robert Darwin  
Betty Robinson, Haiku by Dan Dana

DAN

**Darwin Day**

COVID's on the hunt  
evolution's not done yet  
hide behind your mask

nature's famous law:  
"survival of the fittest"  
stay alert, humans!

our tasty bits tempt  
hungry predator wants more  
she can't eat just one

wily genes mutate  
natural selection works  
Darwin showed us how

seek god's protection?  
or seek knowledge through science?  
nothing fails like prayer

BETTY

Charles Robert Darwin is buried in Westminster Abbey not far from Isaac Newton. I once stood looking down at this great man's tomb, this bigger than life human being's resting place and wondered what his life - his life had been like away from the books, the discoveries, the experiments. Darwin was an author, a naturalist, a geologist and a biologist. He was more of a philosopher than he realized and he learned taxidermy. But, did he have a family life? Did he love someone who loved him back? Did he have a temper? Did he ever laugh at himself or was he always Mr. Perfect? Did he have friends and, if so, did they like him for what he was and not for what he did? How did he evolve into the man he became? After all, Darwin wasn't always an evolutionist. He slowly became one over time. Charles Robert Darwin. His wife called him Charley.

BOB

Charles Robert Darwin was born February 12, 1809 in Shewsbury, England, the fifth child of Robert Darwin, a society doctor and financier and Susannah Wedgwood Darwin. They were a family of scientists and wealthy. Life started happily for Charles. But his mother died when he was eight and he was raised by his three older sisters. When he was young he loved to roam the hills with his dog, hunting, and collecting bird's nests and all sorts of bugs, especially beetles. All of his life he was obsessed with beetles.

DAVE

“Whenever I hear talk about the capture of rare beetles, I feel like an old warhorse who suddenly hears the sound of a trumpet.” Once I found two distinctly different beetles. And then I saw a third. Well, I just had to have that third beetle but there was no place to put the other two down. So, I put one in my mouth and grabbed for the beetle. The beetle in my mouth secreted something that caused me to spit it out and in doing so lose the other two.

BOB

In 1825, I decided that my son would become a doctor and sent him to the University of Edinburgh Medical College, the finest medical school in England. Charles lasted two years.

DAVE

The subject was boring and the operations gruesome. I did not do well. “I am not apt to follow blindly the lead of other men.” I all but stopped my studies but kept busy learning taxidermy from a freed black slave and bringing home all kinds of plants and animals. Some of them I ate. There was this owl that looked really delicious. The taste was indescribable.

BETTY

Good or bad?

DAVE

Indescribable.

BOB

That son of mine! He disgraced me at Edinburgh. I had to move him to Christ College Cambridge to study Divinity. Any fool can master Divinity. I advised him of my displeasure. “You care for nothing but shooting, dogs and rat catching, and you will be a disgrace to yourself and your family.”

BETTY

Charles had a girlfriend while at Cambridge. Her name was Fanny. The romance didn't last very long probably because Charles was forever out in the fields collecting beetles and things and writing copious notes on what ever he found. One December, Fanny wrote him a “dear John letter” saying she was getting married and not to him! Wonder how he felt about that?

DAVE

“A scientific man ought to have no wishes, no affections – a mere heart of stone.”

BETTY

Okay.

DAVE

In 1831 destiny paid me a visit. I returned from a geological expedition in Wales to find a letter from John Henslow, my college mentor. Henslow proposed that I join Captain Robert FitzRoy as a gentleman passenger on the H.M.S. Beagle soon to be setting sail for the coastline of South America. Would I go in his place? Would I go in his place!! Father was distraught.

BOB

No! What a damn waste of time. No! Not under any circumstances! Find a church and start baptizing babies!

DAVE

My cousin, Emma and the rest of the Wedgwood family talked father into giving his consent and I sailed as the Naturalist on the H.M.S. Beagle, December 27, 1831. The voyage was to last two years. It lasted five years. We circumnavigated the globe. “Whilst on board the Beagle I was quite orthodox but I gradually came to see that the old testament from its manifest

false history of the world and form, it's attributing to God the feelings of a vengeful tyrant, was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindoos or the beliefs of any barbarian.”

DAN

**Is Atheism a Faith?**

is atheism  
a belief system like those  
we call religions?

if no evidence,  
is not believing belief,  
or simply reason?

is end of living  
your afterlife's beginning  
if nothing happens?

can not lifting weights  
be your daily exercise,  
or just self-deceit?

I have a hobby ... \*  
not collecting foreign stamps,  
hours of pleasure

DAVE

What I eventually said, however, was, “I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of God. I think generally...an agnostic would be the most correct description of my state of mind.”

BOB

The Anglican church maintained that Darwin returned to Christianity before he died. His children, his wife, and his friends vehemently asserted that that never ever happened. It wasn't evolution that turned Darwin completely against religion. It was the death of his ten year old daughter, Annie.

DAVE

On the voyage I found many exotic plants and animals and sea shells on volcanoes. In Argentina I went inland with gauchos, dug up bones and fossils and saw the horrors of slavery as well as too many human rights abuses. I am against slavery and “ranking the so called races of man as

distinct species. If the misery of the poor be caused not by the laws of nature but by our institutions, great is our sin. The love for all living creatures is the most noble attribute of man.”

BOB

On the Galapagos Islands Darwin found volcanic rocks and giant tortoises. Being an adventurous young man he decided to take a ride on one of them..

DAVE

I found that when I approached a tortoise it would retreat into its shell. So, I would climb aboard and when the tortoise decided to get up and move we would go for a short ride. Short because I kept losing my balance.

BOB

From island to island, Charles found mocking birds alike and yet different. He theorized that the birds started out the same but took different paths when they separated. He became fascinated by coral reefs and wrote several books about them. “It was snowing butterflies” at one place he visited. Darwin came home loaded down with fossils and stuffed birds. I wonder if he stuffed the birds?

DAVE

Of course I stuffed the birds. I learned Taxidermy, remember?

BOB

Stuffed or unstuffed, he came home with a different attitude towards animals.

DAVE

“Animals, whom we have made our slaves, we do not like to consider our equals.”

BOB

Charles Darwin was a great list maker. Lists would have headings of “pros” on one side and “cons” on another. So, when the time came to consider marriage, Charles made a list entitled “to wed or not to wed” Among the pros were “a constant companion and a friend in old age” and, my favorite, “better than a dog.” Among the cons were “Less money for books” and a terrible loss of time.”

DAVE

“A man who dares to waste one hour of time has not discovered the value of life.”

BETTY

The pros won. In 1839 Darwin wed his first cousin, Emma Wedgwood, a well-bred, well educated young woman. Darwin was twenty-nine and Emma, thirty. They had known each other all their lives. In the England of that time it was not uncommon for first cousins to marry. But, it was a problem. More of a problem was that Emma was a devout Christian and Charles a shaky agnostic. They had many conversations about religion and both feared for their marriage because of their beliefs. But Emma said of him, “He is the most open, transparent man I ever saw, and every word expresses his real thoughts.” Charles said of her...

DAVE

“She would humanize me and soon teach me there is greater happiness, than building theories and accumulating acts in silence and solitude.”

BOB

They married. Had ten children and spent many loving, happy years together, talking, raising children and playing backgammon. At the end of his life he said to her...

DAVE

“I am not the least afraid of death. Remember what a good wife you have been to me. Tell my children to remember how good they have been to me.”

BOB

Once when two of the children were with him instead of Emma he said to them, “It's almost worth while to be sick to be nursed by you.” He loved his family.

DAVE

I worried for my children. “How paramount the future is to the present when one is surrounded by children.” Eugenics was a concern.

BOB

Darwin experimented with plants to understand and cope with inbreeding. Three of his children died and the other seven lived unhealthy lives. He once lamented that, “We are a wretched family and ought to be exterminated.” But his boys George, Francis and Horace became quite successful. An astronomer, a botanist and a civil engineer, they were knighted and became Fellows of the Royal Society. His son, Leonard, was a soldier, a politician, an economist and a eugenicist. Darwin was proud of his children. But from time to time, he suffered from Depression.

DAVE

“We stopped looking for monsters under our bed when we realized they were inside us.” I believe that “A moral being is one who is capable of reflecting on his past actions and their motives – of approving of some and disapproving of others. The highest possible stage in moral culture is when we recognize that we ought to control our thoughts.” Difficult to put into practice.

BOB

Darwin buried himself in work. He was constantly experimenting, constantly re evaluating, correcting and changing his conclusions.

DAVID

“To kill an error is as good a service as and sometimes even better than, the establishing of a new truth or fact.” But, “It is a cursed evil to any man to become as absorbed in any subject as I am in mine.”

BOB

In 1837 Darwin began writing The Origin of Species. Completed in 1839, it was not published for twenty years.

## DAVE

I was somewhat fearful of the public's reaction and for good reason. I once saw childish behavior in an Orangutan at the zoo but I never said people were descended from monkeys. I said we had a common ancestor. I also said, "An american monkey, after getting drunk on brandy, would never touch it again and thus is much wiser than most men." I'm not sure I would have ever published *Origins* if it wasn't for my friend and colleague Alfred Russell Wallace. He kept discussing his theories until I had to publish mine. The Origin Of Species was published on November 24, 1859, the day my son died of scarlet fever.

## DAN

**We Are Accidental People**  
two million years past,  
our concestor's mom conceived,  
one stout sperm out-swam

bested brother-horde  
every human since descends  
if other won, who?

what hist'ry would be?  
whole other population,  
wars, leaders, prophets

that quirk's chance result:  
what is now would not have been,  
strange facts would be true

if alt granddad won,  
I would not be writing this,  
nor you reading it

## DAVE

The idea of evolution did not start with me. Other scientists were thinking along those lines. In 1794, my Grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, wrote a book, *Zoonomia*. In it he posed a question, "Would it be too bold to imagine, that all warm blooded animals have arisen from one living filament?"



BOB

Darwin was a prolific writer all of his life. He published his last book in 1881, the year before he died. The book was called, The Formation of Vegetable Mould Through the Action Of Worms with Observations On Their Habits.

BETTY

Beetles? Now worms? Why am I not surprised?!

DAVE

“If I had my life to live over again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once a week.”

BOB

Charles Robert Darwin died of heart disease on April 19, 1882 at the age of seventy-three. He was to be buried at Downs House, his home. But his friends and the scientific community insisted that he be buried at Westminster Abbey. Charles had become an English Hero. Thousands of people attended his funeral, family, friends, scientists, dignitaries from all over the world. Charley had many friends.

DAVE

“A man's friendships are one of the best measures of his worth.”

BETTY

Charles Darwin changed the world. His name lives on in so many different ways. There's even a dog food called Darwin. In the Galapagos 250 species and several higher groups bear his name. Mount Darwin, the highest peak in Tierra del Fuego, was named for him in 1834 by Captain FitzRoy, during the voyage of the Beagle. And one of my favorite people in the world is named Darwin!

BOB

Did you know that Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin were born on the same day? February 12, 1809. They lost their mothers at a young age. They suffered from Depression. They changed the world. In his writings, Darwin left us words to live by. Words that have a very special meaning at this time in our world.

DAVE

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives... Nor the most intelligent... But the one most responsive to change.”