

The River of Grass bUUKies
and
“Creation, The True Story of Charles Darwin,”

Hi, I am Kathy Jens-Rochow and I am a member of the bUUKies, as are Diane and Bev and many others. bUUKies is one of the small groups here at River of Grass. We meet monthly and discuss a book that we have chosen. We read thought-provoking, spirituality linked books. We alternate between fiction and non-fiction. Membership is open to anyone who cares to join us.

All of my life I have been in awe of creative people. I am just awestruck at a painting which moves me to tears or wonder or fear. How did he or she do that? And sculpture – Bellini comes to mind. He was a master sculptor. His statues appeared so lifelike you want to touch them to reassure yourself that it is really marble. The emotions so clearly evoked in a face or a gesture. Awesome!

And, scientists positively amaze me! How one person can take something and with just a twist here or a nudge there make something different. There are some things that totally confound me like how do planes fly? And electricity and wonder of all wonders – the internet!

Steve's father was one of those people. I should mention that Steve knows what I am going to say about his father. Steve's father was uptight, controlling, rigid in his thinking and positive he knew all the answers. He was very intelligent and articulate. I was totally amazed to learn that he invented a way to make silicone commercially feasible. He could see so many applications for silicone but it was very expensive to produce. So Steve's dad took on the task to find a way to make production practical. And he did! He could contemplate the chemistry of things and work out how to modify something to make it different and easier to produce. So Steve's father, Eugene Rochow, is considered the grandfather of the silicone industry and was internationally renown and a frequent speaker at international symposiums.

When the bUUKies decided to read the book “Creation, The True Story of Charles Darwin,” I was excited. This book explores Darwin's

life with his family and his thinking about human nature and the death of two of his children and of course, his writings about evolution and creation. Here is one of those people I am totally in awe of.

Darwin's "theory" of evolution can be considered to be on the same scale of heresy as Copernicus and Galileo's "theory" that the earth revolved around the sun. Galileo was actually sentenced to life imprisonment for heresy by the Catholic church for publishing his heliocentric thoughts!

Darwin's "The Origin of Species" was published in 1859 over 150 years ago and his "Descent of Man" in 1871, a little over 10 years later. And his theories on evolution and the origin of humans are still not accepted as a scientific reality by a large number of people.

Now, Darwin was a "Naturalist." He studied beetles, barnacles, plants, spiders and just about anything that caught his interest. As a young man, he took a 5 year voyage on the HMS Beagle, collecting specimens from throughout the Amazon and South America and then another two years sorting and cataloging his collection.

While on his journey, he recognized that, although these were distinct species, there were also similarities in the tortoises and the mocking birds which inhabited the mainland Ecuador and those on the Galapagos Islands. He pondered the thought of a possible mutual ancestor. At the time, he had accepted the idea that God had brought all forms of life into existence by separate acts of creation. But, this conjecture of a common ancestry would be the foundation of his further contemplation of the origin of species.

On this journey, he recognized his connection to both the black slaves and the South American Tierra Del Fuego "savages." While off the Tierra Del Fuego coast, Charles wrote "Four or five men suddenly appeared on a cliff near to us. They were absolutely naked and with long streaming hair; springing from the ground and waving their arms around their head, they sent forth most hideous yells. Their appearance was so strange, that it was scarcely like that of earthly inhabitants." Charles felt that they were "man in his lowest and most savage state." And "the reflection at once rushed into my mind – such were our ancestors." He was open enough to see not only the

differences, but also the commonalities between the savage and the *quote* “civilized” man.

The seeds of questioning were planted. “Look at this tortoise and this tortoise. They are different but alike. Why?” “Look at this savage. He is very much like me but different. Why?” At that time, the popular theory of creation was that God created everything in the world, individually and uniquely. “Every organ of every living creature was clearly designed for a purpose in the same way and gave evidence of God’s power and wisdom as the Creator of all things.”

But for Darwin, “Because God made it that way” became an insufficient answer.

And Darwin saw misery, disease, famine and death. If God was the creator of everything, why would children have to die? Why did anyone have to suffer as so many did?

Darwin was a Unitarian. His liberal upbringing enabled him to think more broadly and he was encouraged to explore his own beliefs. Darwin married his cousin, Emma Wedgwood who was also Unitarian. But Emma was a more traditional Unitarian and she frequently expressed a concern that she might not see Charles in heaven due to his questioning of the existence of God.

Darwin had an inquiring, curious mind and the liberal upbringing that enabled him to think outside of the traditional philosophies and ponder the connections, and look for the evidence to prove his theorizing.

Charles Darwin was wealthy enough to support his family without having to work for a living. He could work at home on things he could study there and spend every day studying his children and servants. He could dwell on issues that bear directly on the deepest questions about what it is to be human. He could not keep his thinking about the natural world apart from feelings and ideas about the existence or power of God.

In 1838, Darwin met and studied Jenny, a young orangutan (the first brought to England). He observed her happy, sad, angry and even

what he construed as thoughtful. He played a mouth harp for her and then gave it to her. With little coaching, she began to play it herself. One time the zoo keeper offered Jenny an apple and then withheld it from her. Jenny threw herself down on the floor, crying and kicking her feet – just like a child throwing a temper tantrum. Her behaviors were just like his own children's. For him, this was yet another link in his creation theory.

Much of his personal life helped to formulate his thinking. Darwin and his wife had ten children. His second oldest, Annie, died when she was ten. For me, this was a difficult part of the book, because her illness was never clearly diagnosed nor treated well. Of course, we are talking about the 1850's, when medicine was still very primitive and long before our modern diagnostic tools and treatments.

Darwin's already shaky believe in God, clearly ended when Annie died. She had appeared so good and healthy before her illness. What could have happened? He could not believe in a God who would make children suffer and die like Annie did. He set the Christian faith behind him. He did not attend Sunday service, but would walk his family to church and then spend the time either talking to the local constable or walking in the park.

The nature of diseases was a mystery to Darwin. One of his concerns was hereditary illness. Darwin himself was not well. He suffered from recurring states of languor and discomfort where he found he could not work, what he called "swimming of the head," dying sensations and black spots before he eyes, spasmodic stomach pains and vomiting. He was concerned that his "weaknesses" were inherited by his children. He wrote to his cousin Fox that he feared "with grief" that Annie had inherited his "wretched digestion" and revealed his fear that he was hereditarily responsible for her illness.

But he survived, and Annie did not. To him, there must have been some hidden weakness in Annie and something he and his remaining children didn't have. So, the "fittest" survived, even if he didn't believe that he was among the fittest, maybe just more fit.

Their last child, Charles Waring Darwin, only lived two years. The only photo available of this child appears to indicate that this son was

a Downs syndrome child. But this was before Dr. Downs began formulating his theories on the condition, so he wasn't identified as such.

Darwin played with his child just as he had with each of the others and watched him and noted his differences. The child was small for his age and slow in developing. He did not laugh much and was very placid. Charles Waring got an infection at the age of 2 and died a week later. Darwin saw this again as an affirmation of the survival of the fittest.

I do not mean that Darwin had any less grief in the loss of either of his children. He suffered as much as any parent would with the death of a child. But, he did not relate these deaths to anything that God may have done. It was natural selection, not God's work.

Darwin eventually identified best with the Unitarian Humanists. He subscribed to "The Index" a newspaper produced by a group of disaffected American Unitarians and philosophical unbelievers. The paper advocated a spirit of reform "without deference to authority of Bible, Church or Christ" and proposed a humanistic "Free religion." Every issue of the newspaper included a comment by Darwin endorsing these views.

So what can we learn from Darwin and others who have challenged almost every religions' creation story?

For myself, I wonder if I ever had such revolutionary thoughts, would I be brave enough to even talk about them, let alone publish them?

To give you an example - when Steve & I were in Ireland, we went to New Grange. New Grange is a Megalithic Passage Tomb which was built about 3200 BC. The façade of sparkling white quartz was rebuilt using stone found at the site. From the very first instant I saw this façade, I felt it was wrong. It just didn't feel right. It looked too formal or rigid. Thirteen years later it still looks wrong to me. Now, what do I know about civilization around 3200 BC? If I were more like Darwin, I would relocate to Ireland, educate myself, take the time to explore, ponder and draw my own conclusions. I have the curiosity but not the

motivation. Do I really want to challenge whoever the learned authority was who determined what the façade should look like?

Maybe this example isn't as blasphemous as Darwin's theory of evolution was, but it would be challenging someone. Darwin had the courage to state his beliefs and defend them against the existing Christian churches. Maybe we don't have to all make the really big changes. Many of us are creative in art and music. Others in science and technology. And some of us can take a recipe and make it better. Each of these is creation is a small personal way.

To quote Charles Darwin speaking of evolution "Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, . . . directly follows. There is a grandeur in this view of life, that whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been and are being evolved.