

Michael Kendree

Personal Narrative

Mrs. Dawson

An Evolutionary Debate

The conversation started calmly enough, almost placidly, but soon escalated to an intense conflict where insults and opinions were blasted. Of course, it would be best to start at the beginning. It wouldn't be fit to call them friends, or even acquaintances, so I'll just call the people with whom I was conversing as my neighbors. I happened upon my neighbors one bright summer morning, and we began an easy conversation. However, one way or another, the topic of evolution was broached. I really should have been more aware of the situation; here in the Bible Belt, the Deep South, evolution (or any topic that did not mesh perfectly with one's view of the Bible), was an extremely sensitive topic, one that should be avoided. However, such sagacity had not yet reached me, and I purported that evolution was a cogent theory. Suddenly, looks of disgust, fear, and disbelief crossed the neighbors' faces. Inadvertently, I had sparked a colossal conflict.

Before this extraordinary experience, I was a completely different individual. However, these differences were not physical; they were cerebral. Prior to this argument, I would have been unable to be a participant in such a long and heated debate. I would have lacked the perseverance and confidence to rebut the verbal assaults. Sure, I could argue a point, but an argument such as the arduous one that I was about to engage in would have drained me, both mentally and spiritually. I was afraid that I might make a fool of myself. For instance, when I was younger, my friend Fred and I would always get into arguments or debates. In one such argument, Fred asserted that "The Beatles were the best band that ever played music!" I, of course, offered some sort of rebuttal, and replied that "I kinda think the Clash is the best band ever. They have a better and more complex sound." However, Fred vehemently replied "The who? I've never even heard of them?! Besides, the Beatles have sold way more records, and are way more famous!" "Whatever you say," is how I would typically retreat from arguments. I was not afraid to voice my opinion, but I would not subject myself to a grueling debate. However, that incident was frivolous and minute compared to the leviathan that was slowly creeping up on me in a couple of weeks. Unbeknownst to me, in just a couple of weeks, I was to be changed so that I would never shy away from a passionate argument again.

"Watch out for the rocks," I warned my little brother, Harrison. We were trekking down the mossy and overgrown bank of murky creek adjacent to our neighborhood. I had told my brother to be wary of the rocks because they sat precariously at the edge of the bank. With all of the moss and grime covering them, it would be exceedingly simple to slip and fall into the cold, caliginous depths of the creek. Ahead of us, I noted a bend in the creek. There was a gaping hole in the green canopy of the trees. Bright, illuminating summer sunlight was permitted through that

hole, creating a beautiful spectacle. Stepping into this idyllic patch of paradise were our neighbors, the MacGordons. “Look, Michael, the MacGordons are coming towards us!” exclaimed Harrison, drawing my attention. Indeed, the MacGordons were fast approaching. In the center of the group was Roderick, a short yet athletic boy of 8 years, with short blonde hair and wearing jeans and a t-shirt. Flanking Roderick were his two cousins from Florida; Percy was on his right, Eugene on his left. Percy was also short, had brown hair, was garrulous, and was 10 years old. Eugene was 9 and taller than the other two. (My brother was 11 at the time, I was 13). Now, my brother and I were not really friends with the neighbors, nor even acquaintances; we were just neighbors. Of course, social mantra mandates that two parties who are familiar with each other muster up a greeting, so I uttered: “What’s going on you guys?” Roderick responded “Nothing much, just exploring the creek.” Feeling some momentum going with this conversation, our party retreated to a nearby clearing near the creek bank, and continued our colloquial conversation there. “So, Percy and Eugene, how is Florida?” I inquired. “It is pretty good, but it sure is hot down there.” Percy said, grinning. “So, I guess you Floridians really must have evolved to cope with the heat,” I jovially and jokingly said. However, when I saw the looks of confusion and distaste that ubiquitously manifested itself upon the MacGordon group, I knew that something was amiss. “Did I say something wrong?” I inquired, hoping sincerely to rectify my mistake. Roderick responded, but with apprehension: “Well, Christians don’t believe in evolution,” he said, referencing my earlier comment. Percy readily agreed with him, drawing in vicarious support from his father: “Yeah, my dad is a minister, and he says that evolution is not true.” Fairly intrigued and humored by their opposition to a single word, but still wishing to move past the minefield, I told them: “Relax, you guys, I was only joking around.” “So you don’t believe in evolution, then?” asked Percy. “No, no, I do, it is supported by a plethora of scientific data,” I responded gently, still wishing not to offend them, but desiring to voice my own opinion. “Well, Christians don’t believe in it!” Roderick reiterated with the vehemence of an angry and raging bull. “Ok guys, Harrison and I have got to get going. Come on, Harrison!” I said. In all honesty, readers, I was just trying to get out of there without starting World War Three. Way too much tension had arisen. So, my brother and I headed back home, believing the debacle had concluded. Boy, were we wrong. It was a couple of hours after the creek debate, and I was relaxing. I was sitting in a brown chair in my family’s front room, reading a Lloyd Alexander novel entitled ‘The Book of Three.’ Suddenly, a sharp report radiated from our glass screen door at the front of the house. “What could that be?” I thought and wondered to myself. My thought was quickly answered: “Michael, Harrison, the MacGordons are here to see you!” my mother called. “I wonder what they could be doing at our house?” I thought to myself. It had been several hours since the debate, and I didn’t cross my mind that they would return to continue our little argument. With this thought in mind, Harrison and I made our way to the front door. When we arrived, we saw Roderick and Patrick standing there, Roderick with a Bible in hand. “Oh boy, this can’t be good,” Harrison said to me. “Amen to that!” I responded. Reluctantly, I opened the door and the two of us headed out to meet the MacGordons. “Look, guys, I don’t want to...” I began, but was cut off by Roderick, who began

preaching his version of Genesis. “God created the Earth in seven days, and He created man out of dust, and all the animals were made in those seven days, so evolution can’t be real!” “Ok, I’m leaving” Harrison mumbled, not desiring to be in the crossfire that was about to erupt between me and the two theologians. “Am I supposed to be convinced? You do know that the Bible was altered significantly by Constantine in Constantinople during the Nicean Council, and you can’t take it word for word, right?” I asked them, attempting to enlighten them with some historical factoids. However, they remained incredulous, and became as agitated as disturbed yellow jackets. “So you don’t believe in the Bible AND you’re not a Christian!?” exclaimed Percy, aghast that someone could be so out of line with his ideals, and with venom. “No, on the contrary. I am a devout and pious Christian. And I am using a great gift that God gave me, my mind. Perhaps you two could try it some time.” I responded, with a satisfied grin planting itself on my face. Roderick and Percy bristled, and Roderick screamed “Oh yeah, well evolutions gonna send you to hell!” It was their last ditch effort in an attempt to correct my heretical ways. However, with calmness and control, my reply was “So, paying attention to facts is going to condemn me? Boy, then aren’t a whole bunch of people in trouble? If evolution is so bogus, then how do you explain dinosaurs, the fossil record, variation in species, vestigial organs, and gene mutation?” I asked them. They were dumbstruck. I was firing on all cylinders, and to spite them one last time, I told them this: “If you two are such devout Christians, you should know to not play God and tell me that I will be subject to damnation. I love Jesus, and the Bible says that belief will save me.” Defeated, the duo of theologians left and went back to their house, down the scorched and baking black asphalt street. I headed back inside, satisfied. Harrison appeared and asked “How did it go?” “Pretty well; I really evolved with the situation.”

After that odyssey of a debate, I had decided to resume reading my Lloyd Alexander novel, ‘The Book of Three.’ Just having nestled into the cushiony and paradisiacal arm chair in the front room, a call that was issued from the kitchen abruptly interrupted my reading. Rising from the warm and comfortable living room chair, I made my way towards the kitchen to answer the call. “What did the MacGordons want? And why did they depart so quickly?” my mother inquired. “Isn’t that an interesting story,” was my response. “They came over here to literally preach the Bible to me, and to dispel any notions of the ‘evil and pagan’ doctrine of evolution that I so horribly believe in.” “And how did that go?” my mom additionally inquired. “Well, they came about their argument very brusquely and indignantly, so I was of course brusque and indignant back to them. However, as the argument progressed, I cooled off. One of the reasons why I was so vehement in my assertions at the beginning was because I was somewhat uncertain with my own beliefs.” My mom seemed somewhat dumbstruck after that statement. She pressed; “Why would you be uncertain? You usually know what you are talking about and don’t hesitate in debate.” It was then that I truly recognized how this experience had changed me and incited personal growth. I elucidated this enlightenment to my mother; “Never before had anyone used something as dear to me as religion and spirituality to smite me in an argument. To be honest, my subconscious created a sense of doubt, since the MacGordons were purporting that I was going against my religion.” Intrigued, and listening intently, my mom asked “What

changed? What made you surer of your argument?” “It was actually a couple of things,” was my response. “Firstly, the way that the MacGordons were asserting themselves was un-Christian all by itself. I mean, the fact that they had the audacity to say that I could go to Hell told me that they were in the wrong. Only God and Jesus have the authority to make that particular judgment. That realization made me realize that just because you use a righteous and virtuous doctrine to help you does not mean that the person is making the correct argument. Secondly, I just knew that science backed up my argument and proved its veracity. Those two things combined made me far more confident.” However, those two facts impact did not end there. Their implications have stuck with me, and will continue to stick with me, for the entirety of my existence. This seemingly minute and menial debate taught me that if I believe in something, I should not bow down when others oppose me. And, even if those opposing me use an argument that seems like it compromises my moral integrity, I learned that the opposition does not always use the argument correctly or properly. Essentially, I learned that I need to stick to my beliefs, no matter what, and I have gained a lot of confidence from it.

It really was amazing how that a seemingly placid, calm little conversation between neighbors escalated so rapidly and quickly into a venomous and volatile exchange of insults. It also was amazing how that little, minute, seemingly insignificant conversation would turn out to have such a profound impact on my life and my scruples. I thought that evolution was not a sensitive topic; I soon learned that it was. Through the course of this event, a lot of animosity and tension was created. I would not, however, change a single second of it. What I took from this experience is truly invaluable. I now have the confidence and resources to take on and vanquish bullies and opposing forces, and am not so timid that I will back down when they use a seemingly poignant or morally-compromising argument. I am now able to face them head on, and with voluminous amounts of force. Of course, I do not wish to engage in these kinds of arguments often. They have the potential to tear apart friendships or relationships, and I fear that something like that may occur one of these days. However, if I am to engage in another verbal war, I at least can do so with confidence. To quote a line from a Breaking Benjamin song; “I will not bow, I will not break.”