

Inquiring Minds: SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Issue #35 Sept-Oct, 2015 "The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge." -- Bertrand Russell

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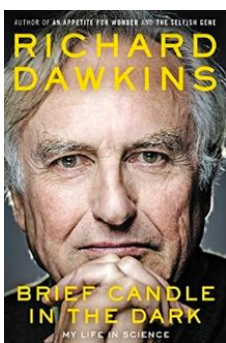
GEM UNEARTHED IN COSTNER'S MOVIE *MACFARLANE USA*

Many cheered in the Redwood City Senior Center as we viewed this true sports-drama story set in the farm community of MacFarlane, near Bakersfield. We learned how some Latino children had to help their families pick produce in the fields before running to school, and finally running back to work the fields again. Coach Jim White (played by Kevin Costner) struggled at the school and with his

students before he found their true strength: cross country running. Fast-paced, moving, humorous, and thought-provoking, this Disney film has it all. It is

a tribute and a testimony to the workers who put food on our tables and the struggles they endure. It is one of those stories I am pleased to say is now immortalized in a dramatic film format where it can get the most exposure. Two thumbs up. [See the trailer](#), and [related links](#).

A BRIEF CANDLE IN THE DARK, HIS LIFE IN SCIENCE, SHINES



I saw and bought this book in Costco (\$15) to learn more about Richard Dawkins who has been called "one of the best nonfiction writers alive today" (Steven Pinker). Dawkins is so much more than an agnostic/atheist in his book *The God Delusion*. He is a respected biologist, Oxford prof, author, and speaker. *The Selfish Gene* give instances in nature where survival of the fittest is refuted by many acts of altruism in the animal kingdom. However, his latest book



Disney
McFARLANE USA

may not be for everyone, only those interested in science, its methods, and his life. He is surrounded by some of the most talented people on the planet, but sounds at

times a little self-serving by name-dropping. This seems like a memoir more mundane than his last one, *An Appetite for Wonder*. From my brief reading Richard Dawkins has the knowledge and enthusiasm of Carl Sagan and Neil deGrasse Tyson. All of these are articulate scientists who, apart from their specialties in science, take the time and have the talent to educate and enthuse the layman, such as myself and millions of others.

AS A LAYMAN I AM A FAN OF THOSE WHO ARE SPECIALISTS

Because we live where we do in the Silicon Valley. I have come to know several highly specialized and talented people. One friend and neighbor is a rocket scientist who found the flaw in and fixed the "Star Wars" Defense Plan. [Another](#) friend I met at [COJ](#) was inducted into the Royal Academy, along with the likes of Isaac Newton. [Sean](#) is a psychologist, poet, priest, mystic, and author. I just found out that my tennis buddy Ken was a group leader at SLAC for a decade. I golf with [Paul](#) whose music has global admirers. Both our families are sprinkled with specialists. I admire their talents, their training, their focus, their dedication, and find most mild-mannered and humble. We all have our unique talents and heroes, and secretly admire that which eludes us.

AND YET THERE'S A PLACE FOR US GENERALISTS

We often admire those who excel, but they depend on us in ways we might never know. In high school one the smartest guys who helped me in math and physics admired my ability in

Neil deGrasse Tyson



Tyson hosting the 40th anniversary celebration of Apollo 11 at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, July 2009

sports. (He was not a super effective tutor since the sciences came too easily to him, and he had difficulty simplifying things for a less-prepared mind such as mine was at the time.)

To wit: John Holt, who in 1967 wrote *How Children Fail*, made the point that non-specialists ought to teach out of their field of expertise because: 1) being a few steps ahead of the kids teachers would experience the thrill and difficulty of learning in the process--versus knowing it all and being bored (and boring?); 2) teachers would be more sympathetic with their students; and 3) instruction would be more simple and to the point. This theory probably might work better at the elementary levels (where Holt taught), but I imagine one would want better trained teachers in secondary and above. Personally, I never learned so much as when I taught all subjects in a sixth grade self-contained classroom for four years. Then I would prep four hours each night reading 3-4 text books to come up with demonstrations, experiments, or activities. It was very exciting, and I was being paid to learn! We even had a workbench in class and built our own experiments. Fun stuff.

BRAVO ALSO TO THOSE WHO RAISE AND SUPPORT FAMILIES

Congratulations to [Aimée](#) and John for the birth of our grandchild [Tommy](#), now two months old. Lois loves being a big sister at five. She leads her Chinese immersion kindergarten class in [reading](#), but still fools her friends into thinking she speaks Cantonese which she fakes with inflection.

Our son [David](#) is "the best uncle ever," dressing up as Spiderman for Lois' fifth birthday party at AT&T Park. It really does take a village to raise a family. *Hope you are well. Joe*

