

# DR. LOREN EISELEY

Paul G. Humber

I have a strange attraction to Dr. Loren Eiseley. He was not quite 70 when he died (I am 74 in 2016). Although I never met him, I have a faint memory of having seen him walking on the UPenn campus when I was a student there.

The attraction may be more poetical than anything else, but there is also another strange connection. His remains are buried at a cemetery with the address, 215 Belmont Avenue, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004. I have been living on that “same” road—but across the river. Green Lane used to be called Belmont Ave.



There are two more “attractive” connections: 1) I very much agree with Dr. Eiseley that Darwin got much of his idea about “natural selection” from a creationist named Blythe (but did not give him credit) and 2) what I am about to share (touching on the poetical aspect):



Eiseley was an evolutionary biologist who eventually became the Benjamin Franklin Professor of Anthropology and the History of Science at the University of Pennsylvania. His book, *All The Strange Hours*, is autobiographical and was published in 1975 (2 years before his death). In it, he recounted an experience he had had with an associate, Frank Speck. They were “strolling in the Philadelphia Zoo” ... and “came upon a wood duck paddling quietly in a little pond.” His associate, impressed apparently by

these “most beautifully patterned” birds, asked, “Loren, tell me honestly. Do you believe unaided natural selection produced that pattern? Do you believe it has that much significance to the bird's survival?”

In the book, Dr. Eiseley confessed that he too, at that moment, had had a similar questioning thought. Finally, he admitted in response:

I have always had a doubt every time I came out of a laboratory, even every time I have had occasion to look inside a dead human being on a slab. I don't doubt that duck was once something else, just as you and I have sprung from something older and more primitive.... It isn't that which troubles me. It's the method, the way. Sometimes it seems very clear, and I satisfy myself in modern genetic terms. Then, as perhaps with your

duck, something seems to go out of focus, as though we are trying too hard, trying, it would seem, to believe the unbelievable.

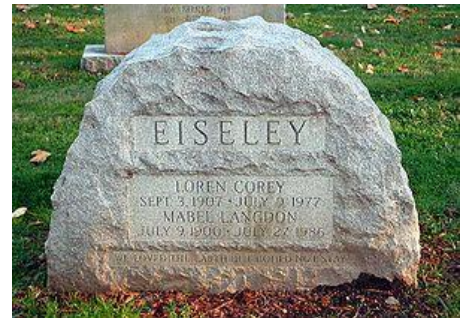
Could it be that the going “out of focus” that Dr. Eiseley referred to came from his Maker? Was the Lord in love reminding Dr. Eiseley of his own creatureliness? Sadly, it seems Dr. Eiseley did not go far with this nudge, for he continued:

I am an evolutionist. I believe my great backyard Sphexes [wasps] have evolved like other creatures. But watching them in the October light as one circles my head in curiosity, I can only repeat my dictum softly: in the world there is nothing, to explain the world. Nothing to explain the necessity of life, nothing to explain the hunger of the elements to become life, nothing to explain why the stolid realm of rock and soil and mineral should diversify itself into beauty, terror, and uncertainty.



Respectfully, Dr. Eiseley was wrong because there is something in the world that explains these mysteries--a divine book. And where did Dr. Eiseley get his “dictum” of denial? Does science give dictums?

On my route to The Haverford School where I taught for 24 years, I would past by the cemetery where Dr. Eiseley’s remains are buried. My last official act at that school was giving the 117<sup>th</sup> commencement invocation on June 8, 2001. The words I used on that occasion were much more hopeful than Dr. Eiseley’s dictum:



#### ORDER OF EXERCISES

The Prelude	Main Line Brass Quartet
The Procession	Please rise and remain standing
The National Anthem	The Notables
The Invocation	Rev. Paul G. Humber
The Awards	Joseph T. Cox, Ph.D., <i>Headmaster</i>
The Alumni Association Key Man Award	Walter E. Hunter IV, <i>2000 Key Man</i>

Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.  
Thank you for rain, for fruitful seasons,  
and for satisfying our hearts with gladness.

Thank you for the sun, moon, and stars.  
Thank you for the bounty and freedoms You provide for us in this nation.

You also bless us with children.  
Today, we reflect especially on this--on sons You have given.  
Thank you for the preciousness of their lives  
when we first held them in our arms.

Thank you also for healing them and us—  
and for health that You have provided over the years.

These sons have grown to be young men, and they live in a fallen world.  
There is sickness, suffering, and death.  
Help them to look to You for direction.  
Give them humility in the face of success,  
and help them to know the path of Truth.

Open their eyes to those in need both locally and globally.  
Grant them compassion and generosity.  
May they walk in service and love for others.

Father, touch each heart present today with reminders of Your grace.  
May this be a worthy beginning not only for the graduates, but for all of us.  
In Jesus name, Amen.

