BOOK REVIEW


If a person is given a pairing game and they have placed Charles Darwin’s name in the mix, most people would pair Darwin’s name with evolution. I know I would. Because of Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection, his name has become synonymous with evolution. People who saw me reading this book thought that I was reading about Darwin’s theory because the title had his name on it. However, after reading the book, I have a glimpse of the real Darwin most people do not see. Most photos depicts Darwin as an old man, with “Santa Clause beard”, quiet, wrinkled and maybe boring. But who is Darwin, really? Was he always this “old man” or was he once a vibrant young man ready to face the unknown?

Eric Simmons, a young man from San Francisco decided to journey and experience first-hand how a young explorer Darwin might feel. He travelled to South America and he compared his experience with that of Darwin’s, based on his diary notes: “The Voyage of the Beagle”. Instead of unravelling the escapade of an “old wrinkled man”, Simmons discovered the escapades of a young, fun-loving Darwin whose adventures were exhilarating also to Simmons himself. Simmons went to every place that Darwin visited based on his records and walked where he perceived Darwin walked. Simmons attempted to see what Darwin would have seen if he was looking at the same glorious views. Like Darwin, the author viewed many things; from rheas to a beach filled with fossils in Port San Julian. Reading this book, Simmons’ eyes become our eyes as to what Darwin saw, but instead of us seeing it physically, we experience it through his words. Simmons described the side of Darwin that most people never see, the adventurous young man who goes places to learn. A most interesting part is that Simmons exhibited the same adventurous spirit that Darwin had.

The book was divided into three parts: exploration of the industrialized South America where Simmons explored the now changed South America, revolution of the people where the author focused on the people of South America of present compared to the people during Darwin’s era, and Darwin’s discoveries where Simmons looked at the most important things that Darwin discovered while exploring South America. Each of these parts gives an idea as to what differences Simmons experienced as compared to Darwin’s time. At the end of the book, Simmons shares his moving experience of sleeping at the same house where Darwin slept and how he imagined the difference between his time and Darwin’s time. The contrast of time may have been very different but the experiences that Simmons and Darwin experienced were irreplaceable, regardless of the time difference.

So who was the young Darwin? Read this book and it will give you an idea of who young Darwin was with less facial hair and how passionate Darwin was
about his travels in South America discovering new species and places. Sim-
mons’ book will give you a detailed and exhilarating experience that will keep
you wanting to know what happens next. This book will show you the different
side of Darwin, the man usually depicted as “the man with the long-white
beard”.

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