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Interview with Dr. Barry Parker

THE INTERVIEW

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(*Barry Parker, Ph.D. (Boise, ID), a professor of physics at Idaho State University from 1967 to 1997, is an award-winning science writer and the author of eleven highly acclaimed books in popular science, including Search for a Supertheory and Alien Life: The Search for Extraterrestrials and Beyond.*

His latest book Einstein's Brainchild: Relativity Made Relatively Easy! (Prometheus Books, 2000) won rave reviews in our journal. Naturally we couldn't contain our desire to know more about him. We at the "Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Book Reviews" approached him for an online interview and he graciously agreed. The interview was conducted for well over a month by the Editor-in-Chief Dr. Anil Aggrawal. Some excerpts...)

Dr. Barry Parker



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Qu.1. Is this (*Einstein's Brainchild*) your first book? Which books have you written before? On which subjects?

Ans. I have written approximately 20 books. Most are on popular science. They include 2 children's books and a textbook on astronomy. I have written 4 books on Einstein. A new one has come out in May this year. See my website (http://www.barryparkerbooks.com/) for a list of all my books.

Qu.2. What is your next book about? Does it have anything to do with physics?

Ans. My next book is titled "Einstein's Vision" It will be out in May and shows the tremendous impact that Einstein's discoveries have had on modern science.

Qu.3. Can you tell us about your career? Your educational background?

Ans.I have a B. A (honors physics), M.Sc. and Ph. D. The Ph. D is from Utah State University. The other two degrees are from Univ. of British Columbia in Canada. I taught at Idaho State Univ. for 30 years before retirement.

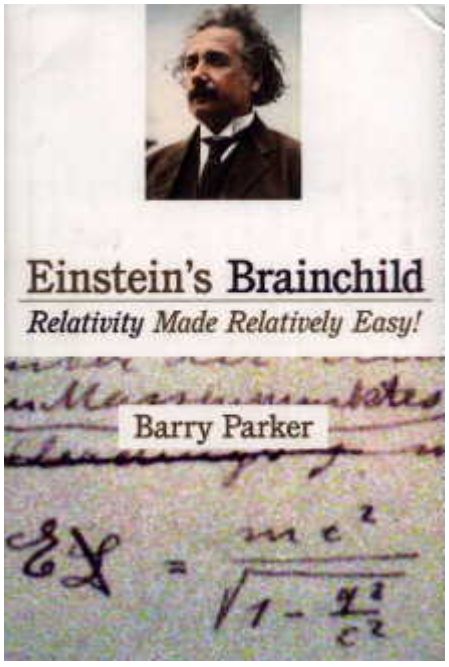
Qu.4. When were you born? How were you attracted to physics? Any interesting experiences?

Ans.I was born in Penticton, B. C. Canada. I was attracted to physics from reading popular science books similar to the ones I write.

Qu.5. Any fascinating experiences while writing this book, or while researching for this book?

Ans.I can't think of any. Over the years, however, I have interviewed many famous physicists and Nobel Prize winners. Several Nobel prize winners have also endorsed my books.

The book by Dr. Barry Parker. Click on the book to read its review



Qu.6. Really? Which ones? And which books did they endorse?

Ans.Murray Gell-Mann endorsed "*Search for a Supertheory*". William Fowler endorsed "*Creation*". Arno Penzias endorsed "*Creation*" and "*The Vindication of the Big Bang*". Sheldon Glashow endorsed "*Einstein: The Passions of a Scientist*". All of them, as we know, are Nobel Prize winners.

Qu.7. Could you tell us about your family? Did you inherit the love of science/writing from your parents? How many children do you have? Would you be happy if they took up the physics/science as a profession? What are they doing now anyway?

Ans.My father was a garage owner in Canada. He had some influence on my latest book which was on the physics of cars. It was titled "Isaac Newton's School of Driving". *Johns Hopkins University Press* published it. I have one child. He got a degree in teaching and planned on teaching science in high school but got sidetracked and is now building houses.

Qu.8. What do you love most (besides your professional work and writing of course)?

Ans.Certainly my family, but I also love the outdoors. We have a cabin near Yellowstone Park and enjoy going to it. I enjoy outdoor activities.

Qu.9. Your favorite dish, book, movie, star, person?

Ans.I am presently writing a book on the science in the James Bond movies for Johns Hopkins University Press so I'll have to say they are some of my favorite movies. Sean Connery is one of my favorite stars, but I have others. Einstein is certainly a favorite person. As an avid pianist, Chopin and Liszt are also favorite persons.

Qu.10. Oh, so you are interested in music too. Have you heard the name of Ravi Shankar?

Ans.I have definitely heard of him but am not too familiar with his music.

Qu.11. What do you dislike most?

Ans.I have few dislikes, but I don't like people who are too stuck on themselves.

> *...Several Nobel Prize winners have endorsed my books. Murray Gell-Mann endorsed my "Search for a Supertheory". William Fowler endorsed "Creation". Arno Penzias endorsed "Creation." and "The Vindication of the Big Bang". Sheldon Glashow endorsed "Einstein: The Passions of a Scientist". All of them, as we know, are Nobel Prize winners...*

Qu.12. What do you consider as your biggest achievement in life?

Ans.I think I had considerable success as a teacher at ISU and of course, I'm proud of my books. A few students have told me years later that I was their favorite teacher.

Qu.13. If God asked you choose your profession again, what would it be and why?

Ans.I'm sure I would do the same thing over again, but I might start writing earlier, knowing what I know now.

Qu.14. Have you ever traveled to India, or to Indian subcontinent? Would you like to visit, if such an opportunity arose?

Ans.I'm sorry, except for Canada, I've never been out of the US. I would like to visit India some day.

Qu.15. What has been your biggest failure/disappointment?

Ans.I wish some of my books would have sold better, but I really can't complain. I suppose all authors wish they had a book on the best seller list.

Qu.16. Do you like Isaac Asimov? What do you think was the reason of his astounding success?

Ans.It's strange that I forgot Isaac Asimov. He is one of my heroes. He also endorsed my first book "Einstein's Dream" (He said "An up-to-date view of what is known of the universe's fundamental structure... beautifully written. Every page is a pleasure.) He was certainly prolific.

Parker's Superlatives



First award : I've had a few minor writing awards

First book : "Einstein's Dream" My text "Concepts of the Cosmos" came about the same time Greatest Love of my life : My family

I am superstitious about :Nothing

I hate : insincere people

My biggest assets : My home and my health

My biggest fear : Spiders, rattlesnakes ....

My Birthday : April 13

My favorite possession : My grand piano

My favorite quote and/or one-liner : " Be all you can be."

My greatest extravagance : My boat

My greatest regret : I really don't have any

My Hero : Einstein

My idea of perfect happiness : Contentment and self satisfaction

My most overrated virtue : money

My passion : Writing, science , music

My spice : Music

My strength : Enthusiasm and determination

My wildest fantasy : Wow. I'm not sure

Place Of Birth : Penticton. B. B Canada

Thing closest to my heart : My family

What touches me most : People who overcome great odds and succeed, then are very generous in giving

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Qu.17. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be, and why?

Ans.That is hard to say. I'm not sure.

Qu.18. Well, you may try again. May be you don't want to change anything about yourself!

Ans.I guess I could always say that I wish I was more talented in relation to writing and music.

Qu.19. Which living person do your admire most? Which person in entire history? Why?

Ans.Among the living ones I like Bill Gates and Paul Newman. Among historical personalities my favorites are Einstein, Chopin and Gandhi. I really admire people who make it against great odds, then give away a lot of their money, or at least help people after they become successful.

Qu.20. I believe you mean Mahatma Gandhi. What exactly did you like in him? If he was such a great man, why didn't he get a Nobel prize in Peace? Any thoughts?

Ans.Gandhi is certainly one of the great men of history. He was compassionate and a great leader. I have no idea why he didn't get the Nobel Prize. By the way, I have a tremendous interest in forensic science. I even tried to get my editor interested, but I didn't manage. I wanted to do a book on the physics related to forensic science.

Qu.21. What is your life's mantra?

Ans.Like anybody, I guess, I would like to be highly successful, then help people with what I achieved.

Qu.22. In one line, how would you best describe yourself?

Ans.I'm quite ambitious and very passionate about things but I think I realize my limitations.

Qu.23. Are you interested in Science Fiction? Do you think SF is a good means to teach physics/ science to children?

Ans.I loved science fiction when I was young, but haven't paid a lot of attention to it as I got older. I still love seeing science in movies etc, though. In writing the James Bond book I've recently had to view all the Bond films and study the science in them. I think science fiction is a great way to teach science to younger people because they love it.

Qu.24. Any awards?

Ans.I have got a few minor writing awards -- nothing major.

Qu.25. If you were marooned on a desert island, who/what would you like to be marooned with and why?

Ans.Wow! I'm not sure about the person but I would like my books, my computer for writing and my grand piano.

Qu.26. What do you do first thing in the morning?

Ans.I exercise for 1/2 hour. (I also plan my day)

Qu.27. And the last thing at night?

Ans.Brush my teeth and thank God that I'm still alive and healthy.

> *...For writing [if one wants to take up writing as a carreer] one has got to write in a journal every day and practice. Just because you know how to write a proper sentence doesn't mean you're a writer. Just as a concert pianist has to practice, so too does a writer, if he or she is to succeed...*

Qu.28. What do you do in your spare time? Your hobbies, interests?

Ans.I love playing the piano. I ski and fish and enjoy hiking. I exercise quite a bit to stay in shape.

Qu.29. Are you religious? If yes, how do you reconcile religion with science, which is your profession?

Ans.I'm not strongly religious but I do think about religious questions a lot. For example: Why did God make the universe so big (we are, after all, only a tiny speck in it) if we are the "center" of the universe?

Qu.30. If a youngster of about 12-13 years wanted to take up physics/writing/science writing as a career, how should he proceed?

Ans.For science writing, I would say, "read popular science books". They increase your enthusiasm. For writing one has got to write in a journal every day and practice. Just because you know how to write a proper sentence doesn't mean you're a writer. Just as a concert pianist has to practice, so too does a writer, if he or she is to succeed.

Qu.31. Your favorite authors/books?

Ans.J.Bronowski, Jeremy Bernstein, Bill Bryson (for Humor), E. B. White.

Qu.32. Any message for our readers?

Ans.Never give up on your dreams.

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-Editor-in-Chief