My Un-Creation Story

The universe was given to me as a finished book, bound in leather and closed with a divine clasp. In the classrooms of my youth, the story of existence was a short one, elegantly told in six days. The world was young, the answers were absolute, and the ink was long dry. We were taught to be readers of this completed text, to memorize its verses and admire its perfect, unchanging design with intellectual fervor, using logic, philosophy, and eloquence to spin the story the book wanted told. To ask a question not covered in its pages was not a sign of curiosity, but of a failure to appreciate the story already written.

My rebellion didn't begin with a shout; it began with a whisper of doubt in my own voice. I remember it in fifth grade, joining a chorus of classmates talking over a perceived outsider. He was trying to tell us that evolution was real, that the universe was billions of years old. We parroted what we were taught. We mimicked the convenient, pre-packaged dismissal: "Well, *micro*-evolution is true, but obviously not *macro*." Even as the words of faked expertise left my mouth, a dissonance echoed inside me. Was I right? Or was I just loud?

By freshman year, my grasp on science had grown, and the notion of a young universe was shrinking in my mind. I saw "Evolution" on the biology syllabus and felt a surge of naive hope that I would finally be taught the real theory. Instead, we were handed a brief, distorted summary of *On the Origin of Species* only to spend the next two weeks discussing how it **must** be false. Our textbook was Genesis. In one assignment, where we were asked to find Bible verses to contradict the theory, I turned to a friend. "This is absurd," I whispered. "I can't do this, because I don't think there *is* a contradiction." His advice was a quiet surrender: "Just write what the teacher wants." And so I did, silencing my own questions. But that silence didn't last. Later that year, in a literature elective, I found my voice when a senior in her "Science and Theology" class asked about the Big Bang, redshift, and Hubble's Law for her homework. I spoke with a fluency born from late nights spent devouring cosmology. She turned to her friend, amazed. "He's insanely smart for a freshman," she said. That compliment was a spark. It gave me the conviction to trust my own curiosity.

The journey was often isolating. As a sophomore, I mentioned my belief in an old universe to a teacher I deeply respected as a mentor. He countered with arguments about transitional fossils and the geologic column—concepts I had heard of but was wildly unequipped to debate. I stood firm in my conviction yet blind in my specific knowledge. I walked away knowing a wall of belief now stood between us, but I refused to let it sever the respect I had for him as a man. It was a lesson in navigating disagreement without sacrificing connection.

The stakes escalated the summer before my junior year. An older gentleman at my church, upon hearing I wanted to study cosmology, warned me with the misplaced confidence of unexamined opinions. If I continued to hold this "belief" in an old universe, he said, I would go to hell. His words cut me to the core, and I began a long walk away from a faith I now associated

with bigotry and willful ignorance. It was not until the end of my junior year that a path back began to emerge. In a theology class debate, I argued that Christianity and evolution were not mutually exclusive. My own debate partners, obvious in their biases, refused to use the definitive points that would have won our case. But my teacher saw my determination. Afterwards, he gifted me an op-ed he usually saved for his senior students, an essay that laid out the very conclusion I had fought so hard for. It showed me my faith was not contingent on the age of the universe. My walk back had begun, slowly and cautiously.

Senior year, I enrolled in that same "Science and Theology" class, hoping for the intellectual honesty it promised. Instead, I found a curriculum of creationist tricks and half-baked "scientific questions" designed not to find truth, but to inject just enough doubt to make dogma seem as plausible as data. For my year-long research paper, I chose to tackle creationism head-on. I spent every spare moment on it, but a requirement to include a pro-creationist source led me to a non-peer-reviewed article in the *Creation Research Society Quarterly*. It proposed that an "acceleron particle" could explain away billions of years of uranium decay in a century—a wild, ad hoc guess where the conclusion fed the premise. My paper systematically dismantled creationism with every tool astronomy had given me, yet I received a shockingly low grade. The message was clear: my intellectual honesty was a threat. The teacher held the power, and he wielded it with defiance.

These experiences are what forged the person I am today. I am not a scientist *despite* my upbringing, but *because* of it. Having lived in a world of prescribed answers, I can never take for granted the profound joy of a genuine question. The universe I inhabit now is not smaller or less divine for being ancient, chaotic, and governed by impersonal laws. It is infinitely larger, more mysterious, and more worthy of awe. The book is not finished, and the story is far from over. And every day, we get the chance to turn the page.

This journey is why my conviction in the importance of scientific advocacy is so absolute. I have seen firsthand how intellectual dishonesty, armed with institutional authority, can build walls around young minds. I have felt the immense pressure to trade curiosity for conformity. This is why I believe so fiercely in a science education rooted in the *process* of inquiry, not just the memorization of its conclusions. It is about equipping the next generation with the critical thinking to recognize a bad-faith argument, to distinguish between a genuine question and a rhetorical trap. It’s about creating spaces where doubt is not a sin, but the starting point of discovery. We have a duty to protect the blank page for every student, ensuring the story they learn is not a finished book, but an open invitation to explore.