

A Mind Travelling in Space: Stephen Hawking [B2]

Costretto in sedia a rotelle per gran parte della sua vita e in grado di parlare solo per mezzo di un sintetizzatore vocale, è stato una delle menti più brillanti della storia. Con la sua forza di volontà, la potenza intellettuale e il talento per la divulgazione, ha aperto nuovi orizzonti alla cosmologia.



The brilliant physicist and cosmologist Stephen Hawking died on 14 March 2018, aged seventy-six, after living with [amyotrophic lateral sclerosis \(ALS\)](#) for more than fifty years. The illness slowly paralysed him, finally leaving him [helpless](#) in a wheelchair, able to communicate only through a speech-generating [device](#) with an American accent — which he hated. His [insights](#) shaped modern cosmology and inspired global audiences in their millions.

ECCENTRIC FAMILY

Hawking came from a highly intelligent, eccentric family. [At mealtimes](#), everyone ate while reading books. The family travelled in a converted London taxi. Hawking was called 'Einstein' at school. In 1965, aged just twenty-three, while studying at Cambridge University for his mathematics

PhD, he was diagnosed with an **early-onset**, slow-progressing form of ALS and given only two years to live.

HARD TIMES

Hawking then married Jane Wilde, a **fellow** student. As his physical condition **worsened** over the years, Jane **looked after** him as well as their three children. When the scientist became world famous, after the global success of his book A Brief History of Time (1988), life became even more complicated. Jane found herself **surrounded** by nurses and assistants, as well as trying to **cope** with his celebrity. Hawking left her in 1995 for his principal nurse. Jane and the family were worried later that Hawking was suffering physical abuse.

SCIENTIFIC CAREER

Hawking is famous, of course, for his scientific work, especially on black holes. He spent his lifetime trying to understand the universe. He wanted a complete theory. Hawking predicted that black holes emitted radiation (often called 'Hawking radiation'). This was an enormous **breakthrough** in theoretical physics. His work on black holes proved the idea of a Big Bang at the birth of the Universe, and attracted great public interest. He was also the first **to set out** a theory of cosmology explained by a union of the general theory of relativity and **quantum mechanics**.

"We are just a **slightly** advanced **breed** of monkeys on a minor planet orbiting an **average star**. But we can understand the Universe. That makes us something very special"

UNREAD BESTSELLER

Hawking is also famous for one of the best-known science books ever written, A Brief History of Time. The Hawking family needed money for their children's education and home **expenses**. The scientist decided to write a popular book about the universe for the general public. His book was a

worldwide bestseller, but many people consider it to be one of the leading unread books of all time, alongside James Joyce's *Ulysses* or Cervantes' *Don Quixote*!

CONFINED BUT FREE

Confined to a wheelchair for most of his life, with increasingly serious problems of communication, Hawking set his mind to travel the universe, producing ideas that advanced the theories of Einstein — when he should have been dead decades before. On his death, Hawking was cremated and his ashes were interred in Westminster Abbey between the graves of Sir Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin: three geniuses in a row.

Glossary

- **slightly** = leggermente
- **in a row** = di fila
- **fellow** = compagna
- **early-onset** = insorgenza precoce
- **surrounded** = circondare
- **cope** = affrontare
- **expenses** = spese
- **set his mind** = essere determinato
- **ashes** = ceneri
- **amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)** = sclerosi laterale amiotrofica (SLA)
- **PhD** = dottorato (Doctor of Philosophy)
- **breed** = specie
- **interred** = seppellire
- **helpless** = inerme
- **insights** = intuizioni, idee
- **At mealtimes** = durante i pasti
- **worsened** = peggiorare
- **looked after** = prendersi cura
- **breakthrough** = progresso
- **to set out** = enunciare
- **quantum mechanics** = meccanica quantica
- **device** = apparecchio
- **average star** = stella normale, nella media