## C# Expression Trees in the Real World

Spencer Schneidenbach









spencer@avironsoftware.com

## Have you ever...

Query a database with a LINQ expression?

```
from product in db.Products
where product.Price < 2.55
select new {
    product.Name,
    product.Price
}</pre>
```



## Have you ever...

Render a field in an ASP.NET Core app like this?

@Html.EditorFor(e => e.FirstName)



## Have you ever...

Select one or more members from an object?

ForMember(x => x.Name)



## If you've ever done any of those

• Then you've used expression trees

ForMember(x => x.Name)



# So what are expression trees anyways?



## Let's talk lambdas first



```
Func<string, string> toUpper = str => str.ToUpper();
var result = toUpper("spencer");
```





```
Expression<Func<string, string>> toUpper = str => str.ToUpper();
var result = toUpper("spencer");
```



```
Expression<Func<string, string>> toUpper = str => str.ToUpper();
var result = toUpper("spencer");  //does not compile
```



#### What the heck?

```
Expression<Func<string, string>> toUpper = str => str.ToUpper();
var result = toUpper("spencer");

Func<string, string> toUpper = str => str.ToUpper();
var result = toUpper("spencer");
```



## Key difference

- Lambdas do the thing
- Expressions describe the lambda that does the thing



## Homoiconicity

```
Expression<Func<string, string>> toUpper = str => str.ToUpper();
var result = toUpper("spencer");

Func<string, string> toUpper = str => str.ToUpper();
var result = toUpper("spencer");
```



#### So what can we do with expressions?

- Read them
- Create them
- Use them



```
Expression<Func<string, string>> toUpper = str => str.ToUpper();
```



ParameterExpression

=>

str



=>

ParameterExpression

str

MethodCallExpression

String.ToUpper()



=>

ParameterExpression

str

MethodCallExpression

String.ToUpper()

ParameterExpression

str



#### So what can we do with expressions?

- Read them
- Create them
- Use them



```
Expression<Func<string, string>> toUpper = str => str.ToUpper();
```



```
Expression<Func<string, string>> toUpper = str => str.ToUpper();
```

Useful, but mainly for libraries to use them



## Expression API



## ParameterExpression

Represents a parameter to a function

```
Expression.Parameter(typeof(string));
Expression.Parameter(typeof(string), "myStr"); //with a name
```



## ConstantExpression

Represents a declared value (e.g. 1, "str", etc)

```
Expression.Constant("spencer");
```



### MethodCallExpression

Represents a call to a method

```
var prm = Expression.Parameter(typeof(string));
var toUpper = typeof(string).GetMethod("ToUpper", Type.EmptyTypes);
Expression.Call(prm, toUpper);
```



## Let's build this guy!

```
Expression<Func<string, string>> toUpper = str => str.ToUpper();
```



```
var prm = Expression.Parameter(typeof(string), "str");
var toUpper = typeof(string).GetMethod("ToUpper", Type.EmptyTypes);
var body = Expression.Call(prm, toUpper);
var lambda = Expression.Lambda(body, prm);
```



#### So what can we do with expressions?

- Read them
- Create them
- Use them



#### Your favorite libraries

- Entity Framework/EF Core
- AutoMapper



## **Entity Framework**

Translates LINQ expressions to SQL



## **Entity Framework**

```
var products = db.Products
.Where(p => p.Name == "eggs")
.OrderByDescending(p => p.Price);
```



## **Entity Framework**

```
var products = db.Products
.Where(p => p.Name == "eggs")
.OrderByDescending(p => p.Price);
```

```
SELECT * FROM Products
WHERE Name = 'eggs'
ORDER BY Price DESC
```



```
var products = db.Products
.Where(p => p.Name == "eggs")
.OrderByDescending(p => p.Price);
```

?

```
SELECT * FROM Products
WHERE Name = 'eggs'
ORDER BY Price DESC
```







```
var products = db.Products
.Where(p => p.Name == "eggs")
.OrderByDescending(p => p.Price);
```

db.Products is an IQueryable



#### Enumerable

Enumerable<T>.Where(Func<T, bool> predicate)



#### Queryable

Queryable<T>.Where(Expression<Func<T, bool>> predicate)



#### Queryable

Queryable<T>.Where(Expression<Func<T, bool>> predicate)

This one can be interpreted at runtime!



#### ExpressionVisitor

Used to read and operate on expressions



```
var products = db.Products
.Where(p => p.Name == "eggs")
.OrderByDescending(p => p.Price);
```



```
.Where(p => p.Name == "eggs")
```

```
WHERE Name = 'eggs'
```



```
.Where(p => p.Name == "eggs")
```

This is what is known as a binary expression



# BinaryExpression

Represents an operation with a left side, right side, and an operator



# BinaryExpression

Property	What is it?
Left	Expression
Right	Expression
NodeType	Equal, NotEqual, etc.



#### ExpressionVisitor

Reads each part of the expression and does \*something\* based on what it's reading



# p.Name == "Eggs"

Part of function	SQL
p.Name	Name
==	=
"eggs"	eggs'



```
var products = db.Products
.Where(p => p.Name == "eggs")
.OrderByDescending(p => p.Price);
```

#### **ExpressionVisitor**

```
SELECT * FROM Products
WHERE Name = 'eggs'
ORDER BY Price DESC
```



```
[Projecti].[downtimerd] AS [downtimerd],
CASE WHEN ([Extent12].[downtimeStart] > @p_linq_7) THEN [Extent13].[downtimeStart] ELSE @p_linq_8 END AS [C1],
CASE WHEN ([Extent14].[equipmentID] IS NULL) THEN 0 ELSE [Extent15].[equipmentID] END AS [C2],
CASE WHEN ([Extent16].[equipmentID] IS NULL) THEN N''Unit Overhead'' ELSE [Extent18].[equipmentCode] END AS [C3],
CASE WHEN ( CAST( [Project1].[downtimeEquipmentStart] AS datetime2) > @p_linq_9) THEN CAST( [Project1].[downtimeEquipmentStart] AS
datetime2) ELSE @p_linq_10 END AS [C4],
CASE WHEN ( CAST( [Project1].[downtimeEquipmentEnd] AS datetime2) < @p_linq_11) THEN CAST( [Project1].[downtimeEquipmentEnd] AS
datetime2) ELSE @p_linq_12 END AS [C5],
CASE WHEN ([Extent19].[standardHourRate] IS NULL) THEN cast(0 as decimal(18)) ELSE [Extent20].[standardHourRate] END AS [C6],
CASE WHEN ([Extent21].[equipmentID] IS NULL) THEN 0 ELSE [Filter2].[reportingSequence] END AS [C7]
FROM
                        (SELECT
    @p_linq_0 AS [p_linq_0],
    [Extent1].[downtimeId] AS [downtimeId],
    [Extent1].[equipmentID] AS [equipmentID],
    [Extent1].[downtimeEquipmentStart] AS [downtimeEquipmentStart],
    [Extent1].[downtimeEquipmentEnd] AS [downtimeEquipmentEnd]
    FROM [dbo].[DowntimeEquipment] AS [Extent1] ) AS [Project1]
OUTER APPLY (SELECT [Extent2].[reportingSequence] AS [reportingSequence]
           [dbo].[ProcessUnitEquipment] AS [Extent2]
    INNER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent3] ON [Extent3].[equipmentID] = [Extent2].[equipmentID]
    LEFT OUTER JOIN (SELECT
        [Extent4].[downtimeId] AS [downtimeId]
        FROM [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent4]
        WHERE [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent4].[downtimeId] ) AS [Project2] ON 1 = 1
    WHERE ([Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent3].[downtimeId]) AND ([Extent2].[processUnitID] = @p_linq_0 AND (@p_linq_0 IS NOT NULL))
AS [Filter2]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent5] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent5].[downtimeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent6] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent6].[downtimeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent7] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent7].[downtimeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent8] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent8].[downtimeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent9] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent9].[downtimeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent10] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent10].[downtimeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[DownTimeType] AS [Extent11] ON [Extent10].[downTimeTypeId] = [Extent11].[downTimeTypeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent12] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent12].[downtimeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent13] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent13].[downtimeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent14] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent14].[downtimeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent15] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent15].[downtimeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent16] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent16].[downtimeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent17] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent17].[downtimeId]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Equipment] AS [Extent18] ON [Extent17].[equipmentID] = [Extent18].[equipmentID]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Equipment] AS [Extent19] ON [Project1].[equipmentID] = [Extent19].[equipmentID]
                                                                                                              @schneidenbach
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Equipment] AS [Extent20] ON [Project1].[equipmentID] = [Extent20].[equipmentID]
LEFT OUTER JOIN [dbo].[Downtime] AS [Extent21] ON [Project1].[downtimeId] = [Extent21].[downtimeId]
```

#### ExpressionVisitor

Used to read and operate on expressions ...or even modify them... kind of



```
public class ToUpperVisitor : ExpressionVisitor
{
    public override Expression Visit(Expression node)
    {
        if (node.NodeType == ExpressionType.Parameter)
        {
            return base.Visit(node);
        }
        if (node.Type == typeof(string))
        {
            var toUpper = typeof(string).GetMethod("ToUpper", Type.EmptyTypes);
            var methodCallExpression = Expression.Call(node, toUpper);
            return methodCallExpression;
        }
        return base.Visit(node);
    }
}
```



```
public class ToUpperVisitor : ExpressionVisitor
   public override Expression Visit(Expression node)
          (node.NodeType == ExpressionType.Parameter)
           return base.Visit(node);
       if (node.Type == typeof(string))
           var toUpper = typeof(string).GetMethod("ToUpper", Type.EmptyTypes);
           var methodCallExpression = Expression.Call(node, toUpper);
           return methodCallExpression;
       return base.Visit(node);
   }
}
Expression<Func<string, string>> spencyString =
    s => s + " belongs to Spencer";
var toUpperVisitor = new ToUpperVisitor();
var expressed = toUpperVisitor.VisitAndConvert(spencyString, null);
Console WriteLine(expressed Compile() DynamicInvoke("the cheese"));
//output: THE CHEESE BELONGS TO SPENCER
```



### My Real World



#### SQL Model Mapper

- Needed to map one entity to another
- Stored procs vs. code



#### SQL Model Mapper

SalesForce Customer -> Quickbooks Customer



```
public class SalesForceCustomer
    public string CustomerName { get; set; }
    public DateTime? CreateDate { get; set; }
public class QuickbooksCustomer
    public string Name { get; set; }
    public DateTime? OpenDate { get; set; }
```



INSERT QuickbooksCustomers (Name, OpenDate)
SELECT CustomerName, CreateDate
FROM SalesForceCustomers



INSERT QuickbooksCustomers (Name, OpenDate)
SELECT CustomerName, CreateDate
FROM SalesForceCustomers

Now do this for 100's of objects and 1,000's of properties, and never make a mistake





#### Tasks

- Write an expression visitor
- Handle any type of expression we want to translate



qbc => qbc.Name.Trim()



qbc => qbc.Name.Trim()

#### LTRIM(RTRIM(Name))



qbc => qbc.CreateDate ?? DateTime.Now



qbc => qbc.CreateDate ?? DateTime.Now

ISNULL(CreateDate, GETDATE())



```
INSERT QuickbooksCustomers (Name, OpenDate)
SELECT LTRIM(RTRIM(CustomerName)), ISNULL(CreateDate, GETDATE())
FROM SalesForceCustomers
```



#### Benefits

- Predictable
- Gave developers a natural way to express mappings
- Saved 1,000's of hours of developer time



### Very simple example



#### https://dotnetfiddle.net/PUij3K



# Order by...string?



api/Customers?orderBy=name



```
db.Customers.OrderBy(c => c.Name)
db.Customers.OrderBy("Name") //doesn't exist
```



```
public async Task<IActionResult> GetCustomers(string orderBy){
    var customersQuery = _context.Customers;
    switch (orderBy)
        case "Name":
            customersQuery = customersQuery.OrderBy(c => c.Name);
            break;
        case "Age":
            customersQuery = customersQuery.OrderBy(c => c.Age);
            break;
        case "Address":
            customersQuery = customersQuery.OrderBy(c => c.Address);
            break:
        case "Id":
            customersQuery = customersQuery.OrderBy(c => c.Id);
            break;
        default:
            break;
    }
    return Ok(customers);
```



# Solution: cook an expression!



db.Customers.OrderBy(c => c.Name)



#### Goals

- Cook our expression
- Apply it to our IQueryable



```
IQueryable<T> OrderByPropertyOrField<T>(
    this IQueryable<T> queryable,
    string propertyOrFieldName,
    bool ascending
)
```





```
Queryable.OrderBy<TSource, TKey>(
    IQueryable<TSource>,
    Expression<Func<TSource, TKey>>
```



```
Queryable.OrderBy<TSource, TKey>(IQueryable<TSource>, Expression<Func<TSource, TKey>>)
```



```
var selector = Expression_Lambda(prop, parameter);
var orderByMethodName = ascending ? "OrderBy" : "OrderByDescending";
var orderByExpression = Expression.Call(
   typeof (Queryable), //the type whose function we want to call
   orderByMethodName, //the name of the method
   new[] {elementType, prop.Type}, //the generic type signature
   queryable Expression, //parameter
   selector);
               //parameter
```



```
var selector = Expression_Lambda(prop, parameter);
var orderByMethodName = ascending ? "OrderBy" : "OrderByDescending";
var orderByExpression = Expression.Call(
   typeof (Queryable), //the type whose function we want to call
   orderByMethodName, //the name of the method
   new[] {elementType, prop.Type}, //the generic type signature
   queryable Expression, //parameter
   selector);
               //parameter
```







```
Queryable OrderBy<TSource, TKey>(IQueryable<TSource>, Expression<Func<TSource, TKey>>)
   var selector = Expression_Lambda(prop, parameter);
   var orderByMethodName = ascending ? "OrderBy" : "OrderByDescending";
   var orderByExpression = Expression.Call(
       typeof (Queryable), //the type whose function we want to call
       orderByMethodName, //the name of the method
       new[] {elementType, prop.Type}, //the generic type signature
       queryable.Expression, //parameter
       selector);
                             //parameter
    Queryable Order By < TSource, TKey > (
          IQueryable<TSource>,
          Expression<Func<TSource, TKey>>
```

```
Queryable OrderBy<TSource, TKey>(IQueryable<TSource>, Expression<Func<TSource, TKey>>)
   var selector = Expression_Lambda(prop, parameter);
   var orderByMethodName = ascending ? "OrderBy" : "OrderByDescending";
   var orderByExpression = Expression.Call(
       typeof (Queryable), //the type whose function we want to call
       orderByMethodName, //the name of the method
       new[] {elementType, prop.Type}, //the generic type signature
       queryable Expression, //parameter
       selector);
                   //parameter
```



#### https://dotnetfiddle.net/5PlilF



# Rules engine?



#### Define structure

```
public class Rule
    public string PropertyName { get; set; }
    public Operation Operation { get; set; }
    public object Value { get; set; }
public enum Operation
    GreaterThan,
    LessThan,
    Equal
```



#### Employee search criteria

```
new Rule {
    PropertyName = "Name",
    Operation = Operation Equal,
    Value = "gary"
},
new Rule {
    PropertyName = "HireDate",
    Operation = Operation GreaterThan,
    Value = new DateTime(2016, 1, 1)
```



```
var parameter = Expression.Parameter(typeof(Employee));
BinaryExpression binaryExpression = null;
foreach (var rule in rules)
   var prop = Expression.Property(parameter, rule.PropertyName);
   var value = Expression.Constant(rule.Value);
   var newBinary = Expression MakeBinary(rule Operation, prop, value);
    binaryExpression =
        binaryExpression == null
        ? newBinary
        : Expression.MakeBinary(AndAlso, binaryExpression, newBinary);
}
```



```
var parameter = Expression.Parameter(typeof(Employee));
BinaryExpression binaryExpression = null;
foreach (var rule in rules)
   var prop = Expression.Property(parameter, rule.PropertyName);
   var value = Expression.Constant(rule.Value);
   var newBinary = Expression.MakeBinary(rule.Operation, prop, value);
    binaryExpression =
        binaryExpression == null
        ? newBinary
        : Expression.MakeBinary(AndAlso, binaryExpression, newBinary);
```



```
var parameter = Expression.Parameter(typeof(Employee));
BinaryExpression binaryExpression = null;
foreach (var rule in rules)
   var prop = Expression.Property(parameter, rule.PropertyName);
   var value = Expression.Constant(rule.Value);
   var newBinary = Expression MakeBinary(rule Operation, prop, value);
    binaryExpression =
        binaryExpression == null
        ? newBinary
        : Expression.MakeBinary(AndAlso, binaryExpression, newBinary);
```



```
var parameter = Expression.Parameter(typeof(Employee));
BinaryExpression binaryExpression = null;
foreach (var rule in rules)
   var prop = Expression.Property(parameter, rule.PropertyName);
   var value = Expression.Constant(rule.Value);
   var newBinary = Expression.MakeBinary(rule.Operation, prop, value);
    binaryExpression =
        binaryExpression == null
        ? newBinary
        : Expression.MakeBinary(AndAlso, binaryExpression, newBinary);
```



```
var parameter = Expression.Parameter(typeof(Employee));
BinaryExpression binaryExpression = null;
foreach (var rule in rules)
   var prop = Expression.Property(parameter, rule.PropertyName);
   var value = Expression.Constant(rule.Value);
   var newBinary = Expression MakeBinary(rule Operation, prop, value);
    binaryExpression =
        binaryExpression == null
        ? newBinary
        : Expression.MakeBinary(AndAlso, binaryExpression, newBinary);
}
```



#### Employee search criteria

```
new Rule {
    PropertyName = "Name",
    Operation = Operation.Equal,
    Value = "gary"
},
new Rule {
    PropertyName = "HireDate",
    Operation = Operation.GreaterThan,
    Value = new DateTime(2016, 1, 1)
}
```

```
e => (e.Name == "gary") && (e.HireDate > new DateTime(2016, 1, 1))
```



#### https://dotnetfiddle.net/iobiuW



## Making it more complex

```
e => (e.Name == "gary") && (e.HireDate > new DateTime(2016, 1, 1))
```



#### Making it more complex

```
e => (e.Name == "gary" || e.Name == "spencer") &&
  (e.HireDate > new DateTime(2015, 1, 1))
```



#### Making it more complex

```
e => (e.Name == "gary" || e.Name == "spencer") &&
    (e.HireDate > new DateTime(2015, 1, 1))
```



```
public abstract class Rule
{
    public abstract Expression BuildExpression(ParameterExpression parameter);
}
```



```
public class RuleGroup : Rule
{
    public List<Rule> SubRules { get; set; }
    public ExpressionType CombineWith { get; set; }

    public RuleGroup(List<Rule> subRules, ExpressionType combineWith)
    {
        SubRules = subRules;
        CombineWith = combineWith;
    }

    public override Expression BuildExpression(ParameterExpression parameter)
    {
        var expressions = SubRules.Select(rule => rule.BuildExpression(parameter));
        var combined = expressions.Aggregate((left, right) => Expression.MakeBinary(CombineWith, left, right));
        return combined;
    }
}
```



```
public class RulePrimitive : Rule
    public string PropertyName { get; set; }
    public ExpressionType Operation { get; set; }
    public object Value { get; set; }
    public RulePrimitive(string propertyName, ExpressionType operation, object value)
        PropertyName = propertyName;
        Operation = operation;
        Value = value;
    public override Expression BuildExpression(ParameterExpression parameter)
        var left = Expression.Property(parameter, PropertyName);
        var right = Expression.Constant(Value);
        return Expression.MakeBinary(Operation, left, right);
```



#### https://dotnetfiddle.net/XuF4ci



## Some other things



# Expression. Block



### Expression. Block

- Used for grouping expressions in a "block"
- Can declare variables for use inside of this block

```
Expression.Variable(typeof(int), "x");
```



```
// Define a variable
var variable = Expression.Variable(typeof(int), "x");
// Create an expression block
var blockExpr = Expression.Block(
    new[] { variable },
    Expression.Assign(variable, Expression.Constant(5)),
    Expression.Add(variable, Expression.Constant(10))
);
// Compile and execute the expression block
var lambda = Expression.Lambda<Func<int>>(blockExpr).Compile();
var result = lambda();
Console WriteLine ("Result: " + result); // Output: Result: 15
```



#### https://dotnetfiddle.net/LOe2iO



## Here Be Dragons

(Problems and limitations)



# C# compiler == magic

```
Expression<Func<string, string, string>> combineStringsExp =
  (str1, str2) => str1 + str2;
```



```
var str1Param = Expression.Parameter(typeof(string));
var str2Param = Expression.Parameter(typeof(string));
var combineThem = Expression.MakeBinary(ExpressionType.Add, str1Param, str2Param);
```



```
var str1Param = Expression.Parameter(typeof(string));
var str2Param = Expression.Parameter(typeof(string));
var combineThem = Expression.MakeBinary(ExpressionType.Add, str1Param, str2Param);
```

EXCEPTION: The binary operator Add is not defined for the types 'System.String' and 'System.String'



```
Expression<Func<string, string, string>> combineStringsExp =
    (str1, str2) => str1 + str2;
```

This uses string.Concat



#### Conversions need to be done explicitly



# Doesn't support every language feature



# Homoiconicity



customers.Where(c => c.Address?.ZipCode == "12345")



customers.Where(c => c.Address?.ZipCode == "12345")





#### (Spencer is paraphrasing from memory)

"We're not going to update the Expression API. We looked at the work that would be required and we'd basically have to stop developing other features for an entire year and focus on that and that alone."



#### How to start

- Experiment
- LINQPad
- Google
- Intellisense!



# Most importantly, EXPERIMENT!



### Thank you!

www

schneids.net



@schneidenbach



