

# On the Origin of Species



*“All the world’s a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts...”*

**– William Shakespeare**

It is the 80th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, a day which always resonates with and deeply saddens me, as it is one of the first historical events I remember learning about as a child. My late father was a 14-year-old kid on December 7th, 1941, attending a professional football game at old Griffith Stadium in Washington, D.C. He told me so many times about the public address announcer calling out different admirals and generals – a sure sign something was terribly

wrong in an era long before cell phones and 24-hour news – that I swear I can hear the echoes of those announcements too.

Soldiers at Pearl Harbor were still learning how to use a new device called radar when Private Joseph McDonald detected a large number of planes heading toward the base. He called his commanding officer, First Lieutenant Kermit Tyler, who had been provided virtually no training, supervision or staff on this new technology and presumed it was the scheduled arrival of six U.S. B-17 bombers. The rest, as they say, is tragic history, and 2,403 Americans died from the attack. The American involvement in World War II had begun. He would later be cleared of any wrongdoing by a Naval Board of Inquiry, but he had to live with his indecision for the rest of his long life. Imagine how different history would be if he had had just a little more time with this new technology. It got me thinking about the power of perspective.

About 35 years ago, when my grandmother was 91, I got a call from the nursing home that she had been injured and, with my parents being out of town and unreachable, I had to immediately take full responsibility, including joining first responders and weighing in on the question of **heroic measures**. The answer at that point was no, which felt terribly adult and precipitate for someone not yet 30. Who was I to make this life and death decision for my grandmother?

As part of the experience in the emergency room, they had to quickly cut off much of her clothing and there I was, answering questions from the emergency room doctors and seeing my grandmother totally vulnerable and half-naked, not something I ever thought I would witness. As with those moments that are sealed in our memories, I was feeling a flood of simultaneous conflicting emotions. Sadness for my grandmother, clearly on her final hospital visit. But also awe for seeing her half-naked. For the very first time in my life, I could imagine her not just as someone two generations my senior, but as a young girl, a vibrant woman, a mother and

only much later, as my grandmother. We have an automatic tendency to do that – see others for only this moment in time as it reflects upon us. As if it is a role handed down by heaven and their job is to play the old person – not the culmination of many different characters over nearly a century. We, of course, play many roles, or “seven ages,” as Shakespeare would say.

I think sometimes that our political differences are less about what we think are our hardened views and more about our perspective. I appreciate the climate change activism and viewpoint of [Greta Thunberg](#), but as someone who had a career as an environmental activist 35 years ago, I only have so much patience for being lectured by an 18 year old. I want her to succeed; I’m just not as patient with the messenger. My perspective has matured.

As Tim Russert said, “The older I get, the smarter my father [and mother] seems to get.” After you reach a certain age and start reading the obituaries before the sports pages and realize you have a shorter and shorter runway, it has a way of minimizing other problems and differences.

In the years before [marketing](#) and mass commercialization took over and Madison Avenue began ignoring people over 55 as not in their target market, age used to be associated with wisdom. And the wisdom was revered. Now we are dismissed with “OK, Boomer” or ignored altogether. The great disappearance.

It is not a complaint but a warning. Our perspectives continue to evolve. Former Senator John Kerry may have been a “flip flopper,” as he was effectively accused of during his 2004 presidential campaign, but he was also exhibiting the wisdom of age, which is to evolve. If we have the same perspective at 75 as we did at 25, then what’s a lifetime for? Looking back is a lot different than looking forward.

I’ve been pro-choice my entire life, though I’ve always

preferred to explain my position rather than categorize it. When I was in law school and wrote a paper on *Roe v. Wade*, I pointed out that while I liked the result, I was troubled by Justice Blackmun finding a right to privacy in the penumbra of the Fourth Amendment, almost out of whole cloth, a reasoning that occasionally concerned other moderate and liberal justices both at the time and in subsequent years. It is as brilliant as it is creative. But is it any more or less hypocritical than some of the arguments we heard last week by the new Court's conservative majority? The likely result troubles me greatly. We can poke a lot of holes in the arguments made by the new six vote majority during their questioning and reasoning at oral argument, when they clearly signaled their desire to overturn *Roe*. Nevertheless, it's not as though the reasoning of the 1973 ruling is without flaws. Perspective.

Like Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, we can choose to continue to evolve. We need not change our core or even our points of view, but we do gain appreciation from the mountain top.

We don't need to like the opposition, but we do need to listen, to engage, to understand. It is how we grow. As the late Senator and candidate for Vice President Bob Dole wrote in his final column – a message from beyond for all of us to be our better selves – “bipartisanship is the minimum we should expect from ourselves.”

I don't learn much from drinking the Kool-Aid, but I do learn an immense amount from listening, discussing and debating. If law school taught me anything, it was to think in layers. If not that argument, then this, to support our point of view—sometimes many layers deep. Never is an opinion to be validated by “Because I said so.”

One of the many joys of my job is the daily podcast I host for the *Corporate Counsel Business Journal* and the opportunity

each day to interview some of the leading legal scholars, lawyers, lobbyists, former politicians, authors and more. And with each show, especially when I don't agree with a guest's point of view, is the heady moment when I think, "I may not agree, but now I *understand* their reasoning." This is how this species evolves.

This week I had four wonderful shows on *In House Warrior*, touching on this topic of listening and inclusivity, including:

A look at the U.S. Supreme Court term with Josh Blackman, a national thought leader on constitutional law and the United States Supreme Court, regular television commentator, Professor at the South Texas College of Law Houston and an **adjunct scholar** at the Cato Institute. He discussed the current Supreme Court term including a look at *Roe v. Wade*, the Mississippi and Texas abortion laws, gun control, voting rights, vaccination mandates, the value of legislative histories, stare decisis and the original intent doctrine. Professor Blackman has authored three books, and his latest, **An Introduction to Constitutional Law**, is a top-five bestseller on Amazon.

A look at nuclear verdicts ("A billion is the new million") with Stratton Horres and Karen Bashor, partners at Wilson Elser and accomplished litigators with extensive experience in crisis management and catastrophic and high-exposure mass casualty events. They discussed the rise of social inflation and its impact on nuclear verdicts, legal strategies for turning the tables and minimizing these nuclear verdicts, and also provided insights into best practices for handling billion-dollar claims.

Ron Karr, CEO of Velocity Mindset, spoke about how sales teams with modern approaches can capitalize on more opportunities and walk away with more deals in less time. He focused on the importance of listening, overcoming resistance and truly

understanding what you want out of each exchange. His newest book is **Velocity Mindset: How Leaders Eliminate Resistance, Gain Buy-in, and Achieve Better Results—Faster.**

And finally, understanding polling and research with Justin Wallin, CEO of Wallin Opinion Research, whose firm has delivered strategic direction to hundreds of political candidates, organizations and non-profits. He spoke about what political polling can and cannot do, our demand for conclusions even when the answer is too close to call, the importance of intelligence informing strategy and why it is so important to speak with people who think differently than we do – our growth and wisdom depend on it, as do our business decisions and our form of self-governance.

*“...And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,  
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;  
His youthful hose, well sav'd, a world too wide  
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,  
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.”*

Perspective. Enjoy the listens.

Richard Levick

***Listen to A Look at the U.S. Supreme Court Term***

***Listen to Nuclear Verdicts – A Billion is the New Million***

***Listen to The Velocity Mindset***

***Listen to Asking Why***