



The Starfish Story

Loren Eiseley, while writing his book *The Unexpected Universe*, was walking along the ocean in Costabel early one morning. It was shortly after a storm had subsided and as he continued walking, he noticed that thousands of starfish had been washed up on the beach. Ahead of him was a gigantic rainbow of incredible perfection shimmering into existence. At the base of the rainbow stooped a little boy, gazing fixedly at an object in the sand. Eventually, he flung the object far beyond the breaking surf.

Eiseley went up to him and asked, "Son, what are you doing?" The little boy answered, "I'm throwing starfish back into the sea because if I don't they're going to die." "But there are thousands of starfish. In the larger scheme of things you're not going to make much of a difference to all these starfish." The little boy looked up at him, stooped down again to pick up another starfish and, gently but quickly, flung it back into the ocean. "It's going to make a big difference to that one" he replied.

Eiseley was embarrassed, uncomfortable with the contrast of the little boy's youthful, innocent love for the living with his own hardened, "mature" indifference to death. He had nothing to say and left, continuing to walk on the beach but unable to get the picture of the little boy out of his mind. It was a moment of truth for Eiseley, of deep soul searching and self-confrontation. In time, he returned to the star thrower, silently picked up a starfish and spun it far out into the waves. "I understand." he said quietly. "Call me another thrower." Together, still under the hues of the rainbow, they spent hours throwing starfish back into the ocean. It was a task not assumed lightly, for it was men as well as starfish they sought to save, sensing intuitively that man cannot exist spiritually without life.