

We should celebrate our very existence

by Mark Pavilons

I have a good story to tell. It's not just my story.

It may not be impressive, but it's like many others out there ? all of us in fact.

Experts estimate that the odds of my (our)?existence today is roughly one in 400 quadrillion.

Yes, that's a huge number ? approximately the volume in cubic metres of the Atlantic Ocean. A Buddhist version of our existence notes that if there was just one life preserver floating around the ocean and only one turtle in the water, our odds would be the same as that turtle sticking its head out in exactly the centre of that preserver.

The numbers are intriguing in the big picture. Some of us think we're pretty tiny, insignificant creatures, walking around aimlessly among our 7.3 billion brethren on this planet. And yet, we're all very, very special. In fact, we beat the astronomical odds.

Our current life is a bit more likely. The odds of our moms and dads meeting is one in 20,000.

The number grows of course with them dating, getting married and having kids (you). But you and I are not a ?given.?

There's a 1 in 400,000,000,000,000,000 chance of our parents' egg and sperm having the right DNA to create us.

That right there is crazy ? an unbelievable miracle if you ask me.

But the human equation gets much longer because that's only our recent history. We have to look back ? all the way back ? millions of years.

Author Ali Binazir created a really interesting infographic that logs our ascent. Check it out if you get a chance.

For us to be here, every one of our ancestors had to live to reproductive age ? going all the way back, not just to the first Homo sapiens, first Homo erectus and Homo habilis, but all the way back to the first single-celled organism. You are a representative of an unbroken lineage of life going back 4 billion years.

That's life on earth, of course, not really us. But that slime that emerged from the primordial ooze is our ancestor, in a manner of speaking.

Hominins have been around for about 3 million years, and a generation is about 20 years. That's 150,000 generations. Over the course of all human existence, let's say the likelihood of any one human offspring to survive childhood and live to reproductive age and have at least one kid is 50:50. Then what would be the chance of your particular lineage to have remained unbroken for 150,000 generations?

Picture two million people getting together, each playing a game of dice with a trillion-sided die.

They each roll the die, and they all roll, say, 550,343,279,001 ??he exact same number out of a trillion possible numbers.

For you and I, that's exactly what happened. We beat the odds.

Bottom line??Statistically, we shouldn't be here.

In light of these startling odds, I laugh in the face of the puny 1 in 14 million odds of winning the Lotto 6/49 jackpot.

Ziggy Marley put it this way: "I ... carry the spirit and blood of my father, mother and my ancestors. So, I am really never alone. My identity is through that line."

It is true, my friends, that each of our stories began before we were born. We are chapters of an ongoing epic, a saga unlike anything ever created.

Some believe that we hardly get a chance to blossom on Earth, before we truly flower in the great beyond.

Thomas Fuller thought we are "born crying, live complaining and die disappointed."

Perhaps. But we don't know anything else. "Who else would we be if not ourselves?"

When you look at those aforementioned numbers, one has to wonder why we made it. How lucky were we that we reached the podium in some strange aquatic race to the finish line? Our trophy was creation and being born.

Few of us give this much thought; we're much too preoccupied with our rather humdrum journeys. Some long for achievement, accomplishment and greatness. Others want to set an example and still others want a lasting legacy.

But really, what can compare to the odds of existence? "How can we do any better than the powers that led to our conception? Just how do we top nativity and genesis?"

Sounds like the ultimate formula of math, faith, spirituality and divine intervention, doesn't it?

But this is science, my friends, by the numbers. They say numbers don't lie.

Well, "our numbers" perhaps led by a higher power rather than mere happenstance? "I saw fit to give us the world. Were we deemed deserving to inherit such wonders?" Or did we land in this magical place because of some roll of the dice?

There are many things about us that simply can't be quantified.

Every person you meet carries a piece of you with them. And someone still smiles when they remember a moment with you.

Truly precious. What are the odds of that?

We all know we're made of sugar, spice, snails and puppy dog tails, and maybe a wee bit more.

Humans are composed of 84 minerals, 23 elements and 8 gallons of water, distributed among 38 billion cells.

We have been built out of an incomprehensible portion of parts of our ancestors and parts of the earth "ligned in a marvellous set of instructions hidden in a double helix, small enough to be carried by a single sperm."

We are made of recycled butterflies, plants, rocks, streams, firewood, wolf skins and shark teeth, decomposed into their smallest parts and reconstructed into the most complex living being on our planet.

We're not living on earth, we are earth.

We can count cards and calculate the odds all we want. The fact is we made it, you and I, out of quadrillions of possible scenarios.

So, my friends, we may be humble, but none of us live ?boring lives.? We are meant to be here, for as long as our genes permit.

Pull up a chair and sit a while, my friends. Chat, breathe in the air and admire the scenery. And revel in the fact you've won the ultimate lottery!