

What We Talk About When We Talk About Photosynthesis

by Con Chapman



Minimalist/realist short-story writer Raymond Carver was fired from his job as an editor of science textbooks because of his inappropriate writing style.

Wikipedia

Photosynthesis is an important process. I mean it's extremely important. It's the source of food for almost all organisms on earth. Except for Doreen, my wife, who lives on cheese curls and diet soda except when we have company over. Which isn't all that often. Her brother, Floyd, won't eat vegetables at all. Calls them "rabbit food."



Plant photosynthesis is the dominant form of photosynthesis on our planet. There's photosynthesis carried on by bacteria, but it's not nearly as important. Maybe it's important to the dirt under Chef's finger nails. I don't know. I've never been there, and I don't want to go. Chef is the fry cook at the place where Doreen is a

waitress. I don't think he washes his hands before returning to work from the rest room.



Man depends on photosynthesis for both food and non-edible plant products, like wood for shelter and fiber for warmth. We had this little wood-frame house when we were first married. It wasn't much, but we wouldn't have had it at all if it weren't for photosynthesis.

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I had Avogadro's number but I lost it, so I started asking around to see if anybody else had it. I asked Naomi, the woman I'd been going out with for a while. "Do you have Avogadro's number?" I asked.



"Why do you ask?" she said.

"No reason. No reason at all."

"Why do you need the number of an Italian physicist who originated the hypothesis that equal volumes of gases, under the same pressure and temperature conditions, contain the same number of molecules?"

"I'm not suspicious," I said. "I just need his number."



Avogadro: You know his name, look up the number.

She gave me a look, then pulled a matchbook from her purse. She opened it up and handed it to me. "Here-here it is." 6×10 to the 23rd power, it said on the inside, right under "Close cover before striking."

I looked down at the matchbook, then back up at her. How did I know this was the number of molecules per gram molecular weight of a substance, and not some phony-baloney number she'd cooked up?

"Thanks," I said. "Thanks a lot."

"Don't mention it," she said. "Don't mention it at all."

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I wanted to get out of Wapato, wanted to get out bad. There was a flag stop where you could catch a bus, but what good would that do you? It only went as far as Moxee, then came back, like running in a circle. I needed to get to Yakima, where I could catch a flight out.

I asked my sister to take me to Yakima, but she had to work. I wasn't about to take a cab all that way—it was 15 miles—so I had to ask my wife.

"Why do you need to go to Yakima?" my wife asked. I couldn't tell her.

"It's the principle of the thing," I said.

"What principle?"



Bernoulli: It's the principle of the thing.

"Bernoulli's Principle. You wouldn't understand."

She mashed her cigarette down into the sink. "Like hell I wouldn't. See that?" she said.

"What?"

"How I used the energy of a stationary mass to exert a downward push."

"So?"

"So? So you're talking about how fluid pressure is reduced whenever the speed of flow is increased." She was angry.

I just sat there, taking it in.

"You don't have anything to say?" she said finally.

I drank the last of my coffee. "You got me," I said.

She looked out the window over the sink. "Go on, go."

"I don't want to go," I said, trying to calm her down. "But the difference in speed of flow causes a lower pressure on the upper surface of a wing. It results in an upward force, or lift."

"That doesn't help me," she said.

"It can take us away from here."

"Just get out."

"It's better this way," I said.

She turned her back to me, and I stared at the kitchen wall, marveling at the wonders of science that surround us. We don't even know they're there most of the time.

Available in Kindle format on amazon.com as part of the collection "Dead Writers Make More Money."

