

Your Inner Fish: A Journey into the 3.5-Billion-Year History of the Human Body

By Neil Shubin

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Neil Shubin, the paleontologist and professor of anatomy who co-discovered *Tiktaalik*, the “fish with hands,” tells the story of our bodies as you've never heard it before. The basis for the PSB series.

By examining fossils and DNA, he shows us that our hands actually resemble fish fins, our heads are organized like long-extinct jawless fish, and major parts of our genomes look and function like those of worms and bacteria. **Your Inner Fish** makes us look at ourselves and our world in an illuminating new light. This is science writing at its finest—enlightening, accessible and told with irresistible enthusiasm.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Oliver Sacks on *Your Inner Fish*

Since the 1970 publication of *Migraine*, neurologist Oliver Sacks's unusual and fascinating case histories of "differently brained" people and phenomena--a surgeon with Tourette's syndrome, a community of people born totally colorblind, musical hallucinations, to name a few--have been marked by extraordinary compassion and humanity, focusing on the patient as much as the condition. His books include *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, *Awakenings* (which inspired the Oscar-nominated film), and 2007's *Musicophilia*. He lives in New York City, where he is Professor of Clinical Neurology at Columbia University.



Your Inner Fish is my favorite sort of book--an intelligent, exhilarating, and compelling scientific adventure story, one which will change forever how you understand what it means to be human. The field of evolutionary biology is just beginning an exciting new age of discovery, and Neil Shubin's research expeditions around the world have redefined the way we now look at the origins of mammals, frogs, crocodiles, tetrapods, and sarcopterygian fish--and thus the way we look at the descent of humankind. One of Shubin's groundbreaking discoveries, only a

*year and a half ago, was the unearthing of a fish with elbows and a neck, a long-sought evolutionary "missing link" between creatures of the sea and land-dwellers. My own mother was a surgeon and a comparative anatomist, and she drummed it into me, and into all of her students, that our own anatomy is unintelligible without a knowledge of its evolutionary origins and precursors. The human body becomes infinitely fascinating with such knowledge, which Shubin provides here with grace and clarity. Your Inner Fish shows us how, like the fish with elbows, we carry the whole history of evolution within our own bodies, and how the human genome links us with the rest of life on earth. Shubin is not only a distinguished scientist, but a wonderfully lucid and elegant writer; he is an irrepressibly enthusiastic teacher whose humor and intelligence and spellbinding narrative make this book an absolute delight. Your Inner Fish is not only a great read; it marks the debut of a science writer of the first rank. (Photo © Elena Seibert) **A Note from Author Neil Shubin** This book grew out of an extraordinary circumstance in my life. On account of faculty departures, I ended up directing the human anatomy course at the University of Chicago medical school. Anatomy is the course during which nervous first-year medical students dissect human cadavers while learning the names and organization of most of the organs, holes, nerves, and vessels in the body. This is their grand entrance to the world of medicine, a formative experience on their path to becoming physicians. At first glance, you couldn't have imagined a worse candidate for the job of training the next generation of doctors: I'm a fish paleontologist. It turns out that being a paleontologist is a huge advantage in teaching human anatomy. Why? The best roadmaps to human bodies lie in the bodies of other animals. The simplest way to teach students the nerves in the human head is to show them the state of affairs in sharks. The easiest roadmap to their limbs lies in fish. Reptiles are a real help with the structure of the brain. The reason is that the bodies of these creatures are simpler versions of ours. During the summer of my second year leading the course, working in the Arctic, my colleagues and I discovered fossil fish that gave us powerful new insights into the invasion of land by fish over 375 million years ago. That discovery and my foray into teaching human anatomy led me to a profound connection. That connection became this book.*

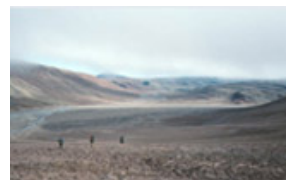
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The crew removing the first Tiktaalik in 2004



Ted Daeschler and Neil Shubin prospecting for new sites (Credit: Andrew Gillis)



The valley where Tiktaalik was discovered (credit: Ted Daeschler, Academy of Natural Sciences)



The models of Tiktaalik being constructed for exhibition (Tyler Keillor, University of Chicago)



Me with one of the models (John Weinstein, Field Museum)

From Publishers Weekly

Fish paleontologist Shubin illuminates the subject of evolution with humor and clarity in this compelling look at how the human body evolved into its present state. Parsing the millennia-old genetic history of the human form is a natural project for Shubin, who chairs the department of organismal biology and anatomy at the University of Chicago and was co-discoverer of *Tiktaalik*, a 375-million-year-old fossil fish whose flat skull and limbs, and finger, toe, ankle and wrist bones, provide a link between fish and the earliest land-dwelling creatures. Shubin moves smoothly through the anatomical spectrum, finding ancient precursors to human teeth in a 200-million-year-old fossil of the mouse-size part animal, part reptile tritheledont; he also notes cellular similarities between humans and sponges. Other fossils reveal the origins of our senses, from the eye to that wonderful Rube Goldberg contraption the ear. Shubin excels at explaining the science, making each discovery an adventure, whether it's a Pennsylvania roadcut or a stony outcrop beset by polar bears and howling Arctic winds. I can imagine few things more beautiful or intellectually profound than finding the basis for our humanity... nestled inside some of the most humble creatures that ever lived, he writes, and curious readers are likely to agree. Illus. (Jan. 15)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Neil Shubin, Professor of Biology and Anatomy at the University of Chicago, made headlines in April 2006 with his discovery of a 375-million-year-old fossil called *Tiktaalik*, the missing link between ancient sea creatures and land dwellers. The reviewers, mostly science writers, embraced Shubin's popular science book, which offers a new perspective on evolution, a subject on which most people feel like they've already made up their minds. While many Americans doubt Darwinism, hardly anyone discounts anatomy, so it is a logical place to reopen the debate. All critics agreed that Shubin, with his clear examples and explanations, makes (yet another) convincing argument. A few critics, in fact, were so excited by it that they seemed ready to enroll in Shubin's anatomy course themselves.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Shanon Stephens:

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