Letters to the Editor

Mathematics and Home Schooling
I read the article “Mathematics and home schooling” (Notices, April 2012) and would like to make some comments. I and my wife are homeschooled parents, we are evangelical Christians, and we have homeschooled five children to varying grades. The oldest (a girl) is about to graduate in mechanical engineering.

1) The Constitution starts with the words “We the People”. The people delegate tasks to the government, but it was never the intention of the framers that the state would be the repository of authority and would delegate responsibility to parents. I take my responsibility as a parent very seriously, from God who gave me the children to begin with, and I do not recognize the state as delegating authority to me. The responsibility and authority are mine unless I screw up. What I do recognize is the right of the other “people” around me to take action if they see me not performing my responsibility to educate my children. Those “people” can form a government if they like, to enforce their view of what should be done as a minimum standard (and they have done so). The authors quote the Tenth Amendment, where powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited to it by the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

2) Much is made in the article about girls and certain publications. I’ve never heard of them (and I’ve seen and heard a lot, being on homeschooling mailing lists), and I note the absence of data. What principal or school board member was ever seen going to a girls basketball game? There is ample data on gender discrimination in society, and the schools must be held accountable. 3) I do avoid the public school system out of a desire to maintain a Godly curriculum. It makes a major difference to a young person to know that God created them. Therefore others around them are special, and should be treated tenderly. The kids come home from high school talking about Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs”, which is accepted without any evidence. One gets only what one gives, and the giving has to come first. The focus is on giving, not on trying to fulfill one’s needs first (which is selfish and is hurtful to teach).

4) Much of “teacher certification” training is in handling groups of youngsters, preparing and executing group instruction, and is not germane to a home-schooling situation.

—Thomas A. Ryan
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A Collision with Salam
Regarding The Infinity Puzzle, reviewed by Brian E. Blank, in the Notices, September 2012. May I share a personal experience from my undergraduate days in Imperial College London in 1966? I was rushing to a class and collided with someone who almost fell over. In my haste I did not stop to apologize. Later I was told that I had almost killed a potential Nobelist. My victim was Salam, the same Nobelist discussed on p. 1107 of Mr. Blank’s review.

—Frank Okoh
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(Received September 6, 2012)

Severi’s Last Political Creed
There is one more piece of information that could complement the interesting article “A fresh look at Francesco Severi”, by Judith Goodstein and Donald Babbitt (Notices, September 2012). In the last years of his life Severi was the president of the “Associazione Italia-URSS”, a cultural association which was financed by the Soviet Union and was very close to the Italian Communist Party. Perhaps this association could deserve the epithet of “Communist Front Organization”.

—Alessandro Figà Talamanca
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(Received September 10, 2012)

Correction
The “Mathematics Opportunities” section of the August 2012 issue of Notices, carried a Call for Nominations for the Otto Neugebauer Prize, giving a deadline of December 31, 2012. In fact, the prize was awarded in July 2012, and the call for nominations is not open at present.

—Sandy Frost

Correction
The photographer for the photo in Figure 7 in “Glimpses of Benoît B. Mandelbrot (1924–2010), Notices, September 2012, was incorrectly identified as Richard Bernt. The photographer was actually Bernt Wahl.

—Sandy Frost