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# Introduction

Let's try something. I will say a word, and you respond with a word. Ready? Peanut butter. . . . Did you say jelly? I thought so. Here's another one. Strawberries. . . . Did you say cream? Pretty amazing huh? It's as if I can read your mind, even though I am not in the room with you. In fact, I am not in the room with you. I am not even in the same time coordinate as you, having written this some time in the past before you read it. As I write this, right now, *I am reading your mind. . . in the future!* Pretty amazing. Let's try another one. Math. . . . What did you say? Did you say humor? I am willing to bet that you did. Because everyone associates math with humor.

Why is it that you can't think about math without thinking about humor? Why is it, when you walk down the corridor of a math building at any major university, you hear peals of laughter and snorts of pleasure coming out of the classrooms? Why do so many comedians complete Ph.D.'s in mathematics simply to improve their ability to deliver a punchline? Why, when students receive their graded exams in math classes, do they laugh out loud?

Why? Well, we all know the answer. Because math is fun. There is nothing quite so much fun as math. Certainly not ice cream. Certainly not sex. And certainly not physics.

But it wasn't always that way. Believe it or not, there was a time when math and humor were considered disjoint sets.

No one is sure when math and humor appeared together for the first time. Many attribute it to the time Karl Friedrich Gauss (1777-1855) mistakenly stumbled into a stand-up club in Göttingen, and managed, with just a few infinite series, to bring down the house. Others suggest that it was the early comedy team known as the Bernoulli Brothers. Still others attribute it to the first use of the word “functor”. But what we know for sure is that now, when you think of math, you just start chuckling.

Why then, is this the first book of humorous math stories? Why aren’t there whole sections of bookstores devoted to this topic? If math and humor go hand-in-hand like a glove and ummm, a hand, then why isn’t literature littered with this stuff?

Again, I will read your mind. Right now, you are saying to yourself, that’s right. I haven’t seen any books of humorous math stories. And given how humorous math is, what could possibly be the explanation for that?

Clearly, there is only one logical conclusion we can draw. The answer is simple. Someone, somehow, and I won’t name names, has kept this material from the American public. Yes, they have used the full power of the American government (think FBI, CIA, FDA, ATF, FTD) to hide the fact that math and humor go together like water and wet pants.

Of course, you may be asking yourself, why would these unnamed people in the highest echelons of government want to keep this humorous math literature from a public hungering for it? Why do they want people to believe that math is dreary, dull, quantitative, and logical in the extreme? Why have they wanted to convince us all that mathematics has, as their PR lackeys put it, “a dearth of mirth”?

There is only one logical answer. Because they fear the marriage of math and humor. They fear it the same way some people fear interspecies marriage. Simply because they don’t understand it.

So I have written this book, I hope somehow it slips past the government censors and gets out to the public. And I hope the public seizes on it, and buys millions of copies and it soars to the top of the bestseller lists, not because of the buckets of money I would make,

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but because people need to satisfy their natural desire to see math and humor together.

But I realize this scenario is extremely unlikely, and the entire book is most likely an exercise in futility. For if the censor reads through this book and chuckles once, just once, that will be enough to relegate it to a vault deep in the bowels of Washington, and to keep it out of your reach.

But perhaps, just perhaps, we will get lucky. Perhaps the government censor will not find anything funny in the entire book, and then she or he will let you read it. We can always hope, can't we?