...when guys at MIT or Princeton had trouble doing a certain integral, it was because they couldn’t do it with the standard methods they had learned in school. If it was contour integration, they would have found it; if it was a simple series expansion, they would have found it. Then I come along and try differentiating under the integral sign, and often it worked. So I got a great reputation for doing integrals, only because my box of tools was different from everybody else’s, and they had tried all their tools on it before giving the problem to me. —Richard Feynman, Surely You’re Joking, Mr. Feynman

L. J. Mordell (1888–1972) was a leading number theorist from St. John’s College, Cambridge University, England. When he was living in the United States, he received a phone call from a woman who asked him if he would like to participate in a quiz program. He agreed, so she asked him if he knew which country the rumba came from. He answered “Cuba,” and she said, “You’re right, and you’ve just won 75 dollars worth of dancing lessons.” To this Mordell said, “Fine, now I have a question for you: Who was the first president of the United States?” She replied, “George Washington,” to which Mordell said, “You’re right, and now you’ve just won your dancing lessons back again.” Mordell considered this to be one of his greatest triumphs.

—Contributed by John Brillhart

What crazy things happen to you? Readers are invited to submit original short amusing stories, math jokes, cartoons, and other material to: noti-backpage@ams.org.