



A Numerate Life: A Mathematician Explores the Vagaries of Life, His Own and Probably Yours

By John Allen Paulos

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Employing intuitive ideas from mathematics, this quirky "meta-memoir" raises questions about our lives that most of us don't think to ask, but arguably should: What part of memory is reliable fact, what part creative embellishment? Which favorite presuppositions are unfounded, which statistically biased? By conjoining two opposing mindsets--the suspension of disbelief required in storytelling and the skepticism inherent in the scientific method--bestselling mathematician John Allen Paulos has created an unusual hybrid, a composite of personal memories and mathematical approaches to re-evaluating them.

Entertaining vignettes from Paulos's biography abound--ranging from a bullying math teacher and a fabulous collection of baseball cards to romantic crushes, a grandmother's petty larceny, and his quite unintended role in getting George Bush elected president in 2000. These vignettes serve as springboards to many telling perspectives: simple arithmetic puts life-long habits in a dubious new light; higher dimensional geometry helps us see that we're all rather peculiar; nonlinear dynamics explains the narcissism of small differences cascading into very different siblings; logarithms and exponentials yield insight on why we tend to become bored and jaded as we age; and there are tricks and jokes, probability and coincidences, and much more.

For fans of Paulos or newcomers to his work, this witty commentary on his life--and yours--is fascinating reading.

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Editorial Review

Review

"There's nothing more enlightening than a view of life's nuances as seen through the lens of a mathematician. Especially when that mathematician is John Allen Paulos, a brilliant educator who persistently empowers the reader to think in ways that render transparent much of what is opaque in the world around us."

—NEIL DEGRASSE TYSON, Astrophysicist, American Museum of Natural History

"*A Numerate Life* is the engaging history of a mathematical mind. As always, John Paulos displays his genius for making the abstract and abstruse entirely intuitive."

—SYLVIA NASAR, author of *A Beautiful Mind*

"A quirky and surprisingly poignant book about the struggle to make sense of one's own life story. With the help of logic and statistical reasoning, Paulos shines a light on the paradoxes and delusions that so often bedevil our remembrance of things past. Where Proust had his madeleine, Paulos has math."

—STEVEN STROGATZ, professor of mathematics, Cornell University, and author of *The Joy of X*

"American editor Ellery Sedgwick wrote once that 'autobiographies ought to begin with Chapter Two.' I believe that had he read *A Numerate Life*, he would have agreed that Chapter One is no less fascinating than any other chapter in this wonderful book. Paulos's life is a rich tapestry embroidered with mathematical gems."

—MARIO LIVIO, astrophysicist, author of *Brilliant Blunders* and *The Golden Ratio*

"In this gripping page-turner, John Allen Paulos surprises us once again, with a 'memoir' like no other memoir. He may not have made, as he claims, any 'seminal contributions' to mathematics, but his impact on 'meta-mathematics,' and the interface of math with the real world, far surpasses that of any single living mathematician. You will never be able to read biographies the same way again, since this is not yet-another-memoir, but a thought-provoking, path-breaking, 'meta-memoir' and even 'anti-memoir.'"

—DORON ZEILBERGER, Board of Governors professor of Mathematics, Rutgers University, and winner of the Leroy P. Steele Prize and the Euler Medal in Mathematics

About the Author

John Allen Paulos is a professor of mathematics at Temple University and the author of eight previous books, including the best-selling *Innumeracy* and *A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper*.

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