



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

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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