

7-1-1993

Like Poetry, Mathematics is Beautiful

JoAnne Growney
Bloomsburg University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/hmnj>



Part of the [Esthetics Commons](#), [Mathematics Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Growney, JoAnne (1993) "Like Poetry, Mathematics is Beautiful," *Humanistic Mathematics Network Journal*: Iss. 8, Article 4.
Available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/hmnj/vol1/iss8/4>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Claremont at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Humanistic Mathematics Network Journal by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

Unpublished doctoral dissertation,
Berkeley, California.

Weissglass, J. (1992). Changing the system
means changing ourselves. Education
Week, June 10.

Like Poetry, Mathematics is Beautiful

Timidly I ask
each one I meet if they
find mathematics beautiful
or useful, and each one dares to say,
"Useful, of course. I use it every day."
And if I seem to want a proof,
they all go on to tell
that daily they subtract and add
to keep a checkbook; sometimes also
they multiply to find how many squares
they need to tile the kitchen floor.

Mathematics is not only plus
and minus, not just counting one,
two, three. There are rules to bend
defiantly, so parallels
will meet before infinity. Look
at the magic of unending terms
that converge to a finite sum:
start with one-half plus half of one-half
plus half of the last again and again.
Though we go on forever, we never
Pass one. Do you find me difficult? Oh, dear!

Suppose, instead, I ask
if poetry is beautiful
or useful. Will each person say,
"Useful, of course. I use it every day."
And if I seem to want a proof,
will they go on to say that they
use rhymes to call to mind the days
of a month -- like "Thirty hath
September" -- and to remember
how to spell words with "i" and "e."

I have a faint, enduring hope
that someday folks will see
mathematics to be
as lovely
as poetry.

JoAnne Growney
Department of Mathematics and Computer Science
Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA 17815