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Review of JoAnne Growney's "My Dance is Mathematics"

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Growney, Joanne. *My Dance is Mathematics*. Bloomsburg, PA: JoAnne Growney, 2001, 30 pages, \$5.00. May be ordered from the author.

My Dance is Mathematics is a set of twenty-four poems expressing appreciation, understanding, and love of mathematics from a variety of different perspectives. The relationship to mathematics may be seen in the content of the poem, the structure, or both. Poems are often humorous. I enjoy reading them so much that I have given the booklet as a gift many times. Readers of *Mathematics Magazine*, *The College Mathematics Journal*, *The American Mathematical Monthly*, and the *Humanistic Mathematical Network Journal* have seen samples from this collection.

The content of a poem in "My Dance is Mathematics" may be related to mathematical subject matter, or the associated pedagogy; it may be about a mathematician, or a mathematician's life. For instance, every mathematician would understand and enjoy the portrayal of a familiar experience in the poem, "Misunderstanding."

Ah, you are a mathematician,
they say with admiration
or scorn.

Then, they say,
I could use you
to balance my checkbook.

I think about checkbooks.
Once in a while
I balance mine,
just like sometimes
I dust high shelves

One of my favorites is called "A Mathematician's Nightmare." On the surface, it seems to be about decision-making in pricing and shopping, but it is an excellent depiction for a student or lay reader of the Collatz Conjecture, a famous unsolved problem. (A

footnote gives the explanation.) Another favorite is a beautiful and poignant poem about Emmy Noether. It is called "My Dance is Mathematics," for which the entire collection is named. In this poem, JoAnne Growney asks "If a woman's dance / is mathematics, / must she dance alone?"

In "December and June," the poet uses vibrant images to compare winter and summer scenes and feelings. The structure of the poem is based on prime factorization in a delightful way. Here is the first stanza:

cold
winds howl
geese go south
nights long tea steeps
temperatures fall low

ponds freeze snowmen grow
toboggans slide down hillsides
sun hides ice coats spring waits
wood-fires flame snowballs fly
winds howl groundhogs hibernate

Poems with very different content, "Changing Colors" (about universal emotions) and "Counting" (about the number system) are based on the same poetic structure: the numbers of syllables in consecutive lines are consecutive positive integers. One of the poems, "ABC," is funny and clever, is also a bit like an exercise, expressing a mathematical idea by using each letter of the alphabet in turn. We enjoy the fun and may be inspired to try one ourselves.

JoAnne Growney's poetic talent, insight, and humor provide repeated pleasure.