

# Journal of Humanistic Mathematics

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Volume 12 | Issue 1

January 2022

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## Wrong Way

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### Recommended Citation

Joseph Chaney, "Wrong Way," *Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*, Volume 12 Issue 1 (January 2022), pages 502-502. . Available at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/jhm/vol12/iss1/37>

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# Wrong Way

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Let the drunkard's walk be memoryless  
so that each step is a new beginning.  
Suppose a man like your dad doesn't know  
where he is. He can't know where he's going.  
He moves randomly, driven by discrete  
impulses, although perhaps believing  
he knows what he's doing. That's why he goes  
rather than halting—alert to guidance.  
What are the odds that he tumbles into  
the river? Knowing nothing is one kind  
of wrong knowledge. A mathematician  
might have solved the equation, might have seen  
where his steps were leading by his leaning—  
his bias for the turbulent, the wet.

**Postscript:** This poem uses the problem of the “drunkard’s walk” to describe how “your dad” died from drowning, based on Brett Berry’s explanation in her blog post “The Drunkard’s Walk Explained: Stochastic Processes, Markov Chains & Random Walks” (*Math Hacks*, June 12, 2017; available at <https://medium.com/i-math/the-drunkards-walk-explained-48a0205d304>). It’s possible to hear the phrase “your dad” as referring to the poem’s speaker’s father, through a sort of psychological (or merely linguistic) displacement. Explicit consideration of the mathematics of the tragic accident pushes the event even further from the emotional origin of the speaker’s concern. In other words, I want to create a tension between the calmness of mathematical calculation and the agitation of grief and/or anger.