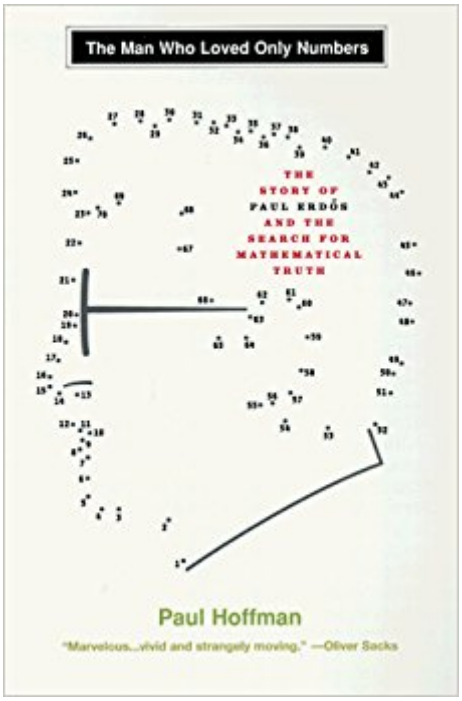
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# The Man Who Loved Only Numbers: The Story Of Paul Erdos And The Search For Mathematical Truth




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## Synopsis

Based on a National Magazine Award-winning article, this masterful biography of Hungarian-born Paul Erdos is both a vivid portrait of an eccentric genius and a layman’s guide to some of this century’s most startling mathematical discoveries.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Paul ErdÃƒÂ¶s was an amazing and prolific mathematician whose life as a world-wandering numerical nomad was legendary. He published almost 1500 scholarly papers before his death in 1996, and he probably thought more about math problems than anyone in history. Like a traveling salesman offering his thoughts as wares, ErdÃƒÂ¶s would show up on the doorstep of one mathematician or another and announce, "My brain is open." After working through a problem, he’d move on to the next place, the next solution. Hoffman’s book, like Sylvia Nasar’s biography of John Nash, A Beautiful Mind, reveals a genius’s life that transcended the merely quirky. But ErdÃƒÂ¶s’s brand of madness was joyful, unlike Nash’s despairing schizophrenia. ErdÃƒÂ¶s never tried to dilute his obsessive passion for numbers with ordinary emotional interactions, thus avoiding hurting the people around him, as Nash did. Oliver Sacks writes of ErdÃƒÂ¶s: "A mathematical genius of the first order, Paul ErdÃƒÂ¶s was totally obsessed with his subject--he thought and wrote mathematics for nineteen hours a day until the day he died. He traveled constantly, living out of a plastic bag, and had no interest in food, sex, companionship, art--all that is usually indispensable to a human life." The Man Who Loved Only Numbers is easy to love, despite his strangeness. It’s hard

not to have affection for someone who referred to children as "epsilons," from the Greek letter used to represent small quantities in mathematics; a man whose epitaph for himself read, "Finally I am becoming stupider no more

The peripatetic Hungarian mathematician Paul Erdos (1913Ã Â- 1996) was renowned for his almost total concentration on his work. Hoffman describes him as "a mathematical monk" who renounced physical pleasure and material possessions for an ascetic, contemplative life, a life devoted to uncovering mathematical truth. This he did in 1,475 papers that he wrote or co-authored with 485 collaborators--more than any other mathematician has produced and a landmark that has given rise to the cherished "Erdos number." An Erdos co-author's number is 1; a mathematician who has published with someone who was an Erdos co-author is a 2, and so on in widening circles to infinity for everyone who has never written a mathematical paper. Hoffman is among those at infinity, but he describes Erdos's life and eccentricities engagingly and deals comprehensively with the great man's mathematical work. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The book is written very well and depicts one of the greatest mathematicians fairly well. It is written for a broad audience so no previous mathematical knowledge is required to understand it, though if you are a mathematician, or are interested in it, probably would not be able to put the book down till you reach the last page. Incredibly easy and fast to read.Besides being a mathematical genius, Erdosh was a very unique person, who had his very outstanding ways of approaching life. One would find his habits very interesting and the way he treats the money, unbelievably weird. Call it bravery or carelessness, he travelled from the US to Australia, UK, Hungary and so on with no money, no credit cards, nothing at all but his bag and his mind. He is the person who most likely published the most amount of joint papers with other mathematicians. Thats where Erdosh's number came from. (Will not spoil this part for the reader.) He invented his own terminology and his jokes would be understandable only to ones who would become familiar with it. Feels like I will never get tired talking or writing about him.This book is a must read. This particular publication I find great! Some additional pictured and letters are included. Definitely recommend to everyone!

This is a very interesting and enjoyable book about Paul Erdos, an eccentric math genius.Speaking as a former college "Mathlete" (Kappa Mu Epsilon), I used to (and still do) have an abiding love for mathematical 'truths', and this book gives readers a brief introduction to some of the many ways that a sense of wonder & curiosity, focused on the universe through the prism of mathematics, can fire

one’s soul on many levels, both intellectual and spiritual.As for myself - after a promising start, I peaked early back in undergrad school, and eventually left the field after finishing a minor degree, and moved on to other studies. However, my sense of wonder has remained ... and it was this book that helped me to recall some of my old joys, and to relive some of the might-have beens, had I been able to stay with it.In any case, the book is a fine read. However, I have some nits that I’ve ranked them from most to least annoying:1) MISSING PROOFS: The author, during his tale, mentions in passing many interesting mathematical problems and theorems that both Paul Erdos, and other mathematicians, helped to solve ... but in the vast majority of instances, the author anti-climactically fails to include the details of those proofs for the benefit of interested & proficient readers. IMHO, proofs of less than, say, 5 pages, could and should have been included in an appendix, and the author could have referred readers to appropriate AMS publications for those proofs that are longer and more involved. Instead, the author leaves the reader with nadda in all but a few trivial instances. It always irks me off when an author (or editor) dumbs down a book because they think readers can’t keep up. Very annoying, and very anti-climactic. I mean come on - what’s the point of spending pages and pages telling about the quest for a solution, only to finish lamely that yes, they solved it ... but omit all the details. Feh.2) FOCUS: The author did a commendable job assembling and integrating a large array of verbal and historical accounts into a fairly coherent whole ... but he also has a mildly irritating tendency to meander around, in his focus, somewhat like a runaway horse cart. First forwards in time, then backwards, then sideways across various topics, then in the middle of nowhere we’re talking about Fibonacci, GÃƒÂ¶del, Gauss, then back to the present, and then to his childhood again, etc. In other words, the flow of the book is a bit uneven and fractured in places, and IMHO it could have benefited from some additional polishing and a bit of re-organization. I kept wanting to grab the reins and drag the book back on course. It’s a fine ride, but it’s a bit more rickety and bouncy then it could have been with some better editing.3) ENDMATTER: The author/editor neglected to tie the "Acknowledgements and Source Notes" section in the rear of the book (p. 269- p.278) into the main text with some helpful endnotes or annotations ... thus rendering the section mostly useless to first time readers. Without notations to clue a reader in that that information is present in the back, then readers are left to finish the book unaware of it’s existence until they reach the end ... by which time the information is of little or no value.Highly enjoyable. Subtract a star if you’re a math geek who prefers to see actual proofs, rather than simply taking solutions for granted, sans details.

Hoffman did an excellent job of covering one of the world’s most interesting mathematicians. The

book was everything that I had hoped it to be, describing not only the eccentric, quirky, but loveable Erdos, but also some of the math with which he grappled. Hoffman allows the reader to move through the book smiling, avoiding in-depth, tortuous mathematical proofs or other in-depth mathematical theory. The book is about Erdos, not math, and Hoffman manages to keep the focus on the strange little man from Hungary and his brilliant career which produced over 1,700 papers. At the end, when I put the book down, I remember thinking, "Wow, I would have loved to have met him!"

Great story. I love this man who loved only numbers. Anybody into math needs to know about him and the enormous service he did to mathematics in the 20th century.

I didn't read this book by choice; I got stuck with Paul Erdos as a school project for my High School algebra class. Needless to say, I wasn't all that enthused. However, this book presented so well and so entertainingly this math genius that I'd recommend it to anyone. We learn about the inner world of math geniuses, the lines of progress that have been made in the twentieth century, and the problem solving process itself.Paul Erdos in presented in perfect form, this book is what biographies should be. His relationship with his family, women, peers, and young people are all apparent. His quirks and his genius for numbers. We also get to see the effects of the Cold War political climate in the world on intelligentsia. On top of all that, you even get a little math too.

I read this book to find out more about Paul Erdos' personality. There was a fair amount of math in the book, so I skipped over those parts. I enjoyed reading the anecdotes which gave me some insight into this fascinating character. I don't believe this book was intended to be a piece of great writing, and so it certainly was not that. Merle Miller's 'Plain Speaking' about H.S.Truman was written much better.

I loved this book and have given it to my son and to a friend -- they both like the book too. Great anecdotes and fun math throughout.

good book good story.

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