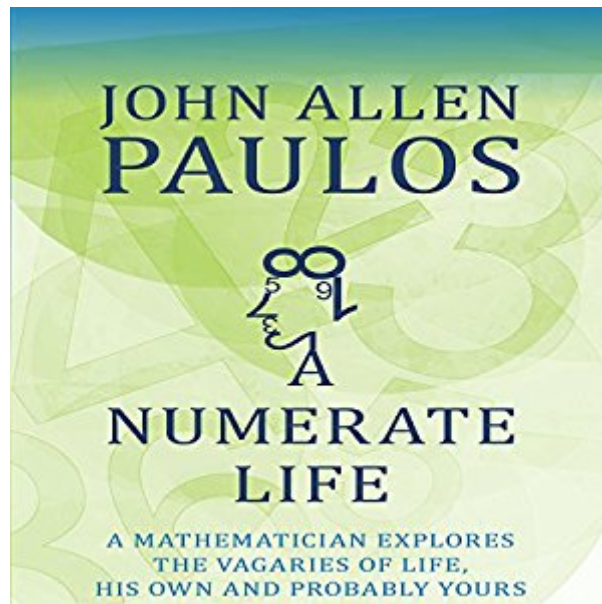


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A Numerate Life: A Mathematician Explores The Vagaries Of Life, His Own And Probably Yours



Synopsis

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 mind-sets - the suspension of disbelief required in storytelling and the skepticism inherent in the scientific method - best-selling mathematician John Allen Paulos has created an unusual hybrid, a composite of personal memories and mathematical approaches to reevaluating 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 lifelong 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 listening.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 6 hours and 46 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Gildan Media, LLC

Audible.com Release Date: November 30, 2015

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B018IL6RCW

Best Sellers Rank: #83 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Science > Mathematics #1877

in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Scientists #2292 in Books >

Audible Audiobooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Personal Memoirs

Customer Reviews

In his latest book John Allen Paulos brings to bear his considerable experience and expertise in the

world of mathematics and applies it to the world of biography and autobiography. Displaying the wit and wisdom and humor that have been the hallmark of his previous eight books, Paulos asks if we can ever truly know ourselves objectively and quantifiably. Conversely the author seems to state how easy it is to know ourselves and others given quantifiable fields. Utilizing topology, scaling, statistics and probability Mr. Paulos suggests that each life is different, and yet, via the benefit of scaling, each life is very much the same. To wrap that idea up in a paragraph as short as this makes the authors findings seem trite, however, they are anything but!! Consider, Mr. Paulos says, an autobiography or even an authorized biography of some "famous" person. Such a biography will only include relevant points to show the famous person's rise to their current celebrity while discounting the outliers, the unusable data, the "small stories" which may provide a more consistent or variable "take" on the person in question! Using statistics Paulos suggests that each life is very much the same in its move forward and its disregard for the outliers. How much do we lose in that disregard for the outliers? Perhaps nothing. Perhaps everything. Even outliers need quantification! Neither completely mathematical instruction, nor autobiography Mr. Paulos' slim book - weighing in at 188 pages, plus notes - provides some curious and thoughtful insight into his life and into our lives. Grounded with firm mathematical knowledge, Mr.

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