

A TRIBUTE TO MARTIN GARDNER

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The most recent addition to my mathematics library is *Here's Looking At Euclid* (Free Press, 2010), written by a young British journalist, Alex Bellos. The first words of praise on the back of the dust jacket were written by Martin Gardner. It made me feel sad to realize that this is undoubtedly the last book to which Gardner paid tribute. It is certainly worthy of it because Bellos has a delightful writing style similar in many ways to that of Gardner.

I had the privilege of meeting Alex Bellos at a Gathering For Gardner Conference held in Atlanta in 2008. There were nearly 300 mathematicians, puzzle people, and magicians there, all of whom had been influenced by Gardner's work although most of them had never met him. The conference, which meets biannually and is called G4G for short, was founded by Tom Rodgers, a businessman and book collector who has long been numbered among Gardner's many admirers and fans.

Jerry and Karen Farrell help with running the G4G meetings and that is how they and I met and became good friends. When Jerry asked me if I would like to write an article about Martin Gardner for *Word Ways*, I thought of what had already been written. The book *Mathematical People—Profiles and Interviews* (Birkhäuser, 1985) edited by Donald J. Albers and G. L. Alexanderson, devotes a chapter to Gardner, with a tribute written by Peter Renz and an interview with Gardner held by Anthony Barcellos. A booklet titled *Martin Gardner and Mathematical Games* that accompanies the DVD published by the M. A. A. of Gardner's Scientific American columns (2005) included an updated version of the article by Renz titled "Martin Gardner: Defending the Honor of the Human Mind," and an article by Donald J. Albers titled "Martin Gardner: Master of Recreational Mathematics and Much More." There is no way in which I could possibly improve upon or add to any of these references, so I am taking the liberty of telling about how Martin Gardner has influenced my life.

I began buying Scientific American when I was in college, mainly because of the "Mathematical Games" column, which I strongly suspect was the reason many other readers were drawn to the magazine. Upon beginning a teaching career in a large public high school in the San Fernando Valley, I realized that Gardner was an ideal model to emulate. Although he was not a teacher himself, his columns were like demonstration lessons from a master teacher. Many of them contained material ideally suited for the classroom.

I felt the need for an elective in which the students were given the chance to survey mathematics without getting into solving equations or writing proofs—something that even students who had never taken algebra or who had failed it could succeed in. I decided to try to write a textbook for these students, something like what Gardner would write. I began working on it in 1968 and it was published by W. H. Freeman and Company in 1971. Its title was *Mathematics: A Human Endeavor*. Freeman and Scientific American were closely connected and Martin was kind enough to write a foreword to the book. This was followed by textbooks in geometry and algebra, again with Gardner as my primary inspiration.

It was Gardner's columns that introduced me to Coxeter's wonderful *Introduction to Geometry*, the work of Maurits Escher, Solomon Golomb's polynominoes, John Conway's The Game of Life, the geometry of anamorphic art, Scott Kim's wonderful creations, and even the fantastic "The Upside-Downs of Little Lady Lovekins and Old Man Muffaroo", something that I spoke about at the 2006 Gathering for Gardner. [Interestingly, Gardner wrote about this comic strip in his Scientific American column of May 1962. Just last year Peter Maresca published a beautiful book that included all of the strips (*The Upside-Down World Of Gustave Verbeek*, Sunday Press, 2009) for which Martin wrote the foreword.]

Each of Gardner's books, ranging among such titles as *In The Name of Science* (Putnam, 1952), *The Annotated Alice* (Clarkson Potter, 1960), *The Ambidextrous Universe* (Basic Books, 1964), his wonderful book on magic, *Martin Gardner Presents* (Kaufman & Greenberg, 1993), and books about G. K. Chesterton and Mary Baker Eddy, revealed his curiosity about an amazing variety of topics and were invariably a delight to read.

I treasure the memory of going with Peter Renz to spend the day with Martin and his wife Charlotte at their home in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Getting to look through Martin's files and seeing him perform astonishing magic tricks was something I shall never forget. And each time I would talk to him on the phone, he would invariably introduce me to something new.

I also think of the many good friends I have made over the years, due in large part to Martin. He made a tremendous difference in my life, something to which I am certain many others would also attest. Thank you, Martin, for being such an inspiration, guide and dear friend.

LIGHT RAY'S

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An occasional collection from the master of whimsy.



Some definitions:

- 1- Theology--Study of the definite pronoun.
- 2- Deist-One who is formerly a C-ist.
- 3-Oxymoron-Def.1- a stupid ox.
Def. 2- a moron educated at oxford.
- 4-Specialist- One who does everything else worse.