

# Square Root to Nowhere

Jo Ann Niehaus

I COULD sympathize with Mr. Thurber when he wrote of his troubles in school, although his difficulty was botany and mine was, and is, math. It was a struggle for me to learn that two and two are four, and I never mastered the multiplication tables. I had no interest in interest, and ratios captured my attention only when used in reference to Purdue—the ratio there is five to one.

This aversion to all things mathematical began in grade school. My fourth grade teacher had a favorite method of passing time which almost failed to pass me. She had several cards on which simple problems were printed. One by one each child would be called upon to answer. I mentally answered each one,  $4 \times 8$  equals 32;  $15 \div 3$  equals 5 until it was my turn to recite. Then my mind went completely blank; one plus one did not even equal two. After giving several wrong answers, I occasionally gave the right one, and with a sigh the teacher flipped over a new card and called on someone else.

In the seventh and eighth grades, the arithmetic teacher was one of those who delighted in giving tests. This in itself would not have been bad if she had not reminded us everyday for a week that we were to have a test. I dreaded arithmetic tests almost as much as I

did dental appointments. I awoke in the mornings thinking about the test, and I went to bed at night still thinking about the test. When it was finally given, if I did not fail, I at least had one of the lowest grades in the class. We did learn a great deal in that class, though. We heard all about Mrs. B's daughter, Elizabeth, and her husband, Roy, not to mention their dog and cats. Every day as we walked into class someone would whisper, "Start her talking about her cats." Yes, I learned many things in eighth grade arithmetic.

By constant study and tutoring by my journalism teacher and advisor of the school paper, I passed the required courses in high school mathematics. Now all that remains are the five hours of math needed for graduation from college.

## Tones of Grey

Anne Lewis

I AM a little girl of six, standing with my hands clasped behind me, watching the swirls of grey water swell and burst on the dull grey sand of Lake Michigan. The silver rain falls lightly on my face, and I stick out my tongue to catch a few drops of the jewel-like water. The rain seems sweet to my taste, and brings to my mind the hard rock candy that I have just eaten.

Hearing a flapping of wings, I look up and see a pale grey seagull sweeping the black sky with his wings. It arches its neck and turns to go away but decides to return and settle in the sand. Suddenly, a great flock of the graceful birds comes whirring and churning out of the sky and approaches to nestle in the doleful sand. The beach was a silent place except for the sound of the water, but now there is a mingled sound that comes from the sand. It is the sound of hundreds of birds chattering and clucking to each other. These birds seem to blend into the sand and create the illusion of a lumpy quilt spread over a bed of earth. Now they leave as abruptly as they came. They move as a body into the dark sky, producing a pale grey cloud hanging beneath a black sky.

It is now quiet again, and it has stopped raining. I see a ghostly white sailboat against the horizon, and watching it toss and turn against the murky water, I feel afraid. I am conscious of being surrounded by the greys, the blacks, and the whites of this solemn scene. I turn and leave quickly, trying to keep in my memory the solemn tones of grey that are a part of Lake Michigan.