

M.G. and Me

Uncle Bob

Martin Gardner was a prolific disseminator of mathematical games and puzzles. He wrote the “Mathematical Games” column for *Scientific American* magazine continuously from 1957 to 1981. That’s 25 years and a few thousand words each month. Many of these columns were collected in over a dozen books — part of the 70+ books to his credit.

Gardner first touched my life in the early 60s when I was just entering high school and received a gift of one volume of collected columns. I toyed with those posers that interested me, but I assure you, I didn’t solve many of them. Five years later, I was a math major at college, an intern at GE Missile and Space Division, and surrounded by scientific Americans. We were shooting for the Moon, you know.

When, later in my teaching, I began to use more games and puzzles, my interest in those areas blossomed. I began to write my own puzzles, or at least my own versions. I read popular science/math writers like Keith Devlin and Ivars Peterson. I saw how they could expose the general public to new discoveries in complex areas, and yet make things understandable. It is a fact that Martin Gardner inspired many of these writers. When the mathematicians of the last 35 years began solving problems that were hundreds of years old, the math writers like Gardner could tell us about them.

I began to have my math articles and puzzles published every month, first in a local paper, then a few in the *Journal of Recreational Mathematics*, and presently at the Puzzle Corner as Uncle Bob. It amazes me that, one, I have been at it every month for twelve and one-half years, and two, that it is a mere half the span of Gardner’s SciAm gig (and that is only 25 of his 75 adult years, all of which were active ones).

Gardner not only showed us wondrous new math discoveries, but showed us how to write them in an amusing and thought-provoking way. If you would like to interact with more Gardner fans, a good place to start (besides Google) is the report of the annual “Gathering for Gardner” now in its tenth year.

The entire Gardner SciAm opus is now available on CD published by The Mathematical Association of America.