

Sue Jenkins Interview:

How would you describe your area of study to a novice?

I would describe it as a good balance of graduate level mathematics and education courses. The mathematics courses enhance, extend, and reinforce concepts that are sometimes commonplace and sometimes new to me. The education courses provide me with a better reference point for the teaching and learning of mathematics.

What is your primary motivation for persevering through graduate school?

Although I've taught mathematics in high school for almost 30 years, I always want to learn more about mathematics itself, as well as how students learn mathematics. I love learning! Also, my job as a department chairman for K – 12 students requires that I have some knowledge of age-appropriate mathematics learning, particularly in developmental levels of learning.

Do you think there is any value in social networking with other graduate students in non-related fields?

I value professional networking of any kind; networking with non-mathematics graduate students would be fascinating. There's something to learn from just about anyone who is passionate about his/her discipline and who wishes to share that passion. I would hope that I had something to offer them as well.

What is your favorite stress-reduction technique?

There is no doubt that gardening is the most effective stress-reducer for me. I have an interesting flower garden that always has something in bloom, and there's never any shortage of chores to do out there! If I can't actively work in the garden, I can read books about gardening, peruse catalogs, or simply plan. I also photograph my garden as an expression of art.

What is the last book you read strictly for pleasure and how long ago was it?

I just finished *Cutting for Stone* by Abraham Verghese. The book was quite good, and it reminds me that I wish I had more time for reading.

Please describe your most meaningful academic relationship.

A student whom I taught is incredibly gifted in mathematics. We spent a great deal of time together when she was in Upper School at St. Catherine's doing everything from planning Math Club activities (she was the head of the club), building and participating in competitions with a robot in her robotics club (she founded that, too), traveling to MathFest with a few of her peers, and just talking a lot about mathematics. She and I share a fascination with the beauty of mathematics, as well as in its application. She is now in her second year at Columbia, and we get together for coffee whenever she returns. Occasionally she'll send me an email with some fresh information that she's learned about Taylor Series (my personal favorite topic) and their application. She's doing some fascinating research in physics, her major; in fact, she just asked me to write a letter of reference for her summer internship. I'd like to think that perhaps I contributed in some way to her success and interest in math and science.

What surprised you the most about graduate school?

Although it's not as difficult as I expected, it requires far more time than I anticipated.

If travel to Mars happens in your lifetime, would you want to be one of the scientists on board? If yes, what would you contribute to the mission?

If I was young and had no children, then I would absolutely love to go. My contribution would probably be in the area of physics.

What is your favorite comfort food and why? How often do you consume it?

I love food and cooking, so there are many choices. I'd probably say soup, though. I like to keep a pot cooking all of the time during cold weather – often during the summer, as well – so that's my primary comfort food.

If you hadn't been admitted to graduate school, what do you think you would be doing right now?

I doubt that I would be doing anything differently, but I would have much more time!

When do you expect to complete your degree?

This program concludes in the spring of 2014.