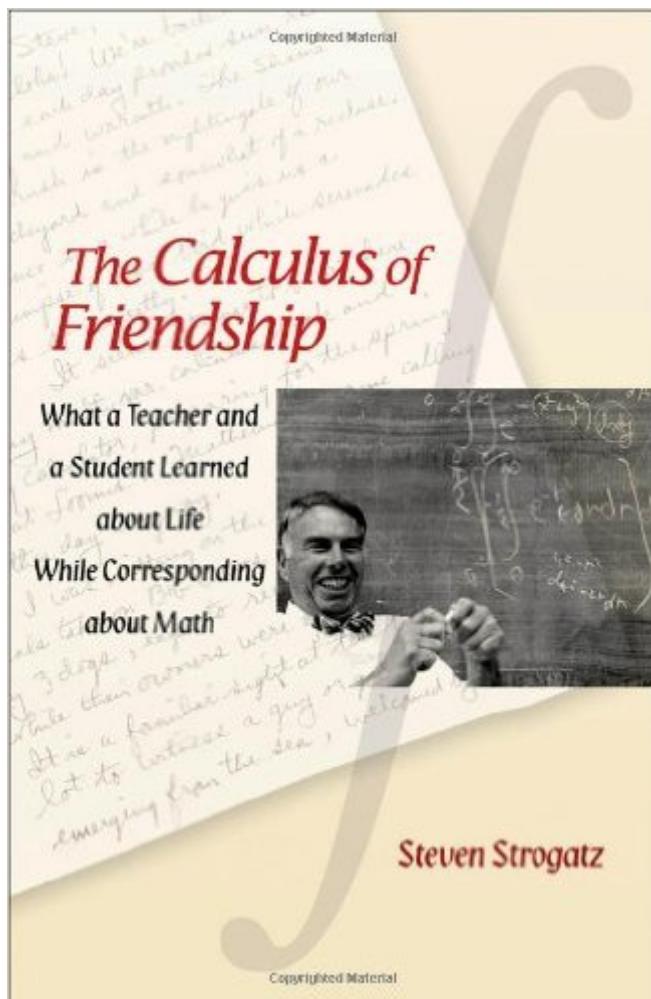


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# The Calculus Of Friendship: What A Teacher And A Student Learned About Life While Corresponding About Math



## Synopsis

The Calculus of Friendship is the story of an extraordinary connection between a teacher and a student, as chronicled through more than thirty years of letters between them. What makes their relationship unique is that it is based almost entirely on a shared love of calculus. For them, calculus is more than a branch of mathematics; it is a game they love playing together, a constant when all else is in flux. The teacher goes from the prime of his career to retirement, competes in whitewater kayaking at the international level, and loses a son. The student matures from high school math whiz to Ivy League professor, suffers the sudden death of a parent, and blunders into a marriage destined to fail. Yet through it all they take refuge in the haven of calculus--until a day comes when calculus is no longer enough. Like calculus itself, The Calculus of Friendship is an exploration of change. It's about the transformation that takes place in a student's heart, as he and his teacher reverse roles, as they age, as they are buffeted by life itself. Written by a renowned teacher and communicator of mathematics, The Calculus of Friendship is warm, intimate, and deeply moving. The most inspiring ideas of calculus, differential equations, and chaos theory are explained through metaphors, images, and anecdotes in a way that all readers will find beautiful, and even poignant. Math enthusiasts, from high school students to professionals, will delight in the offbeat problems and lucid explanations in the letters. For anyone whose life has been changed by a mentor, The Calculus of Friendship will be an unforgettable journey.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is an absolutely beautiful book about the relationship through letters of a high school math teacher and one of his students who becomes a world class mathematician. It's about their lives and the mathematics that bound them together. I have read quite a few memoirs and don't recall any that choked me up like this one did, I want to thank Dr. Strogatz for being so open. Also, the math in the book is very interesting and well explained, if I could give it more than five stars I would.

This is a very interesting book about the relationship between a high school student and teacher that extends long after the student has graduated. Because both student and teacher are math teachers, the correspondence between them frequently revolves around math problems that interest them, but it includes much more than that. Not being mathematically inclined whatsoever, I skipped over all the math, and found it a touching story. For those interested in the math too, it will be a double treat.

Full disclosure: Don Joffray, about whom this book was written, was a great friend of my parents so I knew him as much more than a teacher. The great thing about this book is that the author, Steve Strogatz, paints an accurate, empathetic picture of Joff the man & Joff the teacher, and also weaves a compelling story about the enduring friendship between two math geeks (I say this with admiration). I am not a math major so some of the calculations went beyond my meager understanding, but that didn't matter. Even the math conversations replicated in the book were glimpses into the continuum of a student/teacher relationship. Very cool! - V. Norris

Written by a Math Prof @ Cornell University, it is on Calculus, not in the dry formal math textbook way, but via a life story and many correspondences with his retired high-school math teacher, who helped the author overcome his fear of "epsilon-delta" in Calculus lesson at high-school. Also in this book the author gave the working example of Feynman's "Differentiate under Integral" trick, not shown in the original book "Are you Joking, Mr. Feynman" where Feynman mentioned he self-paced the "secret weapon" from the "Advanced Calculus" (Woods). I recommended this book to our local National Library to procure 10 copies for general public's reading. It is a shame if they don't, this book is an excellent reading for curious nonmathematicians.

I am clearly in the minority, but this book did not inspire me at all. Simply put, it seems as though the author was writing a story that was not compelling in the least, not as a book of friendship, nor as a book of mathematics. It was a story that seemed forced -- that is, it was made out to be more than it

really was. To review, Strogatz had Joff as a teacher in high school, and was uninspired by him. Nevertheless, they corresponded a few letters over the next few years of mathematical content, discovering or rediscovering various mathematical proofs (these proofs form the bulk of the book). Then, for many decades, Strogatz all but ignored his teacher's letters, while he got married and set out on his own path as a mathematician. Later, with some remorse, he began to write back again, and then visited Joff in what seemed a rather uneventful visit. Strogatz concluded after that visit that after all these years, he finally realized what he has to thank Joff for --- that "he let me teach him". This is a friendship? I didn't find their friendship to be a meaningful one at all. The tone throughout the book by Strogatz was one of condescension toward his teacher - that he was not the mathematician that Strogatz had become. The author's ego made it a somewhat uncomfortable read -- we get it -- you are very smart. Perhaps this level of friendship is one that some mathematicians would consider meaningful. I didn't find it inspiring in the least.

I'm familiar with Steven Strogatz from being an avid Radiolab listener, so I anxiously awaited *The Calculus of Friendship*. It's a beautiful, poignant story of the intense, special, and evolving relationship between student & teacher. It is also an amazing writing accomplishment that successfully combines math and memoir. While I can't say that I completely understand all the math, the mathematics only adds to this story rather than detracting from it. It shows the true elegance & beauty of calculus, along with the elegance & beauty of working together as student and teacher to solve the calculus. Mr. Joffray is truly an extraordinary teacher, one that allows his students to teach him. I honestly wish that I could learn math from both of these men, and they are portrayed so well through their letters that I would also like to share an interesting dinner & discussion with them. Maybe they could (attempt to) further explain "differentiating under the integral sign" to me! I'm going to insist that my son read this book as he has already had some exemplary math (and chemistry!) teachers that have greatly influenced his life, and is embarking on his college career where I fervently hope he meets more of the same.

Very touching book. I admit I did not understand all the math ... I enjoyed seeing it, though.:)  
Bittersweet in a "benjamin button" sort of way.

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