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The power of pi

By Katjusa Cisar

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MONTICELLO - The journey that led a Monticello man in December to self-publish a philosophical book about math started last year on March 11.

"I was at work. It was a Friday. I printed off 27 pages from Wikipedia on pi," remembered Marty Leeds, aka Kevin McNally, a 1997 graduate of Monroe High School. In one part of his life, he's Kevin McNally, a 32-year-old graphic designer who recently moved back to Wisconsin from Eugene, Ore., and lives with his fiancée Katie Anderson on her parents' hay and corn farm in rural Monticello.

In the other part of his life, for which he's taken the pseudonym "Marty Leeds," he's an autodidact often immersed in creative projects, from poetry to music, and a voracious reader (he reread the first 50 pages of James Joyce's "Finnegan's Wake" 100 times to let it fully soak in, he said).

"Pi: The Great Work" is Leeds' first book, and his first foray into the world of math - at least the first with enthusiasm. He got a C in a university algebra class and eventually dropped out of college because he didn't feel he was getting a proper education. He doesn't blame the professors or a lack of intelligence on his own part, but an uninspired and rigid educational format.

Comparative mythology sparked his initial interest in math. He started investigating why different cultures share mathematical concepts as a common language. When he read up on pi, the ratio of any circle's circumference to its diameter, he discovered a world of math that connects symmetry with creation and spirituality with numbers and finds order in a seemingly chaotic universe.

Leeds doesn't consider himself spiritual. He's not a church-goer, and said his parents taught him to be a free thinker. But what he was learning - decimal parity, Vesica Piscis, the Fibonacci sequence - helped him find hope, make sense of life and be a better person: "It gave me a sense of harmony. It shows connectivity to all things."

The Fibonacci sequence of growth, for example, appears throughout nature. When graphed, the sequence looks like the coil on a seashell. It's simple enough for a fourth-grader to understand, he said, and can be seen everywhere, from a tree to a dandelion to the human body.

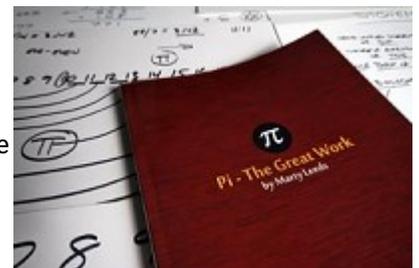
"Whatever sprouted that dandelion is what sprouted you," he said. Yet when he asked his brother, then in an Advanced Calculus class, if he was learning about Fibonacci, he said no.

"He'd never heard of it," Leeds said. "A lot of this stuff is not taught."

Through the Internet, Leeds found an editor, Scott Onstott, a software programmer, architect and writer who lives in Canada and shares Leeds' interest in mathematics. With Onstott's help, Leeds pared the book down to 100 pages, with a new concept introduced on each page. He intends it as a coffee table book - flip to any page and start reading.



Times photo: Anthony Wahl Marty Leeds, aka Kevin McNally, a Monroe High School graduate, explores the intersection of mathematics, folklore, spirituality, science and symbolism in his new book π : The Great Work.



"I wanted to keep it as terse as possible," he said.

The ideas he's presenting are not new, he freely admits, but they're ideas that deserve "their day in court."

"It should be everyday, common knowledge," he said.

To watch Leeds explain in a video some of the concepts presented in his book, search "Marty Leeds pi" on YouTube.

"Pi: The Great Work" is available for purchase online through Amazon and at creativespace.com/3717383, or email the author directly at martyleeds33@gmail.com.

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