

DISTRACTIONS

Editor: Darlene Hannah
 Deadline: Tuesday Noon
 Send your original comics
 and poetry to Room 35 SUB.

IN SEARCH OF ABSOLUTE TRUTH

By MIKE KNOTS

I was in university once. Back in the eighties, when the world was becoming aware of that it was, in fact, a world. As a survey engineer, I was to be a significant droplet in the wave of the future, measuring, mapping, describing, and dividing up the planet from the inside out (where is out? According to Stephen Hawking's bestseller, "they" will know in a few years how big the universe is/will be/ was (its all the same, since four dimensional space-time is involved.))

Anyway, we studied a lot about probability at the time. It was frustrating. Here I was in a field ripe with numbers, and my profs told me that none of the numbers were correct! In the nitty gritty end of things, Mr. Hawking tells us that Mr. Heisenberg told us that we can't ever know where anything is for sure, because at best we can only measure where it is with an infinitely small wave and that's not small enough to be sure.

Faced with the classically quoted knowledge that nothing is exactly as it seems, I tried to ignore it. Thoughts of David Hume saying that there is an apparent world, the one in which we think we are living, completely different from the real world kept entering my mind (as we used to say in grade 5 - its all a fig newton of your imagination). At that time I recall learning some nuggets of pseudo-truth from a prof I had, Jeremy Simpson. He was as eccentric as the best/worst/rest of them. His typical surveyor look was as amplified as I've ever seen. The slimness was outright skinnynity, the moustache fused with the beard for the ultimate Rasputin look, and the ever present male humour was alive and well.

Simpson used to tell us that with enough repetitions of a certain measurement, the random errors associated with it

would cancel each other out and become insignificant. Of course the boys and I would sit at the back and whoop about how Ernie Dermott was his parent's random error, and Bill Isaac had made so many mistakes on the midterm that they could be ignored. You can really have a field day, if you remove the repetition of measurement clause.

Aside: Of course our whole world revolves around these clauses, and not just Santa or in the legal sense but in the "household dream" sense as well. Whenever one tries to imagine a situation one could/did/will end up in, unless all end up with an untrue result. Its kind of like when you try to imagine how many beer(s) (I've never been sure about that plural) you need to imbibe before having the liquid courage to ask that girl to dance. My second year philosophy teach Robert McEvoy almost had a hernia trying to get our class to consider clauses. He told us fourty doughheads that we were having a picnic in a tidal cave, and one picknicker had overstuffed himself and was stuck in the opening. The tide was rushing in and we would all certainly die unless something was done. We were left with the option of blowing up the pig, against his will, saving all but he (feminist aside - females are too weight conscious to ever get stuck in tidal caves) or all perishing except for him. Surely most people would dynamite the dumb diner, if they truly considered the certainty clauses. Despite McEvoy spending more energy than NASA trying to get his situation off the ground, it was a failure (like many other flights these days), except for being passed on to countless nauseated lunchers after class simply because it was extraordinary. Beside the aside: How is it that the unusual items are what stick in one's mind? Plane crashes are news, accents are charming, and "I remember the guy in the purple sweater had a wart

on his nose" all seem to obey the basic economic laws of supply. Perhaps to live a rich, and by defination eventful, life one need only enter a frame of mind where everything is considered extraordinary and valuable because of its rarity. After all, barring Mr. Hawking's time considerations, no one instant of time can be repeated, you only live once unless you're a cat or James Bond (It's perhaps interesting to note that in the Scandinavian languages one of the words used to denote "good" is "rart" as in rare).

On the human side of the noon, my female cousin had once advised me that meeting women was random, and so the truth about the randomness in the world appeared to be coming out. After all, the more times I tried to chase girls, the more insignificant I became, just a living random error to them. I had been called lucky before, and though I don't deny the grandeur of my rearing, the classification disturbed me. Had I done nothing of my own free will to decide anything? The president of the university had told me that there was a lot of chance in the world, but that it was also a matter of taking advantage of one's opportunities when they presented themselves.

Recalling that makes me recall the time when I had a several months long crush on a young lady, Lisa Chislett, a basketball blonde. I went so far to estimate the 1 in 227 odds of her being on the same plane home for Christmas (as a surveyor I knew that her destination was a mere 11 degrees astray of mine so a similar routing had to be followed). I thought that if I got a chance to talk to her (1:2943 of being in the seat next to me) my holidays would be that much happier. It was around exam time that my roommate reminded me that in my last female encounter I had inquired whether the agile young lady had been the victim of a dentist lately, without

realizing her lisp was built-in. Needless to say, the seatbelt beside me lay unbuckled for the entire flight (does anybody other than the safety guys call them lapbelts?)

Fresh (and yet soggy) from plying myself with ales one evening, I began to wonder what the point of trying hard at anything was, if fate was the dude with the automatic three-pointer at the buzzer anyway. I couldn't incorporate the concepts of opportunity (maybe I would, by luck, some day if I kept pondering over it, but that wasn't for sure). This is when Mr. Simpson stepped in, and in his monotonic voice, lectured me on variance, confidence regions and other statistical creatures.

Certain, as in both particular and sure, things are true 19 times out of 20, and that takes care of enough common occurrences of living to satisfy my soul. Like most of the other participants of life however, my soul remained curious about the 20th time. Even now, I still have an unresolved crush on Ms. Chislett, and Mr. Hawking and I still haven't figured out whether God made the universe, but the rest is easy. There are no absolutes, and its the deviations from the standard that make life worth living.



Monday the 3rd

Unturned chairs near the "no smoking sign" wrappers scattered two feet away from the garbage can. Mess in one corner and wargames in another I'm hidden away on a blue-gray couch. Who's studied? Certainly no me. The holiday - mad fool who missed Florida.

Funny that nobody's brought books...

Tara



THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON



"Now remember, Cory, show us that you can take good care of these little fellows and maybe next year we'll get you that puppy."