

In Code: A Mathematical Journey

By Sarah Flannery, David Flannery

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In January 1999, Sarah Flannery, a sports-loving teenager from Blarney in County Cork, Ireland was awarded Ireland's Young Scientist of the Year for her extraordinary research and discoveries in Internet cryptography. The following day, her story began appearing in Irish papers and soon after was splashed across the front page of the *London Times*, complete with a photo of Sarah and a caption calling her "brilliant." Just 16, she was a mathematician with an international reputation.

In Code is a heartwarming story that will have readers cheering Sarah on. Originally published in England and co-written with her mathematician father, David Flannery, *In Code* is "a wonderfully moving story . . . about the thrill of the mathematical chase" (*Nature*) and "a paean to intellectual adventure" (*Times Educational Supplement*). A memoir in mathematics, it is all about how a girl next door, nurtured by her family, moved from the simple math puzzles that were the staple of dinnertime conversation to prime numbers, the Sieve of Eratosthenes, Fermat's Little Theorem, Googols-- and finally into her breathtaking algorithm. Parallel with each step is a modest girl's own self-discovery--her values, her burning curiosity, the joy of persistence, and, above all, her love for her family.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
At 16, Flannery made worldwide headlines as Ireland's 1999 Young Scientist of the Year for her discovery and presentation of the Cayley-Purser algorithm, an innovative encryption system roughly 22 times faster than the worldwide standard RSA algorithm. She declines the "genius" label, and a method for cracking her algorithm has since been discovered, but this only makes the book more interesting and unpredictable. It's more about the journey's adventure than the destination and less about Sarah's specialness than her spirit. The mix is part memoir, part puzzle book and part mathematical exploration, with scattered bits of mathematical lore. (The heaviest math is concentrated into two chapters and the appendices, leaving the remainder easy going for the fainthearted.) The puzzle-solving approach to math cultivated by her father (and coauthor) encourages exploration, an adventurous attitude, attention to concepts more than calculations and sheer enjoyment of taking on a challenge. It's also more egalitarian than proof-based approaches, giving newcomers a more equal footing with old pros, emphasizing the process of discovery and making connections, which is more fundamental than finished proofs. All this is wonderfully illustrated by Flannery's own story of her rapidly developing interest and proficiency in cryptography, as well as by the puzzles she uses to get readers thinking and introduce some basic concepts. Other threads, running from brief descriptions of her grandparents to her father's teaching methods and her relationship to family in the face of a media frenzy, give her story added depth, warmth and humor. 8 pages of b&w photos. (June)Forecast: Workman is hoping to, and should, attract budding young mathematicians with a first printing of 35,000, a $65,000 marketing budget and an eight-city author tour.

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From Library Journal
"I have no doubt that I am not a genius," writes Sarah Flannery, the 16-year-old Irish girl who won first place in the 1999 European Union Contest for Young Scientists. Nonetheless, her project about public key cryptography, the method used to transmit secure data over the Internet, created a media sensation. Until a security hole was discovered, some believed that Sarah's encryption algorithm could be worth millions, and she became an instant celebrity. Though her mathematician father helped write this book, Sarah's own heartfelt enthusiasm is obvious. She is breathlessly excited to get a phone call from a mathematician whose papers she has read, frustrated by the difficult math in research journals, flattered by media attention, and genuinely intrigued by the mathematics of encryption, which she valiantly explains. A particularly touching moment comes when Sarah is overjoyed to see her dad because she finally has somebody who will talk with her about mathematics. The prize-winning contest paper is included as an appendix. Despite the advanced math discussed here, this will appeal to high school and college students because the author is a very young mathematician and does a commendable job of explaining how she got interested in such an intense science project. For public and college libraries. Amy Brunvand, Univ. of Utah Lib., Salt Lake City
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From the Inside Flap
From puzzles on the blackboard in an Irish country kitchen to her acclaimed Cayley-Purser algorithm, Sarah Flannery has made an extraordinary beginning as a mathematician. Her research and discoveries in Internet cryptography won her both Ireland's Young Scientist of the Year and European Young Scientist of the Year awards. Her story was splashed across the front page of the London Times - and suddenly this teenager from

Country Cork had an international reputation.

How did Sarah, an above average student who loves "maths" but adamantly refuses epithets like brilliant or genius, astound the world with an algorithm? In Code, cowritten with Sarah's father and teacher, David Flannery, is a surprising and heartwarming story that will have readers cheering Sarah on.

A memoir with mathematics, In Code tells how the girl next door moved from the simple math puzzles that were the staple of dinnertime conversation to number theory, the Sieve of Eratosthenes, and Femat's Little Theorem Finally culminating in a passion for public key cryptography, and the creative breakthroughs that led to her own discoveries.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Thomas Rinaldi:

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