



Crossing the Equal Sign

Marion D. Cohen

This is poetry about the experience of math, written by a poet/mathematician. Math research, coupled with the way it affects and is affected by the rest of everyday (and not so everyday) life, serves as metaphor for all striving and yearning — and vice versa. These poems have appeared in both math and literary journals, and been appreciated by mathematicians and non-mathematicians alike.

Marion is one of the few poets who can successfully explore the join between the literary and the mathematical sensibilities, and no one does it as well as she. (Jet Foncannon, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics, Drexel University)

Many readers know Marion Cohen through her writings on chronic illness, caregiving, and pregnancy loss, and while some of these poems touch on this “life stuff”, the subject here is math. The collection begins —

Points were blinking.
Lines were beckoning.
How was I to know?
What could I have done?

I heard some voices.
I had some time.
There was a tenderness.
There was weeping.

How was I to know
the points would not point?
How was I to know
the lines would not line up?

Other poems connect math with adolescent memories, nature photography, the ocean, guns and violence, broken ankles, kids, cats, and more. As an added treat, Paul Klee’s “Comedy”, reproduced on the cover, extends the metaphor of the poems.

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