

Northwest Student Named Provincial Mathematics Ambassador

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You've got to love Math. Especially if you harbour hopes of being named the Mathematics Ambassador for the Province of Saskatchewan. That honour was won by Turtleford Community School's Emily Stein this past weekend. The grade four student stated her case plainly and clearly in an essay she submitted to the World Math Day organizers.

"I love math," she said. "It's my favourite subject. I guess I like it because it seems to come naturally to me, and I like to help my classmates become better at it as well. Also, it's fun, not work."

This is, you'll admit, a pretty good attitude to have if you want to be the Provincial Mathematics Ambassador. It's also the attitudinal foundation for her career of choice: "I want to be a professor of mathematics," she stated, looking at me as if it was the most natural thing in the world, "at the University of Regina."

I'd hire her. On the spot. "She's good," said her teacher Eileen Anderson, "she'll do the problems in class and then she'll take them home to see if she can take them further – she has an open, active and enquiring mind."

"I love subtraction a lot," Emily said. "Multiplication is second. Seems hard at first but then it's easy. I can do the 11 times table, and I'm working on the twelve's."

At this point in the conversation I tested her. She had the twelve's down pretty well so, hoping to trip her up, I asked her questions from THE DREADED 9 TIMES TABLE. The one with 9×6 and 9×7 and "you there daydreaming at the back of the class, what's 9×8 hey?" All the questions that you hated in grades 4, and 5 and 6. And probably still hate.

" 9×8 is 72," she replied politely. Note the politely. No scoffing, no raised eyebrow as if to imply that the nine times table is so easy that it's beneath contempt. No, just a polite answer, a nice smile, and the explanation that, "all you have to do is take the number you're multiplying by 9 and subtract one, so if it's 8×9 then you take the 8, subtract 1 which gives you 7, see, and 7 is 2 less than 9 so the answer is 72. That's the rule of 9's." A clear, concise answer, beautifully phrased, as you'd expect from the Ambassador.

"As ambassador my job is to inform people, and especially students about World Math Day, and encourage students everywhere to participate in Mathletics. I had to keep a blog that will be posted on the website, and make up posters," she said. "It's an excellent event."

World Math Day is a day (a full 24 hours of a day) during which students from around the world (5.3 million students from 218 countries) compete to correctly answer questions. Results from this year's contest are still being tabulated. Mathletics is an on-line math drill /competition with questions for all grade levels. Nineteen schools in the Northwest School Division use Mathletics regularly to improve skills and mental agility.

“We (the students of the world) were trying to break the record for the most math questions answered correctly,” Emily said, “but unfortunately we didn’t.”

“How many questions were answered correctly, Emily?” I asked.

Without a pause, without batting an eyelid, she answered. “Four hundred and twenty-eight million, five hundred and ninety-eight thousand, two hundred and fourteen.”

“Goodness me,” I said. And later, when I checked it on the website –not that I was suspicious or anything, there it was. In big, bold numerals. 428,598,214.

Emily Stein. A grade 4 student of Turtleford Community School. Likes to swim, skate and read Harry Potter books. Absolutely loves Math. A great kid, and the best Provincial Mathematics Ambassador that anyone could wish for.

