



Bio Sketch for Clemency Montelle

What area of maths do you work in?

History and Philosophy of Mathematics.

Tell us more...

I read old mathematical texts and try to figure out what they mean! Sometimes they are in different languages that aren't spoken anymore, using mathematical notations that have fallen out of favour, using ideas and concepts that have long since been forgotten in mathematics. More broadly, I examine the motivations of mathematicians, their impact on the directions mathematics takes, and some of the features that have made mathematics what it is today.

What were your best and worst subjects at school?

Best: Mathematics, Physics, Art History, Classics.

Worst: Hmm....I did not like Chemistry at all. I liked the theoretical side of it (funnily enough!) but mucking around in the lab testing things and spending hours doing experiments and all the practical requirements I found utterly tedious. And besides, the chemistry labs always had this ever present odour. Give me a clean sheet of paper, a sharp pencil, a theorem, and a quiet place in the library any day!

When you decided you wanted to be a mathematician and why

I didn't always intend to pursue a career as a mathematician. However, mathematics seemed to keep many doors open and be so useful in a variety of careers, whether it be teaching, researching, working in industry, management, analysis, and so on. And one day I realised all my courses were in mathematics and I couldn't imagine doing anything else! There is something very reassuring about mathematical results that you don't find in other subjects - but at the same time it is an incredibly creative discipline.

What training (degrees and subjects) you've done

My trajectory is somewhat diverse. I have a B.A. (hons) in mathematics and classics, a M.Sc. in mathematics, and a Ph.D. from Brown University from the Department of the History of Mathematics. This department was unique in both its name and circumstances; with the one and a half professors who made up this research center, I enjoyed a veritable apprenticeship of a singular kind.

How did I come to arrive at where I did? I entered university with no predetermined plan, other than to relish in the breadth and diversity that a university education offered me. I enrolled in maths because I had been good at it at school and took Greek and Latin, because I had always loved languages and it seemed like a "good classical education". I continued these two loves, Maths and Classics, completely separately for almost the four years of my undergraduate degree, and I recall people commenting "Clemency, what on earth do mathematics and classical languages have in common?" Good question I thought! The answer struck me years later as I was browsing through the stacks of the library and I paused upon the mathematical work of the famous Greek mathematician Euclid, "The Elements", and I suddenly had the epiphany. "I don't believe I never thought of this before - I can read Euclid, in the original ancient Greek!" Hence my entry into this speciality.

What do you do for fun?

Raising Children. Baking Bread. Swimming. Hiking. Conducting the campus choir.