

# The Purpose of the Music Club

by C. P. Boyko

—HEY, MATT? THERE'S just one thing I don't understand.

—What's that?

—Everything.

—Let me see. Well, this is a logarithmic equation.

—I know, but I don't know how to do it.

—Well, logarithmics are tough. To be honest, I've forgotten just about everything I ever knew about them.

—But you're the teacher.

—Yeah, but teachers don't know everything. You know who you should ask? Khaji is good at this stuff.

—Ugh, but she's such a nerd.

—Nerds can be cool people too. A lot of my best friends are nerds. I'm married to a nerd.

Matt Roades became a teacher because he never wanted to leave high school. His classmates in teacher college had different reasons: they wanted to inspire, they wanted to ameliorate, they wanted to educate. Matt was appalled by their piety, and they were bemused by his facetiousness. He went from being one of the most popular people in high school to being a loner and a misfit in college. His degree lasted three years. Then he got a job and a classroom of his own. He entered it, that first morning, ready to tear the walls down.

He filed in with the students at the warning bell and sat at one of the desks, which he had arranged in a circle the night before. He propped his feet on his guitar case, opened a novel, and waited. At the second bell a few stragglers rushed in ostentatiously, feigning breathlessness. The hubbub of conversation and insult died down for a minute, then, when nothing happened, rose in a crescendo, till everyone was shouting over one another hys-

terically. Matt turned the page of his novel.

“Hey, who’s the teacher here anyway?”

Matt looked up, smiled, and went back to his novel.

“Hey, dog, seriously: are you going to teach us something or what?”

Matt closed the book. They were all waiting for him to speak, even the ones still chatting, even the ones pretending to be absorbed in their own thoughts. He had, without effort or merit, achieved what he had once had to fight so hard for. He was the center of attention. He tossed his book on the floor. He was going to love this.

“What do you want me to teach you?”

“This is math class, isn’t it? You’re supposed to teach us math.”

“I know what I’m supposed to do. What do you guys want me to do?”

“Teach us math.” —“Let us have free time.” —“Yeah, independent study!” —“Shit, hoss, it doesn’t matter what we want. Don’t you know that? You gotta teach us math because it says math on the schedule, and we gotta learn math because we’re here.”

“What happens if I don’t?”

“They fire your ass!” —“And they flunk all our asses.”

“Who’s ‘they’?”

“Come on. You know. The school. Ms. Mowthorpe.”

“Who’s going to tell them?”

“They’ll find out when we all fail the tests.”

“Who says we have to have tests?”

“You gotta give tests, or else how do you give grades?”

“That should be easy enough. We can draw lots for grades, or you can give yourselves the grades you want. We can figure that out.”

The students who were not taking him seriously shouted that they would take A’s. The scholars objected.

“Well, what would be fair?”

“What would be fair would be if Charnise and me gave the grades.” —“What would be fair would be if you taught us all math and gave us math tests and the ones that did the best got the best grades.” —There was a murmur of grudging agreement.

Matt shrugged. "Is that what everyone wants? Okay, I know voting is lame, but should we put it to a vote or something?"

And so Matt found himself, twenty minutes into his first class on his first day of his first year as a teacher, standing at the board, outlining the approved curriculum from the assigned textbook to a room full of sullen teenagers whose desks all faced the same way and who raised their hands when they wanted to go to the toilet. His had become every class he had ever attended; he had become every teacher he had ever hated. He had offered them freedom and equality, and they had chosen slavery and subjection.

"Hey, Mr. Roades, aren't you forgetting to do roll call?"

"Look, call me Matt, okay?"

"I was here before the bell, Mr. Roades. Everybody saw me."

As the days passed, Matt came to blame the students' abjectness on Dundrum High School itself. The building looked like a prison, and was surrounded by parking lots and chain-link fence. The parking lots were patrolled by security guards and the halls by teachers or student trustees. The entrances were chained and padlocked after hours, and extracurricular entry had to be requested in writing. Caged clocks and loudspeakers were mounted on every wall. The stairwells were festooned with nets to thwart suicides. Some of the windows had bars.

The faculty, too, treated the students like convicts, and spoke of them in the staff room with animosity and contempt. Detentions and suspensions were handed out with vengeful relish. Matt's new colleagues spoke not of inspiration and amelioration, but only of keeping the upper hand. He found this attitude even more repugnant than the idealism of teacher college, which survived here only in the principal's pep talks and the poster over the staff-room door: "They will not care to learn until you learn to care."

There was no one for him to talk to but Gwyneth, and she was too fascinated by the baby to empathize.

"Don't you think she drools too much?"

"I'm sure it's quite normal at that age."

Some nights, as they sat in front of the television, which played sooth-

ing mysteries for the baby, Matt cracked Gwyneth's knuckles and told her of his disappointments. Her replies, though brief, were always incisive, and they irritated him.

"Well, after years of being treated like prisoners by their teachers, can you blame them for treating their teachers like jailers?"

"But I'm not like that."

"You'll have to prove it to them."

He tried. When on hall duty, he whistled like a bumpkin and winked at infractions. He plucked his guitar and smiled on discussions in study hall. He ignored raised hands and gum chewing, but acknowledged interruptions, however irrelevant. He sent no one to the vice-principal. He neither outlawed nor demanded any behavior. He called students by their nicknames, or "dog," "bird," and "hoss." He improvised songs about the quadratic formula and the Pythagorean theorem. He digressed, told jokes, burped, and cussed. He lied, and mocked his students' credulity. He asked about their other classes, and joined in their criticism of other teachers. He told them stories about his own high school days.

But nothing worked. Conversations died under his benevolent gaze. The kids groaned at his jokes and sneered at his belches. They fooled around if he tried to teach, and wanted to work if he tried to chat. They threw chalk when his back was turned, until he threw chalk back; then chalk-throwing fell beneath contempt. He revealed that he had been a point guard in high school, and attendance at basketball games dwindled. He admired Ezra Rosales's Buzzcocks t-shirt, and the shirt was not seen again in the corridors of academe. Graffiti, a perennial plague at Dundrum, dried up after Henry McCarnock discovered Matt writing "Fuck The War" on a toilet stall door. Not even sex and drugs were immune to the death-kiss of his approval.

"Shit, bird, no way, drugs fuck you up."

"You're crazy if you'd risk getting knocked up before you're even in college, that's all I have to say."

He belonged to an inferior race. He was an adult. Worse, he was a teacher, and by definition nothing that a teacher said or did could be cool.

“Oh my god, you guys, how uncool are we? Talking to our *teacher* about *dating*. Let’s get back to work.”

This went on for two months. Matt grew more depressed, and more unsure of himself. Perhaps he really was uncool. Did his students see something that he himself was blind to? He looked at his old, tired, bitter, fat colleagues. Was he doomed to become one of them? Was he already halfway there? It was a terrifying thought. He was only twenty-two; but sometimes he heard himself talking in class, and the voice he heard was that of a thirty-year-old.

Then, in November, the music club was founded, and things began to change.

—Hey, Matt.

—Hey, Taylor. You missed a water fountain.

—Hi, Matt.

—Hi, Parvinder. How’s that elbow? Ouch!

—Hey, Matt! Chalmers’s uncle’ll give him as many two-liters as we want at cost.

—Best. When do we pick them up?

Years ago, in a distant school, a fistfight had broken out in a prom-committee meeting. Since that time, the school district had decreed that every extracurricular club must have one teacher advisor attend all its meetings and ratify all its decisions. These chaperon positions held little appeal for the overworked faculty, and tended to fall to the junior teachers. While students were obligated to join at least one club, teachers were not obligated to act as advisors. But most new teachers did not know this, and those who did found it hard to say no. Some were flattered by the nomination, which came from the students.

—Hi, Matt. What does your shirt say?

—Daisy Chain Gang Bang.

—That’d be a cool name for a band.

—It is a band! Don’t you guys know anything?

—Hi, Matt.

—Hey, Matt.

—Hey, bird, hey, dog . . . Damn, since when are those two coupled up?

—Since forever, dog.

—Hi, Matty. Did you get my note? I put it in my test yesterday.

—I haven't corrected them yet. What'd it say?

—Better do your homework, Matty!

The music club was started by two seniors, Judd Haziz and Peyton Al-moss. Judd was good-looking, expensively dressed, and sat through all his classes in silent, immobile protest. Peyton was a gawky chatterbox whose classes were always being disrupted by coughs, sneezes, and table tappings of mysterious origin. Matt was flattered by their nomination, which he supposed was due to his own musicality. He later learned that he was the eighth teacher they had approached. And he learned at the first meeting, when the club charter was drafted, that Judd, Peyton, and their friends had little interest in music.

—Hey, Matt! Are you hall cop fifth period?

—Nope. Harris.

—Shit. I was going to skip French.

—And deprive Ta Gueule of your charming presence? Harsh, hoss.

The founders of the music club wanted to throw parties. This seemed too naked a statement of their intent, so, with Matt's help, they translated their aim into officialese. "The purpose of the music club is to promote awareness of the music club. Any activity that promotes awareness of the music club will be considered a legitimate activity of the music club. Legitimate activities of the music club may therefore include, but will not be limited to: producing and/or distributing advertisements for the club, writing or speaking about the club, recruiting new members for the club, and holding social gatherings for members or potential members of the club."

This much was the handiwork of Judd and Peyton, with Matt contributing only a sonorous synonym or two. But when they began concocting restrictions to membership, becoming intoxicated with their exclusivity and increasingly cruel in their exclusions, Matt felt the need to intervene.

"I don't know, I just think our parties will be kind of worst if we don't have as many people as possible."

They looked at him quizzically. In the end, they decided that Ms. Mowthorpe would not let them limit their membership anyway; somewhere there must be a rule that school clubs had to be open to everyone. And so, the final clause of the music club's charter was Matt's: "Every person who chooses to be a member of the music club is a member of the music club."

They all signed it. Matt signed too—not as an advisor, but as a founding member.

"Imagine," Judd said, "if we could get everyone in the school to join. Now that would be a best fucking party."

—Matt! Did you hear what happened to Judd? They're shooting him through the grease for talking in class.

—What the hell! Judd never talks in class. They should give him an award.

—They're going to suspend him probably, so he can't go to the party.

—They can't do that.

—Oh yes they can. The music club is still a school event, so if you're suspended it's off limits.

The music club met opposition from the administration over its first picnic. Every outing, whether curricular or extracurricular, had to be approved at the weekly staff meeting by the Finance Committee. The Committee, consisting of three senior faculty and Ms. Mowthorpe, the vice-principal, contested every excursion automatically. They denied the instructiveness of museums, galleries, and concerts; they viewed the world outside the school as a minefield of liability and litigation. Matt tried to convince them that the music club had no more nefarious designs than to eat hamburgers and play capture-the-flag in the park.

"What exactly does this have to do with music, Mr. Roades?"

"It's a membership drive." Afraid that the self-propagating aims of the club would not bear scrutiny, he improvised: "With enough members, we hope to be able to start a school band."

"We have had bands in this school before, Mr. Roades. To most of us their educational value was not, shall we say, manifest."

—This is total bullshit.

—It’s just revenge. They can’t shut down the party so they’re going to harass as many of us as possible.

—You better watch out, Matt.

—The hell I will. I’m going to talk to Bartleman.

Nevertheless, the picnic was permitted, after the Committee made clear to Matt that he would be held solely accountable for any crimes committed or injuries sustained by his charges while outside the school walls. When all fifteen students who had attended the picnic came to class on Monday morning, apparently intact and no more inattentive than usual, a precedent was set. The Committee groused and stonewalled at every new application he submitted, but they could find no reason to forbid the music club from holding its meetings.

—There’s not a heck of a lot I can do, Matthew. You know I don’t concern myself directly with discipline.

—I got the kids to clean up their parking lot, didn’t I? You owe me one, Trevor.

—Perhaps if you hadn’t been quite so eager to make enemies . . .

Though Matt portrayed it that way to the students, not everyone on the staff was against him. Some of the younger teachers, those who had tussled with Ms. Mowthorpe themselves, showed by their silence in staff meetings or their smiles in the hallways that they supported Matt’s rebellion. And Trevor Bartleman, the principal, apparently confusing him with other teachers he had known, said he was in sympathy with Matt’s philosophy of pedagogy, and treated him like an undercover agent.

But when Matt proposed to host a meeting of the music club at his own house, everyone objected. They all agreed that it could not be done. Maybe twenty years ago, but not today. Not today, when merry-go-rounds had been removed from playgrounds and teachers were forbidden to shake their students’ hands for fear of lawsuits. It might be different, someone said, if Matt were a woman, but, unfortunately . . .

“My wife will be there. And my ten-month-old daughter. What do you think is going to happen?”

The Finance Committee scoured the school district’s bylaws, but could



find no prohibition against students being inside teachers' homes. Next they tried to bury the proposition beneath paperwork, but Peyton Almost retaliated by holding an open workshop on forgery during detention period, which drew record numbers and supplied the music club with enough permission slips for years to come.

—Lyle Harris is complaining that some of the students are calling him by his first name.

—That's not necessarily a sign of disrespect—nor is 'Mr. Harris' necessarily a sign of respect. Nor is a noisy classroom necessarily a disordered one. Or sneakers necessarily a sign of diseased morals.

—Rules become very confusing for the teenage mind if they do not apply universally, Matthew. It's only a matter of time before one of the students asks why, if you're allowed to wear sneakers, it's not all right for them.

—Rules become very confusing for the teenage mind, and not just the teenage mind, if they don't make any sense, Trevor. Good reasons make good rules.

Nearly one hundred students crammed into Matt and Gwyneth's house for three hours of board games, darts, dancing, gossip, and pizza. At tenthirty there came rumor of a knock at the front door. On Monday morning, the entire student body was talking about Matt's showdown with the police.

"It's okay, I'm their teacher. We're not being that loud. And it is a Friday."

"Well, just be sure to shut it down by midnight. This is a residential area."

By the time school let out on Monday, the music club's membership had exploded to over three hundred, and they were forced to look for a bigger venue for the Christmas party.

—I'm on your side, Matthew. But there is a great deal that is out of my hands.

—What happens if Judd Haziz comes to the party despite being suspended?

—Well, if it got back to the Disciplinary Committee—he could be expelled.

—That’s what I thought. Thanks a lot, Trevor.

THE DAY AFTER the Christmas party was the last before holidays, when the administration, knowing that no learning would be interrupted, distributed evaluation forms. These were to be filled out anonymously, in the absence of the teacher, and under the eye of a student invigilator who was instructed to seal the evaluations in an envelope and deliver them to the office. This ceremony was largely meaningless, since the teachers were allowed to review their evaluations and could identify most of their students’ handwriting; but it lent a solemnity to the proceedings that most of the students responded to, and their dignified postures as they completed the questionnaires suggested effort, precision, and justice.

Matt tried to dispel this gravity with mock fear, mock threats, and mock bribes, but no one was amused. They waited sullenly for him to leave the room so that they could begin writing about him. In the hallway he exchanged mock grimaces with the other exiled educators, some of whom told him not to worry: the evaluations were just a formality for the school’s insurance policy. But the atmosphere remained portentous.

He had not enjoyed the party. He had arrived late, with untamed cowlicks, on Gwyneth’s bicycle, because she would not let him drive the car, with its faulty signal, after dark. The decorations were already up, the punch and cookies already out, and the first round of Dance Lotto tickets already drawn. His official job that night was DJ, and to avoid being tied to the stereo, he had put five hours of his favorite songs on a disk; but after half an hour, someone put on a Polly Pringle record of staggering mediocrity—and no one even noticed the change. It seemed that in every room he entered, the laughter was just ending and a game had just begun. He stood for twenty minutes by the pool table, munching cookies and making sarcastic commentary, and though Hollis Turanti was playing without a partner, no one asked him to join. Searching for Anita Paulstone, who had by note asked to talk to him tonight, he found only Devlin’s parents, who mortifyingly thanked him for helping bring their son out of his shell, and asked his

advice on consolidating the boy's social and academic gains.

Then, just when he had insinuated himself into a game of Monopoly, Devlin himself tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hey, Matt. Judd just showed up."

Everyone looked up, looked at each other, looked at Matt to see what he would say.

"Well, what do you want me to do about it?"

"I don't know. Shouldn't somebody say something to him?"

"If he wants to risk getting expelled over a stupid party, it's his decision."

The Monopoly game fizzled, and Matt again went looking for Anita. As the search wore on, it seemed to grow in importance. Anita was surely one of the most attractive, well-dressed, and popular girls in the school. She had a little bow-tie mouth and a laugh like an eraser skidding across a desktop. When she was displeased with someone, she showed them not her middle but her pinky finger; and she cursed like a sailor in her high sweet voice. She was constantly grooming herself, adjusting her hair, her skirt, her bra. In class, when asking a question, she insisted on raising her arm, supporting it with her other hand and leaning forward in a way that flaunted her cleavage. When she brought her notebook to his desk he could smell her perfume, and her long hair sometimes brushed his shoulder.

"Hey, Matt. Can I talk to you?" It was Peyton Almass, looking distressed.

"What's the matter?"

"Well, Jen C. told me Palm-Wine saw Elton and Alitz go into a bedroom upstairs."

"Okay."

"Don't you think that's a problem? I mean, the school could shut us down if they found out, couldn't they?"

"I guess Elton and Alitz never thought about that."

"Well, should we do something?"

"What do you want to do? It's Devlin's house. Talk to him about it."

Matt did not know what Anita really felt. In the halls and parking lot

she hardly acknowledged him. Was she made shy by her infatuation, or did she only flirt with him in class out of cruelty? Nothing could ever happen between them, of course, and not only because he was happily married; but it was delicious to imagine her in love with him, and to rehearse the gentle, complimentary words he would use to tell her he was unattainable. He studied her note for clues, but the words were noncommittal.

Khaji handed him a glass of punch, and he found himself wishing that someone had had the guts to spike it.

“It’s not a very good party, is it?” he said.

“No! I think it’s great.”

“When I think of some of the parties we threw back in my high school . . .”

He was still lost in remembrance when Anita Paulstone poked him in the ribs.

“I’ve been looking all over for you, Matty.”

“And I’ve been looking all over for you, Neetie.”

Khaji moved away.

“I wanted to talk to you.”

“Let’s find someplace quieter.”

But every room was crowded, and in every room someone shouted his or Anita’s name. They did not reply, and the others’ eyes followed their progress knowingly. Before they could find a suitable refuge, Devlin grabbed Matt by the arm.

“Hey, Matt. I think we got a problem. Some guys just showed up that I don’t think they’re in the music club. In fact I don’t think they even go to Dundrum.”

“So charge them a ticket.”

“Well, the thing is, they sort of brought some beers.”

This news was announced during a lull in the music, and several faces turned their way. The faces showed disappointment and appeal; and Matt imagined that the disappointment was directed at what they expected him, as a teacher, to say, and the appeal at what they hoped he, as one of them, might say.

Realization dawned in him. The party was dull because he was there. His presence made it a school function. At none of the parties he had enjoyed in high school had a teacher been present. And at all of them, without exception, there had been alcohol.

He smiled and spread his hands. "I'm not going to say anything if you guys don't."

"Forget it," said Devlin. "I'll talk to Peyton."

The music started again, and the faces turned away—Anita's too.

"You wanted to talk to me?"

"I wanted to ask you something, but I think I know what you'll say."

"Well, ask anyway. Maybe the answer's not what you think."

She tucked hair behind her ear and adjusted her belt impatiently. "I was going to ask you if you'd ask Peyton if he likes me, but you would've said I should ask him myself, right?"

All the times she had ignored him in the hallway or in the parking lot: Peyton had been with him.

"I don't know," he said. "I guess I might have asked him for you."

"That's okay. I guess I'll probably just ask him myself. That's probably the grown-up thing to do."

TAYLOR MEDAVAL CAME out of the classroom, clutching the envelope of evaluations importantly. He was reluctant to relinquish them.

"I'm supposed to take them to the office myself. It says right here."

"That's just so they get there, dog. Do you think Ms. Angeles cares, or even notices who puts them in her box? Come on, I'll save you the trip. I'm going there anyway."

"Don't you need to be in class? There's still fifteen minutes left."

"I'm putting you in charge."

The boy's eyes became glazed with visions of prepotence, and his grip on the envelope relaxed.

Matt secured himself in a toilet stall, tore open the envelope, and riffled through the forms, reading at random:

“Mr. Roades needs to take more care when he writes on the blackboard.” —“It was often difficult to concentrate in Mr. Roade’s class because of all the talking going on all the time.” —“We should of spent more time on preparing for the final exam and not so much time making decorations and planning for the music club, when some people in class were not even in the music club (not me) although I did enjoy the preparations a lot. But not the party itself, for reasons that I will be mum about here.” —“Matt seems to have some teacher’s pets in this class, I will not say who though.” —“Hard to get anything done in this class.” —“Spent too much time talking about himself (but we all liked it).” —“Mr. Roades is rude and forgets people’s names.” —“Some of the things talked about and the language used in this classroom was not always appropriate.” —“I learned a lot in this class but I couldn’t help the sneaking suspicion that I could of learned more: That is to say, if the teacher (Mr. Roades) had not spent so much time helping the more ‘challenged’ students catch up to the level of the rest of the class (like 90%).” —“With Matt’s brains and education he could get a lot of jobs better paid than a teacher.” —“There should have been more structure to this class.” —“Matt tries too hard.”

He searched in vain for the praise and gratitude that he’d been expecting, then for some explanation for his students’ treason. Their comments purported to be objective, and even hinted at sorrow for having to be so blunt, but much of what they said was nonsense. He knew all his students’ names. He did not teach to the bottom ten percent, but rather, if anything, the top ten. If there was too much talking, whose fault was that? He wrote on the blackboard perfectly legibly.

Waves of anger and sadness passed through him. Did they really believe what they had written? If so, why had no one ever asked him to write more clearly or to talk less? Why had none of them ever said, “It’s too loud in here,” or “Let’s move on to the next problem already”? And even if some of them had spoken up (*had* some of them?), what did they think that he could, or should, have done about it? Did they really want another teacher who told his class to shut up and sit down and turn to page sixty-seven?

No, he decided that the feedback was not sincere, but *ad hominem*

slander. These must be the words of the unpopular students, the quiet students who had been too timid to join the music club, the ugly students who resented the attention paid him by their attractive classmates, the stupid students who had been unable to grasp the coursework. Under the cover of anonymity, they were venting their spite. He was able to entertain this hypothesis until he came upon an evaluation, proudly signed, by Khaji, who may have been quiet, but was not stupid, ugly, or, since joining the music club, unpopular. He read her words with bewilderment and pain, and stuffed the sheet of paper in his pocket before returning the others to the envelope and delivering them to Ms. Angeles, the school secretary.

“To be truthful to begin with, I would not recommend it (the teacher or the program) to other people. I am in twelfth grade now and therefore naturally I have experienced every different kind of teaching math, but the way Matt did it here would be for me the bottom of them all, really.”

The music club called no meetings in the new year, and eventually its constitution lapsed. It was revived, two years later, by four students interested in starting a school band.

“I will however put forth the opinion that Matt (he preferred to be called Matt) can be very likeable, but that might not be what we needed above all. It can help to keep people paying attention (I mean when you are charming and talk well and are funny) but not everyone. I am afraid that many people get left out under that method. Maybe a few don’t like the humor, and a few don’t like the math. In either event, if you make it optional to learn, a lot of people will not bother. Would that be their fault? They are the people I can’t help but feel regret for.”

Judd Haziz was never expelled, because no word of his having defied suspension ever reached the Disciplinary Committee. No teacher heard him speak again in class, and he flunked out of high school with dignity.

“What can you do for them? I don’t know, but it would have to be individualized. You can’t treat the whole roomful of people like one good, attention-paying, wanting-to-learn pupil. People are all different. Give too much freedom, and you give people the choice to fail. But failure can’t be an option, a good teacher would believe. You are in my opinion being undemo-

cratic toward the people who don't care if they fail.”

A year later, one of Matt's students accused him of abusing his own daughter. No one really believed it, but several of Matt's colleagues muttered that they were not surprised: it was the sort of thing that came of fraternizing with teenagers, who, after all, hadn't yet learned to master their emotions.

“Another point: It can be nice to be nice, and maybe a bad grade can feel like a penalty, but when people know for a certain fact that they cannot get a grade below maybe a C, they will quit trying if they ever tried to begin with. Therefore again I think trying to be helpful rendered Matt actually unhelpful.”

The scandal soured Matt on teaching and cast a shadow over his career, but he did not quit. He didn't know what else to do, and was afraid of the unknown.

“Next, I hope I will be permitted to opine that external to the educational context Matt could learn a thing or two, too. I am talking now about the oh-very-popular club with the puzzling name. You know the one I mean. Here too he didn't do the job required of him. And the outcome? Everyone who attended will be embroiled in a web of concealment and deceit till their dying day. Thank you once again, Mr. ‘Matt’ Roades. Sincerely, Khaji Ji DuPreane.”

As the years passed, his classes gained structure, and his evaluations improved.

—Hey, Mr. Roades? There's just one thing I don't understand.

—Let me see. Oh. This looks like you're getting into matrices.

—I just don't understand why you can't divide a matrix.

—Yeah. Huh. You know, I wouldn't worry about this stuff. You won't have to know anything past chapter twelve.

—But if you can multiply a matrix, why can't you divide it?

—Honestly, I wouldn't worry about it. You don't need to know that.