

Illinois Number Theory Meeting, March 25-26, 2009

Banquet talk by Bruce C. Berndt

THANK YOU

BRUCE BERNDT

Some years ago I read that in the ancient sacred Hindu epic, The Ramayana, the most egregious sin is considered to be ingratitude. Lest I be accused of this most egregious sin, I would like to take a few minutes to thank several people. Because of time limitations, many will not be individually named but instead will be thanked in groups.

I begin by thanking my parents. Before the age of six, several unfortunate incidents in my life required special loving care from my mother, who will be celebrating her 97th birthday tomorrow. From my father, who died much too early, I inherited my work ethic.

My wife Helen and our children, Kristin, Sonja, and Brooks, have always fully supported me. They have been especially kind to always (or almost always) accept my excuse that "I have to work on the notebooks or lost notebook," when I have, for example, delayed cleaning the garage, painting the house, or cleaning bathroom sinks. At the recent celebration of George Andrews's 70th birthday at Penn. St., George "thanked his family for putting up with me." These words are equally applicable and appropriate for me on this occasion.

I was fortunate to have a wonderful undergraduate teacher, Keith Moore, who taught me most of my undergraduate mathematics. I chose to become a mathematician primarily because of his teaching and influence.

At Wisconsin, I was fortunate to have been taught by several great teachers including Charles Curtis, Marvin Knopp (who I call my mathematical step-father), my thesis advisor Rod Smart, and Dick Askey, who did most of his teaching to me after I left Wisconsin. As I told my students in a graduate course on hypergeometric functions that I taught last spring, my biggest mistake while a student at Wisconsin was dropping a course on hypergeometric functions that Askey was teaching. There were times at Wisconsin when I became depressed and discouraged. I thank especially Curtis, Knopp, Smart, and Askey for their support and faith in me.

I thank Paul Bateman for hiring me. I was shocked, when in November, 1966, I unexpectedly received a letter from Bateman offering me a job. I accepted his offer, thinking that I would only stay at Illinois from 2 to 5 years.

In my work, the mathematics library at the University of Illinois has been indispensable. I therefore thank all of those mathematicians and librarians from 1867, when the University of Illinois was founded, to the present day for their dedication in maintaining such a valuable resource for myself and my colleagues.

During my entire career here at Illinois I have been surrounded by amiable and talented number theorists. One often hears of infighting and jealousy among groups or departments of mathematicians. I can honestly assert that our group of number

theorists here at Illinois has always been very supportive of each other's work, and I thank all of you for your support of my work, for attending my many seminar talks, and even for occasionally staying awake during my talk - well, maybe not the *entire* talk. In particular, this evening I thank Harold, Kevin, and Adolf for arranging this celebration.

As much as I am indebted to my colleagues in number theory, professionally and personally, I owe my biggest debt to my past and current graduate students. The most satisfying and gratifying part of my work as a mathematician has been my associations with my graduate students. I enjoyed supervising the research of each of you. I am proud of each of you, not only for your dissertations, but for your integrity, dedication, and love of our subject. Especially satisfying to me are those of you wrote dissertations that exceeded expectations. Although most of you will kindly claim that you learned a lot from my teaching, I feel that I have learned so much from you that it would be impossible for me to adequately express my appreciation for what you have contributed to my life, both professionally and personally.

For several years, our department had few postdoctoral visitors, but in the past 10-15 years those numbers have significantly increased. I have had the privilege of being the mentor to several postdocs, and my expressions of gratitude for my graduate students apply to my postdocs as well. Thank you very much for choosing the University of Illinois for your postdoctoral years and for especially allowing me to serve as your mentor.

I thank my more than 60 coauthors for the privilege of working with you on joint projects, almost all connected with Ramanujan's work.

Finally, I thank Ramanujan, to whom I owe my career. His theorems have brought beauty to my life and to many, many others as well. And Ramanujan, if you are really listening to me, I have quite a few questions to ask you about how you discovered many of your wonderful theorems.

Thank you very much your attendance this evening and especially for listening to me.

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