

Elvis: Optimizing My Opportunities

As told to Tim Pennings

Hi. I'm Elvis. I got my name because as a nursing puppy I gyrated my back legs in a motion similar to my namesake, the King of Rock and Roll. As with Presley, I love the spotlight, from posing for a camera to diving into an eager crowd of high school students.

I knew that I was destined for fame, but when I went to live with mathematics professor, Tim Pennings, two years ago, I could see that my opportunities were limited. Nice guy, but not star quality, if you know what I mean. Then one fine day playing fetch at the beach, I had an inspiration: Show him that I have an instinctual knack for calculus by choosing the quickest path to the ball. (I have trouble with symbolic manipulation, but max-min problems come naturally to me.) It took him a few weeks to catch on, but when he did we researched and wrote the paper and I knew that I was on my way to the top.

With my smile gracing the front cover of the May issue of *The College Mathematics Journal*, what would come next? Well, first several local papers wrote stories, including two with headlines and front page pictures. Then *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Baltimore Sun* followed suit. ABCNEWS.com called for an interview and ran me as their top story, just ahead of the Microsoft-AOL merger. (And Bill Gates thought that HE was top dog!)



Elvis relaxing at home in between interviews and personal appearances. Photo courtesy of Tim Pennings.

The BBC found out about me and called for a live on-the-air interview, as did our own country's NPR radio. Finally, we had an offer to go to Los Angeles for a spot on an NBC daytime talk show in August. (I was all for it, but my co-author would rather go camping.) All together we gave nine interviews and appeared in 28 news stories of various types.

All of this press led to some fine letters from dog lovers including one from a sincere elderly woman who described her Rottweiler's ability to solve algebraic formulas and do square roots. As for myself, I'll stick to calculus, and look for-

ward to us giving our talk in various high schools and colleges next fall. Those students are just suckers for my handsome face. ■

Tim Pennings is an Associate Professor of Mathematics at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. His research, done collaboratively with undergraduate students, is in dynamical systems and modeling. He also directs the Hope College NSF-REU Mathematics Summer Research Program. Other reasons for living include ultimate frisbee, racquetball, nature photography, choral music, folk song guitar gigs, and playing with Elvis at the beach.



Don Albers, the MAA's Associate Executive Director, John dePillis, author of 777 Mathematical Conversation Starters, and Lisette dePillis met Jay Leno after the Tonight Show aired on April 21, 2003. Leno likes mathematics and Albers and dePillis talked with him about Elvis and getting more math on the Tonight Show. Photo courtesy of The Tonight Show.