

Reader's digest

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GENIUS
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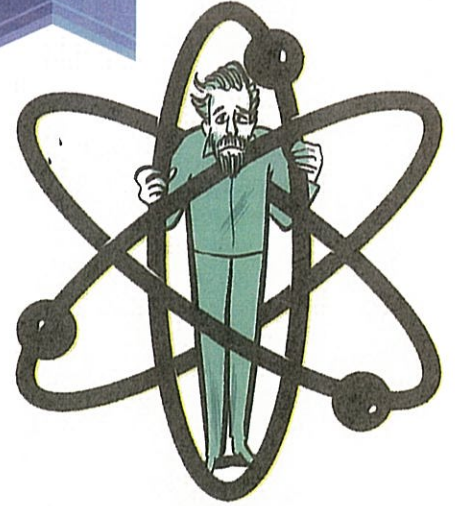
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Department of Wit

The Prisoner Of Mensa

BY RICK ROSNER



RICK ROSNER has the second-highest IQ in the world (192), according to the World Genius Directory.

HISTORY REMEMBERS moments of genius. Isaac Newton saw an apple fall to the ground and formulated his theory of gravity. Archimedes was taking a bath when he had his eureka moment: Water displacement can measure the purity of gold. Who knew? But in contrast, over the past 10,000 years, humans have experienced about 100 quadrillion run-of-the-mill, nothing-much-happened moments, which is a lousy ratio of genius to not-genius moments. The fact is, the world is set up for non-Einsteins, not geniuses. The words *tortured*, *evil*, and *eccentric* are more frequently associated with genius than *bubbly* or *well-adjusted*.

My mom was aware of this. She freaked out when I taught myself to read at age three. But while I crushed IQ tests, I was a playground loner and target of projectiles. A moment of genius at age six: "Here comes a rock, thrown by a bully on the other side of the chain-link fence. The fence is divided into two-inch squares, and the rock is one and a half ➤➤

inches in diameter. The odds that the rock won't be deflected by the fence are negligible (25 percent squared, or one in 16), so I don't have to duck." Then the rock passed clean through the fence and clonked me on the head.

Having the world's second-highest IQ, I can tell you genius has its drawbacks. My less bright friends put it like this: "There's the right way, and there's the Rosner way." The Rosner way includes trying to get a girl to make out with me at a junior high basement party by pitifully asking, "How do you kiss—suction or pressure?" Instead of a kiss, for the rest of the year, I got "Suction or pressure?" yelled at me by kids I didn't even know.

As with many brainiacs, my people skills needed work. I addressed this problem after college by becoming a nightclub doorman. At the doors, I caught thousands of underage people using fake IDs. The challenge of detecting liars within ten seconds of meeting them fascinated me. High-IQ people can easily become gripped by obsessions. I became obsessed with IDs, spending ten years developing a statistical algorithm to help me spot fake or borrowed IDs with 99 percent accuracy. But after a decade of research, I was still getting

paid \$8 an hour, the same as all the other bouncers who didn't have statistical algorithms.

When I was writing for the quiz show *Weakest Link*, we had a quota of 24 questions a day. This didn't seem like enough for someone with my big brain, so I set my own quota of 60 to 100 questions a day. I didn't know that my bosses were evaluating writers based on how many of our questions were rejected. Writing three times as many questions as everyone else, I made the top of that rejection list and was fired.

For more than a year I trained to get on

Jeopardy!, studying hundreds of books and spending dozens of hours clicking a handheld counter to make my thumb faster on the buzzer. After five auditions, I got on the show ... and lost (by chickening out on a Daily Double and then surrendering the lead by failing to identify the flag of Saudi Arabia). I also lost my extra pair of pants, which were mistakenly taken by another contestant.

I studied for almost as long to get on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. For my \$16,000 question, Regis Philbin asked me, "What capital city is located at the highest altitude above sea level?" I answered, "Kathmandu." *Millionaire* claimed


“*Instead of a kiss, I got “Suction or pressure?” yelled at me by kids in my junior high I didn’t know.*”

the correct answer was Quito. However, the world's highest national capital is generally considered to be La Paz, Bolivia, which wasn't included among the possible answers. I sued the show, backing up my claim that the question was flawed with thousands of hours of research, comparing my question with more than 100,000 other *Millionaire* questions. I eventually learned that judges don't have much patience for quiz show lawsuits. I lost in court, appealed the judgment, and lost again. The legal proceedings cost me tens of thousands of dollars, making me the biggest loser in the history of *Millionaire*.

Not everything has backfired because of my genius. I've had a 25-year career as a TV comedy writer. When pumping out thousands of jokes, it helps to be obsessive

and have a skewed point of view. I have a lovely wife and daughter who rein in my most unreasonable schemes. Having earned 12 years of college credits in less than a year and graduating with five majors, I'm always able to help with homework. I've even used my research ability to concoct a mixture of 20 medicines and supplements that helped our dog survive for 117.5 dog years.

In 20 years, my mental power will be commonplace. Thanks to our increasingly brilliant devices, we'll all be potential geniuses with access to all the information and wisdom in the world. And just like me, you'll use your vast computational resources to do mostly dumb stuff.

See you at the 2036 Four-Dimensional Candy Crush Championship, everybody! 

*
* *

COMEDIANS-IN-CHIEF

My esteem in this country has gone up substantially. It is very nice now that when people wave at me, they use all their fingers.

JIMMY CARTER

Mothers all want their sons to grow up to be president, but they don't want them to become politicians in the process.

JOHN F. KENNEDY

No matter how much cats fight,
there always seem to be plenty of kittens.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN (attributed)