

You're a wizard, Andy

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Oh the dreaded calculus. The bane of high school. The class that is taught by the strict nerdy genius who will make fun of you until you cry if you can't figure out the basic double integral of a general function over a polar region: he is boring, has no social skills and feels more comfortable reading Newtonian proofs than chatting with his students. Right?

I know this is crazy, but just bear with me a second. Maybe that stereotype of the math teacher we see on TV isn't accurate. Maybe, just maybe, our calculus teacher, Andy Rosen, is not a soulless robot. This is what some students at Carlsbad are trying to claim. In fact, some students adamantly claim he is instead a wizard. The claim that a calculus teacher has a personality, let alone is a wizard, seemed so radical and ludicrous to me that I just had to look into it more.

"Well I've known since elementary school that I've wanted to teach, but it was in high school that I decided on math," Rosen said.

So there was a period of time in Rosen's life where he had not yet devoted his life to mathematics. Maybe that period of time was long enough for him to develop a personality, and hopefully he partook in other activities besides solving mathematical proofs during his childhood.

"I played football all four years of high school," Rosen said. "I loved playing defense because all you need to do is stand there and not get knocked down and try to push people over. It was great and I really enjoyed it. I mean I got to start two games my senior year: the senior game and against this dinky team so I got my glory in."

Okay, so he had other hobbies besides math in high school, but what about in college? He attended UCSD as an undergrad with a double major in mathematics and US history, and I'm sure that whole time was spent engrossed alone in the library, planning out how to make high schoolers miserable.

"When I was at UCSD my friend started the juggling club there and she taught me how to juggle," Rosen said. "I mentioned that to one of my calculus students a few years ago and he got really excited and pulled out five balls and started going crazy juggling in class. That became the impetus for creating juggling club."

Huh. Well okay so he had friends in college, and girl ones at that. He also participated in a hobby that brings enjoyment to everyone

watching, and eventually started a club for said hobby to bring that happiness to other kids.

After his undergrad work, he attended UC Irvine to get a masters in math and education, and then came straight to Carlsbad.

"I was hired to teach calculus here, and let me just tell you how shocked and excited I was," Rosen said. "The other teacher was going away to grad school, so they asked if I wanted to teach it and I was like, 'Yeah are you kidding, come on?!' At first, it was intimidating but now I've been here for 13 years and I'm happy with what I've created. It's all mine."

However, he was quick to point out that he is not a stuck up specialist who only teaches the best of the best math students.

"I've taught algebra 1, geometry, algebra 2, calculus AB and calculus 3," Rosen said. "I like teaching both the best math students at the school, and also those who aren't as confident at math. I prefer that actually."

Alright, he teaches a wide range of students and says he likes that better, sure. But I'm sure he is mechanical in his teaching like a good math teacher is supposed to be.

"I never wanted class to be me just saying 'here's my lesson and now copy it,' that would be so boring and I would hate it," Rosen said. "I was told in college I have to be serious until Christmas to assert my dominance and then I could loosen up but I don't buy that. I think students react to authenticity and I am goofy and stupid and I tell dumb jokes and that's just me."

Okay, so he has a sense of humor and likes to interact with students and all that fun jazz, but at least tell me he's arrogant.

"The reason I am successful and the reason my students do well is because of the teachers before them," Rosen said. "I really want to emphasize that I am able to be successful because the students I get are very well prepared by the other teachers before them."

At this point, I am losing all faith in this stereotype and I am starting to have the desire to search his closet for some wizard robes. Come on Rosen, just give me a nerdy thing only a boring math teacher could do.

"Well my daughter is two and a half now," Rosen said. "She can already count to 20 so I'm pretty proud of her. I got her a book called 'Calculus for Infants' actually: it's an alphabet book of calculus. It's pretty awesome."

I tried extremely hard to force myself to accept that as the one piece of evidence backing the math teacher stereotype, but I just can't. That is just adorable and mind boggling that a book of that sort exists.

So what's the verdict? If Rosen replaced his jeans with robes and his yo-yo with a wand, he'd just be a scar short of being Harry Potter. Though Potter's magic is evident in his ability to cast patronuses left and right, Rosen's lies in his magical mind and ability to relate to students.



photo by mikayla ferraro