

Best unknown Donald Knuth fact EVAH

Submitted by lambert on Fri, 07/06/2012 - 12:05pm

I found this in the [Wikipedia](#) entry for *potrzebie* when ^[1]I was trying to find out how to spell *fershuggeneh*. (Donald Knuth is a great computer sci--- humanist. The kind of creator who, when he doesn't like the mathematical typesetting his publisher does, writes his own typesetting program. And also a program to create the fonts to typeset with. All free for the world to use. They don't make 'em like that any more.*)

In issue 33, Mad published a partial table of the "Potrzebie System of Weights and Measures", developed by 19-year-old Donald E. Knuth, later a famed computer scientist. According to Knuth, the basis of this new revolutionary system is the *potrzebie*, which equals the thickness of Mad issue 26, or 2.263348517438173216473 mm. A standardization in terms of the wavelength of the red line of the emission spectrum of Cadmium is also given, which if the 1927 definition of the Angstrom is taken for the value of that wavelength, would equal 2.263347539605392 mm.

Volume was measured in ngogn (equal to 1000 cubic *potrzebies*), mass in blintz (equal to the mass of 1 ngogn of halawah, which is "a form of pie [with] a specific gravity of 3.1416 and a specific heat of .31416"), and time in seven named units (decimal powers of the average earth rotation, equal to 1 "clarke"). The system also features such units as whatmeworry, cowznofski, vreeble, hoo and hah.

According to the "Date" system in Knuth's article, which substitutes a 10-clarke "mingo" for a month and a 100-clarke "cowznofski", for a year, the date of October 29, 2007, is rendered as "To 1, 190 C. M." (for Cowznofsko Madi, or "in the Cowznofski of our MAD." The dates are calculated from October 1, 1952, the date MAD was first published. Dates before this point are referred to (perhaps tongue-in-cheek) as "B.M." ("Before MAD.") The ten "Mingoes" are: Tales (Tal.) Calculated (Cal.) To (To) Drive (Dri.) You (You) Humor (Hum.) In (In) A (A) Jugular (Jug.) Vein (Vei.)

NOTE * What they *do* make are vicious little profit-driven dwarf weasels, who are strip mining Knuth's work for the knowledge in it, but not adding anything to it themselves other than bullet points and three-ring binders for the IPO. Sorry for the mixed metaphors. Anyhow, if you want to see what a great academic looks like, the kind of academic that "strategic dynamism" is designed to destroy and make a mockery of, take a look at Donald Knuth. Also, too [Elinor Ostrum in this week's economist](#) ^[2], but I didn't run into her searching for *fershuggeneh*.

UPDATE "Eleanor" to "Elinor"... Hat tip, editor_u.



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[1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potrzenie>

[2]

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