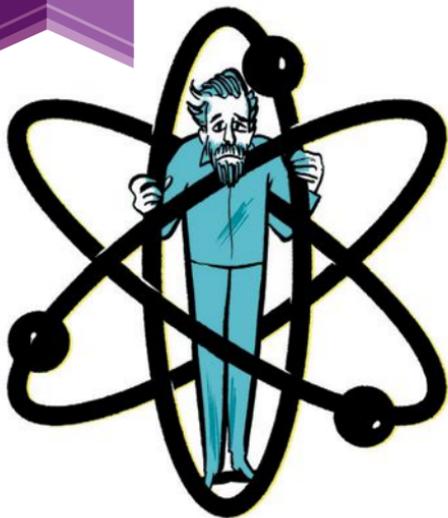


VOICES & VIEWS

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 mum 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.

ILLUSTRATION BY NISHANT CHOKSI; ROSNER ILLUSTRATION BY JOE MCKENDRY

The odds that the rock won't be deflected by the fence are negligible (25 per cent 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 10 seconds of meeting them fascinated me. High-IQ people can easily become gripped by obsessions. I became obsessed with IDs, spending 10 years developing a statistical algorithm to help me spot fake or borrowed IDs with 99 per cent 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 the correct answer was Quito.

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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 1,00,000 other *Millionaire* questions. I eventually learnt that judges don't have much patience for quiz show lawsuits. I lost in court, appealed the judgement, 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!



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SELF-PROCLAIMED WORLD CAPITALS

- Cow-Chip-Throwing Capital of the World: Beaver, Oklahoma
- Artichoke Capital of the World: Castroville, California
- Barbed Wire Capital of the World: La Crosse, Kansas
- Fruitcake Capital of the World: Claxton, Georgia
- Moonshine Capital of the World: Franklin County, Virginia
- Horseradish Capital of the World: Collinsville, Illinois

Via Uncle John's Bathroom Reader