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BULLETIN (New Series) OF THE
AMERICAN MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY
Volume 17, Number 1, July 1987
©1987 American Mathematical Society
0273-0979/87 \$1.00 + \$.25 per page

Enigmas of chance. An autobiography, by Mark Kac, Harper and Row, New York, 1985, xxvii + 163 pp., \$18.95. ISBN 0-06-015433-0

This wonderfully lively and colorful autobiography tells the story of a man who as a teen-ager fell under the spell of mathematics, never gave it up, and grew to become a brilliant, creative mathematician.

Born in 1914, literally with the opening gunfire of World War I, in Krzemieniec, a town in czarist Russia, as a son of a middle-class Jewish family, Mark Kac was raised in an intellectual tradition. His father held a Ph.D. degree in philosophy from Leipzig and an advanced degree from the University of Moscow, and when needed earned an income by tutoring in mathematics, classical languages, and history.

In 1925, Mark was admitted to the Lycée of Krzemieniec, a school with a long tradition and ambitious standards. In 1930, at the age of sixteen, he achieved his first success in mathematics: he found a new derivation of Cardano's solution of cubic equations and showed it to his mathematics teacher, who sent it on to a journal. By a chain of circumstances the paper