Dear Colleague:

I am fond of the following anecdotes concerning pure mathematicians. Cathleen Morawetz of the Courant Institute of Mathematics, New York University, was asked whether she didn't worry about her young children when she was at work. The questioner no doubt expected the cliched answer. Instead, Morawetz replied, "No, I'm much more likely to worry about a theorem when I'm with my children" (Science, 10 October, 1979, p. 207). This reply, I know, is likely to offend the desire for cuddly-cozy reassurance in all of us. Nevertheless I am glad to hear it.

The genius Shrinivasa Ramanujan died at the age of 32. He was hospitalized in a grim institution in Putney, a London borough. The English mathematician G. H. Hardy took a taxi to visit him. He went into Ramanujan's room and said, probably without greeting for Hardy was extremely shy, "The number of my taxi-cab was 1729. It seemed to be rather a dull number." To which Ramanujan replied: "No, Hardy! No, Hardy! It is a very interesting number. It is the smallest number expressible as the sum of two cubes in two different ways" (C. P. Snow, Variety of Men, p. 44).

The great German mathematician David Hilbert one day saw a young colleague in tears. He was in tears because his wife had left him. Hilbert put his arms around the young man's shoulder and said comfortingly, "Es wird convergieren, es wird convergieren! (It will converge)." What else could make a mathematician cry than an integral that refused to converge? (S. E. Luria, A Slot Machine, p. 121).

An American mother, a gay Englishman, a self-taught Indian of modest social background, an upper middle-class German. What possibly can they have in common? What can they talk about if they had confined their interest to their self-identity, their peculiar sexual tastes, their diet, their roots? It seems to me that it is only after they have recognized something important which they all share--in this case, pure mathematics (but it could be the frailness of being)--that they can then look upon each other's peculiarity with tolerance and indeed affection.

Best wishes,