

A REAL MEMORY TEST

by Miles Mathis

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I was thinking about [John von Neumann](#) again today, and his claim to be able to memorize the phonebook. I keep laughing about that, since it is such a useless skill. Then I began thinking about my own memory: why I am attached to it, why I would not like to lose it, and why it is not useless. I consider my longterm memory to be one of my secrets of success, but why? Because I think intelligence is partially a function of your total memory, so the better your longterm memory is, the more total data you will have stored in that noggin of yours. Once you have a large storage of data, you can collate it and cross reference it, which I would say is one measurement of intelligence. Having that large storage of data allows you to spot and catalog both patterns and pattern breaks in it, then allowing you to see errors in newer incoming data. This is what I believe allows me to do something like read a Wikipedia page for the first time and see all the errors in it. I don't mean minor meaningless errors like spelling or grammar errors. I mean errors as in red flags. Things that don't collate, don't follow, don't make sense, or don't logically scan.

So I thought, how could I quantify that longterm memory in a fairly easy and straightforward test, also making it fun for my readers? So I went back in memory to my second-grade class, to see how many kids' names I could remember. That's 50 years ago now for me. 1970. I remembered quite a few. I won't tell you how many I remembered yet, because I want to give you a chance to play the game first. So have a cup of coffee, maybe jog in place for a minute or something, get the brain working. Then try to remember as many names from **that one class** as you can. Don't include kids in grades above or below you, except as follows. I think I may have a bit of an advantage over some, since I didn't move around in those years. So I knew most of these kids for more than that one year. If you moved around a lot, you can count anyone you remember from 1st to 6th grade, *in your specific grade and class*.

Let's also include any kids that lived within a block or so of you in any direction (that's for everyone, 1st to 6th grades). Also, include your teachers in those first six grades. Don't give yourself anything. You need to be at least 95% sure that is the name. Spelling doesn't count.

Here is how we will score it. One point for a first name, one point for a last name. If the kid lived within a block of you, you only get half that. If you later dated that person (after 6th grade) or married them, you get zero points. Your own brothers and sisters don't count, of course. If you later dated a teacher. . . you are under arrest.

Add em up, and if you are in your 20s, that is your score. If you are in your 30s, multiply by 1.3. If you are in your 40s, multiply by 1.6. If you are in your 50s, multiply by 2. If you are in your 60s, multiply by 2.4. If you are in your 70s, multiply by 2.8. If you are in your 80s, multiply by 3.3. If you are in your 90s, you win!

If you did well and wish to report your score, you can send it to me via email, milesmathis@protonmail.com, or post your score at CuttingThroughtheFog.com, in the section on current events. I will post my score in a few days. Report both your raw score and your net score. Of

course it will be easier to compare scores to others your age. I tried to factor in age, but I am not sure my factor is right. It is just a guess. You should definitely get more credit for remembering for 50 years than for remembering for 20, but how much more? Hard to say. Also, those who lived in neighborhoods with more kids, like me, will have an advantage.

OK, a couple of days have passed. Just so you know, I haven't been thinking about names for two days or looking them up online. I don't have any class photos lying around. It took me about fifteen minutes to create my list two days ago, and I haven't added anything to it since. That said, I have admitted I have an advantage over many people, in that I lived in the same house from 2nd grade to 12th grade, and in that I lived in a neighborhood with a lot of kids. Also, back in the 1970s we played outside the house all the time. We went over to other kids' houses and played in their yards, in their houses, *on* their houses, in their pools, in their trees. If you are in your 20s, you probably have no idea what that is like.

I have an advantage in another way, in that I have never been stoned, high, drunk, or blotto. I have never smoked a single cigarette, a single joint, and have never taken harder drugs of any kind. I have never been seriously drunk. I got dizzy on champagne on New Year's Eve when I was 17 and that cured me of that. It never happened again. Once or twice in college I got a bit of a buzz on alcohol, but never once got "hammered". Never went past what you would call a two-drink buzz. And since college I have drunk even less. I have a beer or glass of wine now and then, but never more than one. I never *want* more than one, so don't feel sorry for me. I don't drink hard liquor at all, because I can't stand it. I don't like it. It tastes like lighter fluid to me. Also, I don't think I have ever pulled an all-nighter in my life. The closest would be getting a bit jet lagged when traveling to or from Europe, but I always made up the sleep immediately. I like my sleep too much to miss it on purpose, or for any given reason. I don't consider it cool or manly to miss sleep. On average, I get about ten hours of sleep a night and always have. If I exercise hard during the day, I may get even more, up to twelve hours.

Which all goes to say I haven't killed a lot of brain cells in the normal ways. I have taken pretty good care of myself for a long time. So my brain still works fairly well. Which may explain why my net score is . . . 190. My raw score was 95, and because I am 56 I got to double that. I remembered the names of 65 kids, and 58 of those I remembered both names.* I remembered five teachers' names. I hated my 3rd grade teacher and have apparently jettisoned her name from my memory. In first grade I was in a special class that had a group of teachers instead of just one, and I don't remember a single one. My memory seems to have kicked in big time at age 7. Although I remember some things from before that, I remember almost everything after that. I remembered 24 names from the 2nd grade class, which is pretty good since I think there were only about 30 in all. But, as I said, most of those were in my classes 3rd—6th grades as well. I remembered 36 kids from the nearest neighborhood, and so got one point for most of them. That seems like a lot of kids, even to me. But that is basically five square blocks of kids (my block and one in each direction makes five) over five years. So we had kids moving in and out. If you didn't count brothers and sisters of your neighborhood friends, you missed some points there.

I have been sent a lot of scores and I have to say that, like anything else human, this is tending to spin out of control. People are digging up old class photos—which didn't occur to me since I don't have any from that period—digging around online, and one lady had even been to gradeschool reunions. I didn't even know those existed. I am gratified that people are having fun with this, but to keep the field

somewhat level I should have said that those methods are out of bounds. Most of won't have access to photos, etc. I also didn't make myself clear regarding teachers. Some have included as many as 30 teachers, while I meant to limit it to a maximum of six: one for each grade. In my school, we spent most of our time in one room with one teacher. The distance from home has also turned out to be a problem, since the way I put it was open to interpretation. Some have limited themselves to their own one-block street, while others have included 9 square blocks or more. For myself, I included about 5 square blocks, as I just said. I didn't include the four blocks at an angle, mostly because I didn't think to.

My go-ahead to include all six grades for “those who moved around a lot” has also been taken as permission to include all grades, even by those who spent several years in one place. So I guess I should clarify that, too. If you moved around *so much* you are having trouble remembering many kids in one grade, bring in another grade or two to get your score up to normal levels. But if you remember everyone anyway, don't bring in all six grades just to get your score up to 1000 or something. I tried to keep my memory to one grade, since it was already pretty good, and I was stable. Of course there is the possibility I brought in a couple of kids from adjoining grades, who didn't join my class until third grade, for example, but there is no way for me or you to check that, so we just do the best we can.

It doesn't really matter of course. It is just a game, and I am very happy that people are having fun with it. You are free to include the whole town in the game if you like, of course. Recreate the entire class in claymation if it rocks your boat. But for the sake of comparison, I have told you exactly what parameters I used for myself.

I had no idea how divisive and polarizing this little contest would be when I proposed it, and I now sort of wish I hadn't. However, I learned something very important about memory from it, something I didn't expect to learn coming in. **The form of a memory is closely tied to pleasure.** You are far more likely to remember pleasant experiences than unpleasant ones. Or, you remember the unpleasant ones if you need to, as a form of survival, but you only remember the broader forms. You remember roughly how it felt and remember any avoidance mechanism you perfected at the time. But you don't bother remembering details like names.

I thought I chose my 2nd grade class for this game simply because it was as far back as I could go with very good memory. But that isn't why I chose it. I chose it because it was a *pleasant* memory. That year was one of the best years of my life, and I remember it so well for that reason. It is fondness for many of those children and teachers that has caused me to remember them. Maybe I remembered them just for times like this, which aren't so pleasant. I wasn't just accidentally thinking of that time. I was thinking of it as mitigation for the current miserable times. I was seeking a hiding place. If you don't already know how I am feeling right now, you can read [the other paper I wrote this week](#), which expresses it without holding anything back.

I now understand this, and it was Josh's response at CTF that taught it to me. I couldn't understand at first why he was remembering so little, but then I moved forward to 7th grade, where I was miserable, and tried to remember names there. I didn't do so well. As with the name of my third-grade teacher, I have blocked out large parts of those memories from grades 7-9 as painful. I only remember a few of the high points, and a couple of very low points, which are branded into my skull, but most of it has dissolved into mist. I suspect I could dredge much of it up if I tried long and hard, but I don't want to.

So I understand how you feel Josh, believe me. Those of you who didn't find a primary school memory to latch onto, I encourage you to remember a pleasant time, whenever it was in your life. Take yourself back there and huddle for while. Savor it.

You may say, “What does remembering a bunch of stupid kids names have to do with seeing red flags at Wikipedia?” Well, directly it has very little to do with it, obviously. I can't collate those kids' names to give me any information about, say, John Lennon or Karl Marx. But if I can pull up those kids names so quickly and easily, I can also pull up a lot of other information just as quickly. So, as I am reading any page at Wikipedia, or elsewhere, whatever it is telling me I can compare to what I already know. I can call up all previous instances of that topic, claim, fact, or data. I can weigh it against similar data in my head. I can run odds on its likelihood, based on all the other things already in my head.

I have found that the brain doesn't need to actually call up each fact or event individually. I don't sit there and remember thousands of pieces of data while I am writing. That would be exhausting, wouldn't it. No, the brain has previously sorted all that data and come to a running conclusion about it. So in most cases you don't need to pull up any specific data, you just pull up the final conclusion on all data of that sort. Then you compare it to the new incoming data. If it doesn't fit, your brain sends you an abort signal. It says, in effect, “I have been crunching data on that for over 50 years, and the new data doesn't compute. Please re-enter or check your data”. At that point, the brain starts searching for counter-examples, to prove the inconsistency with new data. So in that case, I *do* pull up specific memories. As you have seen in the papers, often those examples are very recent. The hottest examples often come from further up the same page, and I can show you Wikipedia or the writer in question has contradicted himself in the same article. Just as often, the contradiction is from that same week or month, where we just looked at the mainstream telling us the opposite. But in many cases we have to go back years, decades, or even centuries to pull up the crowning contradiction. For instance, a science author may be referring to Newton, but I can show you Newton never said or implied that. I know that only because I have read Newton closely and retained not only the specific facts, but the overall feel of the research and its important conclusions. In fact, I have studied Newton so closely I even know where *he* has contradicted himself. So even in the case the contemporary writer has referenced Newton correctly, I can show he is still wrong—because Newton was wrong. Not many others besides me would presume to do that, but I have never considered the truth a presumption. Everyone makes mistakes, and Newton made his fair share. And because he was Newton, his mistakes are often monumental.

Of course I am not claiming my longterm memory is the *only* thing that allows me to do what I do. If it were, then everyone with a good memory would have already ripped up recent history before I got there. They would have discovered all the mistakes in science before I even woke up. So it must be more than just a large cache of data in the brain, easily accessed. It is seeing and following complex patterns in that data.

Many of you have probably seen the movie *Limitless*. He takes a pill and all of a sudden remembers everything and starts making connections. I don't claim that I can do what he did there, since I certainly can't become fluent in languages in a matter of days or anything like that. Like everyone else, I am very *limited* in my ability to learn. But as far as intuiting connections and influences, what I do is

somewhat like that.** I saw the movie for the first time and thought “Yes, that is how it feels”. This is why I can read a page of physics or mathematics in a subfield I have never studied, and with some effort unwind it. It is even more than that, because I pretty quickly understand what is being said, and also understand *where it is wrong*. This is because I am weighing it as I learn it. I have enough familiarity with similar fields and problems to compare it to them. One of those fields is logic, so I know that whatever I am learning must be consistent. If it is not consistent, I know it is wrong to one degree or another. The inconsistencies have to then be weighed against one another, and something jettisoned. If the inconsistencies are great enough in size or number, I know the paper is either a conjob or a product of ignorance, and the whole thing can be jettisoned.

And, in some ways, I can do what the guy in *Limitless* couldn't, since I can even see the contradictions there. The first thing he wanted to do is make a lot of money, which I see as a mistaken inference. Actually, it was a mistake of the scriptwriters, or something they did on purpose to misdirect you. Someone who suddenly got his full mental powers wouldn't use them to make money, since logically he would be smart enough to know the value of money. He would use his powers for something more important. [Bill Murray learned that in *Groundhog Day*, remember? He went from stealing money from armored cars to catching children falling out of trees.] But even if he did wish to make a lot of money, he wouldn't use the stock market to do it. He would realize the stock market is rigged. They want you to think that geniuses go to Vegas or the stock market to make money, but they don't, because they can see that is all a conjob. The only way to make money in the stock market is to get on the coattails of the billionaires who are rigging it. Which means, you become a thief with them. Beyond that, they will catch you. They don't like uninvited barnacles on their surfboards, and they will drown you. Just ask Jeffrey Epstein.

Another thing I know is that the kind of powers Eddie Morra had do not win you friends. You do not go into a group or party and start telling them all the interesting things you know, and they gather around in amazement. Rather, they assume you are a blowhard and they tell you to take a leap. In our culture, anyone who dominates the conversation for more than a minute or two is considered to be an egomaniac, even if he isn't talking about himself. Socializing is intended to be low-key and unthreatening. Nobody is there to learn anything, much less to be made to feel small by someone who knows something. So the idea that Eddie Morra would charm into bed his landlord's girlfriend—who previously despised him as a loser—with his new-found knowledge of the law is absurd. The idea that within weeks he would be cavorting around with supermodels and jet-setters is ludicrous. Do you really think supermodels would be standing around listening to Eddie lecture on 19th c. literature, medieval politics, or war history? No, not even if he could tie that into stock market advice. They would tell him to shut his trap and just give them the tip.

Just as ludicrous is his running for the Senate, or hoping to be President. He might as well audition for the Ty-D-Bol Man. He would gain an equivalent amount of real power or prestige that way. This is just the scriptwriters trying to keep you in the old cage, where you believe Congress and the President are real positions, rather than talking head fronts for those actually making decisions.

But why this *divertissement* into *Limitless* and other things after a harmless memory game? Because, as you now see, I used that to try to answer some of my fans and critics both. My fans have asked for more personal information, and they are getting that here, you see. They don't understand how I do what I do, or where I am coming from, and I am trying to tell them. I am trying to explain how it works, to a certain extent. And for those critics who think I am a committee, or think I am being fed information, this is also for you. I don't need to be fed information and don't need a committee, because 1) I have the internet. The internet feeds me plenty of information on all these topics, without

relying on any secret sources. I have shown you my sources in the papers, so you should know that. 2) I have a lot of information in my head that I can tap far faster than most people can, from books and experience. In my fields of expertise, I am extremely efficient, and since one of those fields is writing, I can put together a paper almost instantly. I don't need to waffle around seeking emotional confirmation, asking for verification, or rewriting. Even in the longest, most complex papers, I do very little rewriting. I start at the beginning and just go. I get to the end and press publish. I may come back later and make some additions, but I don't have the time or inclination for rewriting. These are exposes, not poems or novels. And because I can formulate an argument as I write, I don't need to rewrite.

Yes, it takes a great deal of confidence to write that way, but over the years I have learned to trust my own judgment. I have discovered that my methods work very well, since they have been confirmed again and again. Also, it helps that I have almost no fear of failure, again for logical reasons. The history of any field is a history of failure. Once you have read as much and as widely as I have, you understand that even the smartest people have been wrong about almost everything, so for me to equal or better them doesn't require me to be flawless. It requires me to be bold and logical and as scrupulously honest with myself as I possibly can be. If I do that, I figure I am bound to discover something worthwhile.

*For those who think I am making it up, I append the actual list of names, in no particular order:

Kelly Walker, Morris Denton, Laurie House, Sheri Moore, Dena Moore, Kathy Smith, Wesley Jackson, Ken Attaway, Alan McIntyre, Dana Cobb, Chuck Wild, Brad Williford, Jimmy Lindsay, Wayne Cook, Dawn Burselson, Teri Lynn Tibbetts, Mary Zournas, Robert Menaul, Mark Vaughan, Andrew Nicholson, Ruth Nicholson, Heather Bradford, Pecos Morgan, Christy Perry, Wynn Fuqua, Mark Russell, Dee John Hart, Cyd Hart, Brenda Bramlett, Candy Creel, Cookie Creel, Janine Mezack, Melissa Mezack, Mike Mezack, Rebecca Mezack, John Archer, Billy Archer, John Menahan, Sarah Way, Matthew Way, Sterritt Collins, Jim Collins, Kelly Nickel, Eric Dockray, Dee Dockray, Tracey Dockray, Bruce Houser, Kate Houser, Joe Goff, Jim Blount, Gary Moyers, Girish Vallabhan, Beth Bolin, Chris Downs, Jim Downs, Jon Hughes, Lee Hughes, David Thompson, Tony Hamby, Kristy, Gerry, Chris, Bill, Gary, Danny, Sandy, Whitney. Teachers: Eleanor Bowling, Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Campbell, Mr. Gray, Mr. Johnston. This was Wheelock Elementary School, Lubbock, TX, 1970-1975. I lived at 3211-41st, and my phone number was (806) 799-7240. Many of these kids lived in Haversham. We were the Wheelock Whippets. "I'm a Wheelock Whippet fighter! Wheelock Whippets fight to win! RahRahRah." No, seriously. I find that the Wheelockians are no longer Whippets. They are now Plainsmen, like the Monterey Plainsmen High School nearby (which I also attended). Boring. If I had the inclination, I could also tell you what each of these kids looked like, down to the tiniest details. I remember them as if they were standing before me. I remember thousands of events from that time. At one point or another, several of those girls were my childhood girlfriends, including Dena Moore, Laurie House, Jon Hughes, Christy Perry, Beth Bolin, Kristy, and Sandy. I also had crushes on Teri, Candy, Cyd, Dee, Dawn, Janine, and Melissa, though some of those came later. Yes, my heart has always been just as busy as my brain. Beth Bolin was my girlfriend in 1st grade. Laurie House was my girlfriend in 2nd grade. Dena Moore was 4th -6th grades, where we were a very hot item, I assure you. Christy Perry was only around for a few months and moved away, breaking my widdle heart. She had long blonde hair. I can still remember the way she stood, with her legs akimbo like a little hippie. Jon Hughes came after Dena, and we were close for many years. Gretchen Schultz was my out-of-town and summer girlfriend from 1971-74. You can see her on [my pics page](#). Oh the memories. I have a theory as to why my memories are so vivid for that period. I was far more popular in those years than in any subsequent years, so the period was a sort of idyll. I think we tend to remember good things and block out bad things. Junior high was a misery, mostly best forgotten, and high school was only a little better. College was much better, since I came into my looks again at that time, but it still didn't compete with my early childhood. Things since college have fallen off steadily, not due to my looks, but because society in the US has been steadily crumbling since the late 1980s. Each decade is worse than the one before. By 1990 we had fallen

into some sort of manufactured abyss, and we are still in it. We should feel especially sorry for those born after 1980, since they don't remember that the world wasn't always like this. Or maybe we should feel especially sorry for ourselves, because only we have had to witness the full fall into the abyss. We remember how it was and know it doesn't have to be this way.

**Some have asked why I don't go on Jeopardy, if my head is so full of facts. To be honest, I probably wouldn't do that well. Sometimes I beat all three players, if the categories suit me, but usually they don't. I know very little about pop culture, movies, video games, best sellers, computers, current events, politics, products, TV and music after 1990, and many other popular categories. I would also probably freeze up in front of the audience, making stupid mistakes or forgetting to answer in the form of a question. I am much better in writing than I am verbally, since I write all the time and hardly ever say anything. I would have been somewhat better in the old College Bowl from the 1960s. I am a geek of that sort, not the new Jeopardy sort. We had one of the best Certamen (Latin Club) teams in the nation in high school, of which I was the captain, but I have had no experience with live question and answer since then.

Which brings me to another subject you may or may not find interesting. I could go on indefinitely, so you can see why people don't get me started in real life. I am the opposite of a chatterbox, but I do have a lot going on in my head. At the State Certamen event, we had the best team, but got second precisely because I kept blurting out the answer, giving points to the others teams. In my defense, we didn't practice Certamen, and the other teams did, so they knew how the buzzers worked. It was the first time any of us had seen buzzers. As you know from Jeopardy, you have to wait until you are called on, since only the host knows who buzzed in first. But I found the rules infuriating, since again like Jeopardy, you had to wait until the host completed the question. This was for the audience, so that they could hear the question. This completely skewed the competition, and it skews it in Jeopardy. Why? Because, logically you should let the players buzz in as soon as they know. If you are going to base it on speed, that is the only logical way to do it. By requiring the question to be read in full, the speed consideration is then out the window, since the buzzing is then determined by the player that can most accurately guess when the computer considers the question to have been read. Is that $\frac{1}{4}$ second after the last sound has faded? $\frac{1}{2}$ second? One full second? Since no one tells you that, the only way to learn it is by playing for a while on that computer. You soon figure out what the gap is. In truth, that ability is what determines many Jeopardy games, since at least $\frac{1}{4}$ of the questions are very easy. The rest of it is determined by Final Jeopardy, which is a crapshoot, and which skews the outcomes far more than it should. In more cases than not, when playing at home, if I know that last question, I win, if I don't, I lose. So you may as well skip the rest of the game and just play Final Jeopardy. In short, the game could use an overhaul. In many ways, I find it a grand annoyance, and would find it even more annoying to play live. The buzzer problem would be easy to fix, since the full question could be flashed to the audience by other means. You don't need to skew the whole competition for the audience. Final Jeopardy could be de-accentuated by making the maximum bet something like \$2000 or 10% of your previous total. As it is, you could be literally twice as smart as your fellow competitors, and still lose because you didn't know the lead character of Pokemon was named Pikachu. Plus, in this way, Jeopardy can all but control the outcome. They have a profile of you, so in general they know your good and bad categories. If they want you to win, they make Final Jeopardy one of your categories. If they don't, they don't. So it is just a *very* obvious way to rig the game. [See the movie *Game Show* for more on this.] And you could say the same of the buzzers. The buzzers would be very easy to rig in favor of one player. As we have seen from voting machines, computers are infinitely hackable and nearly infinitely untraceable. If Jeopardy were doing this, how would you know? You wouldn't, which means the contest isn't transparent. You will say this is just the nature of such contests, but it isn't. Watch the [old College Bowl](#) contests to see that they can be much more transparent. There, the contestants could buzz in as soon as they knew the answer, and there was no crapshoot final round that skewed the whole contest. Also notice how much more difficult the questions were back then. No questions about Pokemon or Brad Pitt. Studying for one of those quizzes would have been fun, since you might learn something worth knowing. Studying for new Jeopardy is mostly a waste of time, since you are just filling your head with junk propaganda and pop-culture garbage.

And if the College Bowl is still too easy for you, you can check out the University Challenge from the BBC. Some of the games are on youtube. It isn't that much harder than the College Bowl, but Paxman reads the questions very fast ([especially in the finals](#)) so you have no time to think. You barely have time to keep up.