“How long is a piece of string” is 16 chapters of maths at its best. Each chapter resolves different problems faced in everyday life. The authors say in their introduction “give us a topic that we care about, and we all become mathematicians”, and that is what they try to prove. The problems they included ‘kept us entertained in the pub’, which as a student, works for me! I definitely recommend this book - and in fact I already have - as it is not only interesting but often hilarious and shows the use of mathematics in everyday situations which are not at first glance obviously related to maths.

Whilst reading this book I constantly found myself quoting it to my friends. The book tries to answer a lot of thought provoking questions. I have many favourites including: the ins and outs of how to prove a full glass is the same as an empty glass; how a taxi meter works; how to prove the length of a piece of string is infinite - which gives the book its amusing title; how to get a hit single; why karaoke singers sound so bad and the best way to meet the love of your life, statistically speaking. It even talks about how the best way to stack cans of beans relates to life inside a male toilet! When I showed this to male friends they all agreed on the unwritten rule discussed in the book.

The only criticisms I have are: firstly - although this book is aimed at both adults and children, as it is mostly easy to read, I felt that perhaps it could be aimed either more at adults so that some topics could be dealt with in more depth or at children; secondly – I found a few chapters were disappointing compared to others. Personally I found the mathematical ideas in the chapter about memorable sporting moments were harder to follow than in most of the other chapters, but it was a one off and since the following chapter was excellent I quickly forgot.

“How long is a piece of string” is an exciting way of showing those who have no interest in maths exactly what it is that mathematicians get so excited about. For those who like maths anyway, it refreshes your memories on things you may have thought about and brings new ideas forward. Although maths is a part of this book there is not too much, nor is it too difficult and any mathematical ideas suggested are explained thoroughly, with the help of funny cartoons, which makes the book easy to read.

This book is marvellous. The choice of topics is mostly extremely entertaining and you could easily find yourself puzzling over topics in this book for weeks after. The style of the book means that the reader is constantly being made to think and is then helped through the concepts, which makes it all the more friendly and interesting. The message I feel this book gives, is that maths is not as scary as most think it is - maths can easily be fun, but it is important to understand that maths can be simple, stimulate curiosity and be relevant to almost everything we do.