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It's difficult for a person with schizophrenia to relate to others. In Dr. Nash's case, even his close colleagues had difficulty conversing with him (or understanding what he was saying). This image, from Hearing Voices Network, attempts to convey the strain for both the individual and the individual's support network.

Lloyd Shapley, a mathematician at UCLA, had known John Nash when Shapley was a graduate student at Princeton:

He was obnoxious. What redeemed him was a keen, beautiful, logical mind.

Now that mind was afflicted with a terrible disease. A disease from which few people ever fully recover. Professor Shapley:

It was very sad...There was no way to talk to him or even follow what he was saying.

Dr. Nash became ill at a time when neuroleptics (drugs used to treat schizophrenia) were new and psychoanalysis (of the Freudian type) was standard. He - according to his Nobel autobiography - believed his treatments were unhelpful:

I later spent times of the order of five to eight months in hospitals in New Jersey, always on an involuntary basis and always attempting a legal argument for release.

The mathematics genius became a pathetic figure, roaming the corridors of Fine Hall with no purpose in mind that anyone else could understand. Sometimes, when the illness gave him moments of lucid thought, Dr. Nash was able to work:

And it did happen that when I had been long enough hospitalized that I would finally renounce my delusional hypotheses and revert to thinking of myself as a human of more conventional circumstances and return to mathematical research. In these interludes of, as it were, enforced rationality, I did succeed in doing some respectable mathematical research.

But the illness would return.

Alicia divorced Nash in 1963, although she never abandoned him. Insisting that he be surrounded by people and places he knew, Alicia allowed her ex-husband to move back home. And Princeton University allowed the former professor to stay within the mathematics community he had known and loved.

Time passed.

Two decades that might have been devoted to consistent, on-going mathematical work slipped away. Yet, Nash was still capable of doing some amazing work. He observes (scroll down 80%):

I would not dare to say that there is a direct relation between mathematics and madness, but there is no doubt that great mathematicians suffer from maniacal characteristics, delirium and symptoms of schizophrenia.

Alicia, Princeton and John's family and friends stood by him. They gave him love and provided a familiar environment.

Then ... doing what so few people have ever been able to do ... John Forbes Nash, Jr. decided he'd had enough:

...Then gradually I began to intellectually reject some of the delusionally influenced lines of thinking which had been characteristic of my orientation. This began, most recognizably, with the rejection of politically-oriented thinking as essentially a hopeless waste of intellectual effort.

In other words, the man with "a beautiful mind" willed himself to get well.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ALL-OVER-FOR-HIM-A-Beautiful-Mind>

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Media Stream



Professor John Nash

Photo of Professor John Nash, online courtesy Library of Congress.

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