

# One man's victory over schizophrenia

By STEPHEN ROW  
Staff Writer

One all-too-common misunderstanding about schizophrenia is that people who suffer from this disease are doomed to a life of institutions, disability, even homelessness.

Fortunately, the movie *A Beautiful Mind* has helped educate the public as it shows how the famous mathematician, John Nash, not only married, had children and held down a job as an instructor at a prestigious university, but also won the coveted Nobel Prize.

Now, with the advent of effective medication and other treatments, people with schizophrenia can lead productive and fulfilling lives.

But it was the hard work of such pioneers as Nash and the person featured in today's *Trentonian* article during Mental Health Awareness week, which has helped make such a dream for thousands of individuals possible.

At age 61 Robin has suffered from schizophrenia for nearly five decades. But his illness hasn't stopped him from a successful career.

A father, husband, graduate of the University of Washington (BA and MBA), Robin worked for 25 years in business and VP of a major corporation.

It was a heart condition, not his mental illness, which forced him to take an early retirement.

He still works full time as a vol-

voices, not visions.

"My mother took me to a psychiatrist," he said, grateful she did not deny the possibility his hallucinations were more than an overactive imagination.

Robin's father was more hesitant. "I recall a conversation between my father and mother," he said. "My father, whose family had a history of mental illness, didn't want that stigma to be attached to his son."

"My (paternal) grandfather committed suicide in a state hospital," he recalled.

Also Robin's aunt and uncle both had frontal lobotomies, a practice whereby portions of the brain's frontal lobe are removed or severed.

His mother was insistent and after some negotiating with her husband, agreed to "give (Robin) six days to 'work it out.'"

"If he doesn't, I'm taking him to a psychiatrist," she told him.

Fortunately she found a good doctor who not only recognized in Robin "all the symptoms of schizophrenia, such as delusions of grandeur and hallucinations" but also tried some pioneering methods.

"I was extremely fortunate that I was with a psychiatrist who was trained in Switzerland, where they were working with psycho-pharmacology," he said.

American-trained psychiatrists were buying into the "Freudian" idea that schizophrenia was the result of a mother's "poor parenting,

Robin explained.

In Switzerland, experts were already working with the idea that schizophrenia was not caused by bad nurturing but was an organic disease rooted in brain chemistry.

"He began looking for a medication," Robin said.

The process was not easy, but the psychiatrist refused to abandon his quest.

"He spent 10 years searching for something that worked. He went through all the available medications starting with Thorazine."

On one occasion, while Robin was doing doctoral studies at the University of Carolina at Chapel Hill, he had a serious breakdown. Knowing what was wrong, he returned to Seattle to see his psychiatrist.

"I drove across the country while hallucinating," he said.

The trip paid off.

"I found a medication which eliminated all the symptoms," he said. He was hesitant to say what medication it was, as no single drug works for all schizophrenics.

Today, nearly 40 years later, Robin is grateful to his doctor's pioneering work.

"I'm an anachronism," he said. "In 1956 I got the kind of treatment which is known today to be effective."

He is also grateful to his supportive family, especially his mother.

"I owe my recovery to her," he said.



Trentonian Photo  
Robin, a retired businessman, is writing a book about his mental illness.

unteer and writer.

Few of his colleagues knew of his schizophrenia. Indeed, the one time he shared it, he was passed over for a promotion.

Robin's schizophrenia surfaced nearly 50 years ago, almost the same time that John Nash was battling delusions about spies and the CIA.

"It was at age 13 that I was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia," he said.

Like many schizophrenics and contrary to depiction in *A Beautiful Mind*, Robin's hallucinations were