



“A problem arises when making the Dean's List becomes the all-consuming goal.”

Ken Bain, Ph.D.

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The Superhuman Mind

Cases of extraordinary mental ability

by Berit Brogaard, DMSci, PhD and Kristian Marlow

Hidden Talent Unleashed

A miraculous encounter with a 30-foot steel camera boom

Published on September 9, 2013 by Berit Brogaard, D.M.Sci., Ph.D in The Superhuman Mind

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Patrick Fagerberg had been a successful lawyer for 13 years when he suffered a traumatic brain injury. He was attending an Orchestral Maneuvers In The Dark concert on March 19, 2011 in Austin, Texas when a 30-foot steel camera boom fell into the crowd. In the footage below Patrick is the person the boom hits directly on the head:



Patrick suffered moderate traumatic brain injury as a result. His career as a lawyer came to a sudden halt. He was severely injured and could no longer perform the demanding tasks that his profession required. During the following year while attempting to recover he developed a sudden urge to paint. As he started painting he discovered to his surprise that he was remarkably good at it. From that moment he couldn't stop painting. Painting became [his life](#).

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What Patrick acquired from the tragic encounter with the steel camera boom is called "savant syndrome." The leading expert on savant syndrome, Darold A. Treffert, M.D., characterizes savant syndrome as a condition in which a person develops extraordinary mathematical, linguistic or artistic talents as a consequence of a brain defect.

The chief hypothesis is that savant syndrome is caused by a brain lesion or birth defect in the brain's left hemisphere that results in



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overcompensation by the brain's right hemisphere. This may allow stereotypical right-hemisphere skills, such as artistic and musical skills and unrestrained or irrational decision-making, to flourish. An alternative but related hypothesis is that we all have the skills of savants but that they are not developed very much because the left hemisphere dominates the average person's brain activity. Typical left hemisphere skills are thought to include the ability to reason and make rational decisions and to evaluate logical and mathematical problems. So in most people it appears to be a strong adherence to reason and logic that somehow suppresses dormant abilities that we all have in areas of drawing, painting and music.



Patrick fits the standard characterization of savant syndrome. Prior to the life-altering incident he worked as a lawyer but had no prior artistic training. In fact, he says that he was always a "math guy" with no interest in the arts. After the encounter with the 30-foot steel camera boom, however, he developed a talent for painting, and the world is starting to notice. Gremillion & Co, a major gallery in Houston, Texas, recently accepted him as a client and is going to show his art. Patrick says that he thinks about painting all of his waking hours. Not a moment goes by where it is not on his mind. This is a common feature of individuals with savant syndrome. They develop an obsession with some narrow area related to mathematics, music or painting. The obsession may play a role in savant syndrome but it is not the sole cause of the talent, as the talent tends to emerge around the same time, but the passion and fixation may be the ingredients needed to perfect the extraordinary abilities and transform a tragic event into success.

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