## 14.2 Psychological Disorders in Film

*A Beautiful Mind* (schizophrenia)

Interestingly enough I have used this movie in the past during my speeches at the high schools to help describe some of the horror my family and I have lived. I have asked the students to rent it (as I am sure most have not seen it) and watch it with the understanding that everything that John Nash is going through is real to him. I watched this movie for the first time when someone suggested it to me. My husband had just been diagnosed with drug induced schizophrenia. While he was no longer using drugs, the brain damage had been done and it would take years, if ever, for him to recover. I was horrified at what I watched and scared to death that my life was turning into the life Mrs. Nash lived. It was an exceptionally well done film and Russell Crowe, who played Mr. Nash became one of my favorite actors. It wasn’t until the 5 years I spent with my husband’s diagnosis was over that I realized how much that movie downplayed the real life world of someone suffering from schizophrenia. It did a good job explaining that what he thought was real and how he eventually learned to live with his disorder but I can guarantee without a shadow of a doubt that life was much worse than they depicted on the movie for Mr. Nash and his wife.

I was just at the beginning of understanding everything about schizophrenia and I was researching everything I could to help me learn to cope with it as well as my children and my husband. It was a very real issue and my husband believe things that you would only see in movies. I thought my life had turned into one. He spent hours staring into door knobs because the round feature of brass causes distortion in objects in the background. To him those were entities that were there from the spirit world and here to give him messages. He believed that everyone with an American Flag on their cars and cell phones in their hands were a part of the conspiracy to put him in prison for the rest of his life. He believe that I was a member of every single government agency out there. From the FBI to the CIA to our local area law enforcement. He ruined every house we moved into by tearing down the walls thinking there were people in them. He tore apart every car, every dashboard, every computer and cell phone in hopes to “catch” those spying on him. In his mind I could speak about 15 different languages and I was trying to poison my newborn son and leave him alone with him so that when my son died, he would get the blame.

Needless to say our life was a living hell. I learned how to sit on my hands when we drove anywhere to refrain from using my hands as I talked. When I did this he would think that I was signalling in some strange sign language where we were headed. I could not get him to a doctor, he was certain I had enlisted every doctor, judge, police officer and everyone we knew that he was crazy and they would take him and lock him away for life. He was suicidal and dangerous to himself and others. I went as far as to having him involuntarily committed just for the hospital to release him over a technicality. Life was scary, depressing and I wondered if there would ever be an end.

I remember when I was little, my Aunt Georgia was also schizophrenic. Back then, they did not have the understanding about this disorder as they do now. Nor did they have the medication. My Aunt Georgia has been in an institution my entire life. Up until recently when they found a medication to stabilize her. She now lives in a home and has started to rebuild her life the best she knows how. She has been robbed of nearly 30 years of her life. Knowing what I know about psychological disorders, I would say that while the movies are a great way for others to get a general understanding of what others go through, it barely touches the tip of the iceberg. Our lives were much worse and I am certain John Nash’s was as well.

Reflective Statement:

I have a different insight than some because I lived with this horrific disorder in my home for years. I have been through the tragic events that unfolded in his mind and I had to sit back and let him think these things, there was absolutely no way I could reason with someone who’s mind was not right in the first place. In the US there are 2.2 million people living with schizphnrenia according to schizphrenia.com and about 7.2 out of every 1000 people affected. This disorder has cost our country billions of dollars and bankrupted many families. We go to great lengths to fix our loved ones and we realize that no amount of money can. Our situation was different in the fact that while schizophrenia is not curable, it is manageable. My ex husband’s bout with this disease was brought on by a three month addiction to meth and the personal use of nearly $10,000 worth of this drug in that amount of time. His brain was severely damaged and his chemicals destroyed. It wasn’t until the 7 year prison sentence he got for nearly killing me (in a rage that was built up over years of thinking I was part of some grand scheme) that the prison doctors understood he needed a confined environment and no medication at all. In a couple years, his brain was able to replenish it’s own chemicals and while he still thinks some things were real, he is pretty much a normal part of society today. They say that this disorder is a combination of genetics as well as environment and I agree with that completely. All I know is that those years, the worse of my life, made me numb to the movies that were made to create them. I have been told my whole life, movies are not real, and after what we lived through, even biographies are not totally real. May everyone affected by this horrible disease find peace and medication that works. It’s the worse disease of the mind I have ever witnessed.