

# Illness

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The test was usually if they burned or drowned or stoned you and you survived you were a witch, so they could burn or drown or stone you again.

As the witch hunts were dying down, hospitals to treat the men-

tally ill began to come into being. In 1785, Jean Colombier — inspector-general of French hospitals — observed that although it was nice to have fewer insane people on the streets, he wasn't sure if the hospitals were much better. Thousands of people were locked up without any effort to cure them, the half-mad were locked away with the raving mad, the violent sociopaths were put with the people suffering from chronic depres-

sion, some people were chained while others ran free. Sometimes a patient would be allowed out but that was rare. The hospitals were the sort of place where if you weren't insane yet — wait a few days.

These hospitals were not places to treat the mentally ill, they were places where they were kept.

With the 20th century, the science of psychology actually became a science. After some laughable attempts at finding out what makes us tick (from phrenology to Freud, both of which have made great contributions, both of which were really, terribly wrong), we stumbled onto the greatest treatment for the mentally ill yet: lobotomy. Developed by Egas Moniz

in the 1940s, a prefrontal lobotomy is a process where you cut parts of the brain, severing connections, messing up thought patterns. If you were dangerously psychotic, this would calm you down.

Of course, it involved mucking around in someone's head and possibly erasing them as a person, but at least they weren't killing anyone, right?

Today, most psychologists will try and avoid talking about the early days of their profession. They'd rather talk about what's being done now for the mentally ill, and I must admit, it sounds much better. We've made great strides in understanding behaviour in the last two decades and with the right treatment a lot of our

would-be axe-murderers can actually live normal lives. Their biggest stumbling block, it seems, is public opinion. Our society thrives on making derogatory remarks towards anything that's different, and we're pretty good at it. To be on the receiving end of our abuse could drive someone insane, even if they weren't there already.

One thing to remember about insanity is that you're only as crazy as the rest of us think you are. Whether you are an eccentric or a real psycho depends as much on what other people think and how you fit in as it does on your biology. It makes an interesting point: if people are ever going to be successfully treated, we need to meet them half way.

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# The PLA: One man's story

BY MONICA GILLIS

The Prior Learning Assessment Centre was a great help to Scott Manuel, a 20 year old St. Margaret's Bay resident, that helped create a bit of focus for his life.

Scott received a high school education at Riverview High School, Cape Breton and one year of upgrading at Sir John A. MacDonald High School here in Halifax. Scott had abandoned his goal of a university career when he failed to be accepted into Dalhousie's science program. He quickly discontinued exploring any other academic fields.

Scott moved on to work in various colourful jobs including one as a Tim Horton's baker and another as a Dowding Siding siding installer. Scott hopes to become a firefighter, and with five firefighting certificates — awaiting the arrival of a sixth — he is well qualified. But with only forty available positions and over 2000 applications, his chances are slim.

Scott, after talking with Jane Harmon at the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) centre, found some possible career alternatives. Together they reviewed his resume both in the employment and volunteer fields, and discussed possible areas that he may have

been interested in, such as the RCMP and the security field. Harmon gave him some brochures about possible upgrading available at Henson College and St. Mary's University. Harmon also outlined possible courses that could help Scott enter these fields if his efforts to be a firefighter were unsuccessful. Scott also found that his CPR and basic fire fighter training could possibly count as two required credits in a correctional institutions program at a community college.

"Anyone looking to get some focus or find themselves," said Scott, "[the PLA] is the definite place to go."

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