

A World of Connections
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Interviewee: Maria Squire

Imagine that you are looking through a kaleidoscope. The many complexities of your eye take in an ever-shifting array of light, color, and structure. As you gaze at the rich pattern, you slowly twist the knob, watching as the design shifts until another beautiful layer of the mystery is revealed. Mathematics can be seen as a kaleidoscope. It is more than the satisfaction of finding the radius of a circle or discovering the value of x : math is a pathway to connection.

When I visited her, Ms. Maria Squire shared a story from her childhood. As a young girl, Maria sits waist-deep in hot, soapy water as her mother stands above, trying to tame her child's intense, stubborn, frizzy hair. The two are discussing multiplication. Suddenly, the young girl is not merely adding, but multiplying. She has discovered multiplication—and with her mom! The Mother and daughter deepened their connection through mathematics: math in the bath! Maria began to turn the knob of her kaleidoscope, but it would take years for her to fully open her eyes to the beautiful array.

Ms. Squire can tell you the angle of γ , and she can explain to you the length from a to b , but she can also communicate her love and appreciation for math on a deeper level. “Math is a world of connections,” she told me. As she offers her students new challenges, she'll ask, “How are these linked? How are these problems related?” Life is the same way.

Ms. Squire's father was a math and computer science professor at Dartmouth College. Dr. Dwight Lahr was the first tenured African American mathematics professor at an Ivy

League school. Dr. Lahr was his young daughter's inspiration. Later, Professor Lahr motivated her to apply for the scholarship that took her to college. He was the driving force behind Ms. Squire following in her father's footsteps to teach mathematics. Dr. Dwight Lahr passed away in Lyme, NH, on Monday, December 26, 2016. To this day, Ms. Squire keeps her father's framed montage of famous mathematicians in her classroom, along with his collection of math books, and a cardboard cat he kept on the upper shelf of his office. Even though her father has passed, these small items keep her connected to the person who inspired her as a young girl.

In third grade, Ms. moved to Tunbridge Central School, and there her love for math more fully emerged. The images of third grade Ms. Squire, uncovering her love for mathematics, do not simply hold herself sitting at a wooden desk, sharpened pencil in hand. No, these memories hold her and her classmates discovering connections together. As she did with her mother and father so many years before, the group

uncovered the mysteries of mathematics. Or course, Maria could solve any problem before her peers. After solving a problem, she would look around. She observed. She discovered that each mind worked differently. Each and every student had a brilliant brain concocting their own unique view of the world. It was fascinating. Maria was twisting the knob of her kaleidoscope, and again, she had discovered another layer.

In high school, Ms. Squire discovered that she did not simply love mathematics. She loved learning of any kind: history, English, geography, science. “You name it, I loved it!” Ms. Squire exclaimed on reflection. It was a troublesome thing for Maria to be forced

into choosing one thing as a career. Still, she earned a degree in applied mathematics and worked at the University of Virginia. During a summer internship, Ms. Squire was placed in a dull, gray cubicle. She would sit in her box, isolated from everyone, for days on end. Her mind would wander to thinking, “Where are the people? Where is the connection? Where is the vitality?”

Ms. Squire became a teacher because the beauties of mathematics can be found in different ways. It all depends on how the person chooses to perceive such complexities. Ms. Squire loves seeing how each child thinks through a problem. She loves seeing the unique qualities and sensitivities of every student’s brain. For Ms. Squire, teaching someone math is not simply about the subject: it is much more about her students. As a rising seventh grade student, apprehension was the emotion I paired with math. What if I didn’t understand the lesson? What if I didn’t know the answer to the problem? What if the lessons moved too fast, and I could not keep up? A thousand what if’s floated around my mind. Ms. Squire wrapped her hands around mine and showed me how to turn the knob of the kaleidoscope. With her help, I was able to uncover the thrilling patterns hidden within. Thanks to Ms. Squire, I have discovered how the different parts of a problem all weave together to form a beautiful design. Ms. Squire went deeper than showing me how to find the area of the circle. She taught me that math is much more than solving an assigned problem or answering a question on a test. Mathematics is a method of uncovering life’s many confusions and complications. Math can be an outlet for those seeking knowledge or comfort. But it is also a technique to assist others in finding their sanctuary in life. Math is not simply solving the problem, and feeling pleased when you do. Math is about creating friendships, deepening relationships, and forming connections.