PROFESSOR: Well, I think-- I don't know if it was in the womb or shortly after, but it was very-- I can't remember ever not being interested in mathematics. Having said that, you know, growing up, I was pretty convinced I was going to be an astrophysicist or exploring strange new worlds and other-- boldly going where no one dared to go. I certainly didn't envision myself being happy as a clam just hunkering down in a research institution and thinking about math. I'd say what got me more interested, as time went on, was just the realization-- I think that there is-- in some sense, that there's an unknown world out there just waiting to be discovered, and I think a lot of-- it's easy-- I felt this growing up, and I think a lot of kids have this feeling that sort of like all the good discoveries have been made.

You know, there's no unknown regions on earth. There's no deepest, darkest place you can go to explore that no one's ever been to. Every mountain's been climbed. You have sort of the sense that the world is known. The state of knowledge is known, but in mathematics that's totally untrue.

There's tons of problems out there that no one's even touched, and there's new problems being discovered every day. So you never run out of space to explore.