

4. A Truly Beautiful Mind

7. He also felt a special interest in a fellow student, Mileva Maric, whom he found to be a “clever creature.” This young Serb had come to Switzerland because the University in Zurich was one of the few in Europe where women could get degrees. Einstein saw in her an ally against the “philistines”—those people in his family and at the university with whom he was constantly at odds. The couple fell in love.

8. In 1900, at the age of 21, Albert Einstein was a university graduate and unemployed. He worked as a teaching assistant, gave private lessons and finally secured a job in 1902 as a technical expert in the patent office in Bern. While he was supposed to be assessing other people’s inventions, Einstein was actually developing his own ideas in secret. He is said to have jokingly called his desk drawer at work the “bureau of theoretical physics.”

9. One of the famous papers of 1905 was Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity, according to which time and distance are not absolute. Indeed, two perfectly accurate clocks will not continue to show the same time if they come together again after a journey if one of them has been moving very fast relative to the other. From this followed the world’s most famous formula which describes the relationship between mass and energy:

$E = mc^2$ (In this mathematical equation, E stands for energy, m for mass and c for the speed of the light in a vacuum (about 300,000 km/s).

10. While Einstein was solving the most difficult problems in physics, his private life was unravelling. Albert had wanted to marry Mileva right after finishing his studies, but his mother was against it. She thought Mileva, who was three years older than her son, was too old for him. She was also bothered by Mileva’s intelligence. “She is a book like you,” his mother said. Einstein put the wedding off.

11. The pair finally married in January 1903, and had two sons. But a few years later, the marriage faltered. Mileva, meanwhile, was losing her intellectual ambition and becoming an unhappy housewife. After years of constant fighting, the couple finally divorced in 1919. Einstein married his cousin Elsa the same year.

ally: a friend or an associate

philistines: a word used disapprovingly to talk about people who do not like art, literature or music

at odds : arguing, disagreeing

patent: a document which gives the rights of an invention to an inventor

absolute: measured in itself, not in relation to anything else

unravelling: starting to fail

faltered: became weak

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