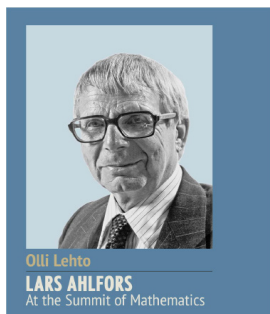## Lars Ahlfors
At the Summit
of Mathematics

Author: Olli Lehto
American Mathematical Society
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Number of Pages: 125

Michael Berg

When I was a junior professor at my university in the early 1990s, I had the pleasure of being advisor and major professor to a gifted young woman who was on the fast track to a very solid graduate school stint in pure mathematics. In her senior year she had pretty much exhausted our regular offerings and asked me for a reading course in analysis. I opted to have her go through part of Ahlfors's classic text on complex analysis and it indeed proved quite a sporty business.

Ahlfors was a living legend at that time (he passed away a few years later, in 1996, at 89), and although he was known to outsiders, i.e. non analysts, primarily through the effect of his famous text, there was, and is, a lot more to be told about his fascinating life. We now have a compact, readable, and mathematically meaningful biography by Olli Lehto, a very close friend of Ahlfors.

In the pages of the book, we learn any number of marvelous things about this great scholar, an early Fields medalist who, early on, moved from Helsinki to Harvard, where he spent on the order of 30 years, and who became a major and

influential figure on the international mathematical scene. We learn about his early breakthrough at age 21, proving Denjoy's conjecture and including it in his doctor's thesis. We learn about Ahlfors's close friendship with Arne Beurling, who also solved the Denjoy problem but didn't publish until some years later,

Arne Beurling was the
best friend I ever had. (L.A.)

Indeed, his wife properly figures throughout this thoughtful biography, from their courtship, through the adventures of a long and full career, to the last year of Ahlfors's life, when he was stricken with dementia. Lehto presents this personal dimension of the life of his friend and the subject of his biography with great sensitivity and poignancy.

Lehto is a mathematician, so that aspect of Ahlfors's life is amply taken care of, and is done proper justice to. We all know of his famous text, at least, and we should all be keen to read about such an interesting mathematician's life.

La versión completa de la reseña,
https://maa.org/press/maa-reviews/lars-ahlfors-at-the-summit-of-mathematics

Beauty
is not quite
the right word

- You have your creative moments, where all of a sudden you have a revelation.
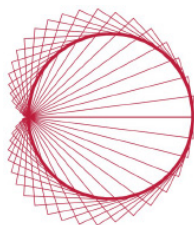*Hasn't that been a feeling of intense beauty for you?*
- You presumably mean when suddenly things fit together? This is not quite like looking at clouds or looking at the sea, or looking at a child. It is something else; it just works! It works and it didn't work before; it is very pleasant. The theories have to be structural and there has to be some sort of appealing structure in the theory. But, you know, beauty…
women are beautiful, men are beautiful, children are beautiful, dogs are beautiful, forests are beautiful and skies are beautiful; but numbers on the page or diagrams on the page? Beauty is not quite the right word. It is satisfying -it is intellectually satisfying- that things fit together, but beauty? I say it's a pleasure when things fit together.
I avoided the word beauty because I don't know what it means to say that a mathematical theorem is beautiful. It is elegant, it is great, it is surprising -that I can understand, but beauty?!

Robert P. Langlands
2018 Abel Prize of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters.