

Astronomy and myself



Greetings,

Let me start by introducing myself to you – my name is Margarida Dimas Santiago and I'm a 17 year old girl from a small town, in the south of Portugal, called Loulé. I'm currently in my twelfth grade and I'm attending Escola Secundária de Loulé – Loules Highschool.

I'm a passionate girl for the things I do. If I do something by my free will, then it is something that I really enjoy doing; otherwise I won't spend any of my time unnecessarily. I've always been quite curious. If someone tries to teach me something, but they can't explain me why it is a certain way and not the other, or if someone doesn't explain the things with the necessary detail, I'll try to get my answers, whether it is by asking further or doing my own research on the matter. I consider myself a responsible person as well. If I tell you that I'll do something, that I'll participate in a certain thing, then I will. I think that your word is really important, and tells a lot about you. If you promise to do something, then do it. I'm also a responsible person in school matters. I care about learning, getting good grades and achieving my goals, therefore I have no problems at abdicating of my less important activities in order to spend more time studying and looking forward to my school career.

Science is a lot more than what you see in the books.

Science has guided my nation, and others, through the oceans. It has given us the possibility to explore ourselves and what surround us. It has taught us how to kill and how to support life. It has taught us that those brilliant dots, up there, at night, aren't really that small. It has driven us through the dark and through the hardest times humanity has ever seen. It is the past, the present and the future. It has taught us more than anything could ever do. It has shown us that, what we used to perceive as the truth, isn't, and that what we believe to be the truth now, might not be, nor ever be. Therefore it has taught us, not only the importance of knowledge, but also the value of humbleness.

My passion for science began about four years ago, when I was in the seventh grade, and my first chemistry and physics teacher began to tell us about this huge this we like to call The Universe. At the time, I didn't know much about it... in fact, it was the first time someone had really introduced me to this subject. It didn't take long until my fascination began. Class after class, my attention for her words kept growing and growing, keeping me stuck like a fly on a spider's web (she doesn't look like a spider at all, though). I would spend my class breaks, in my school's library, flying through those entire Universe related books.

I am now in the twelfth grade, and my passion is even stronger. Now that I'm older, I've been taking part in some scientific projects such as *All-Portugal Asteroid Search Campaign* and *Pan-STARRS Asteroid Search Campaign* where we're given photos of some parts of the Universe to analyze, via a program called *Astrometrica*, in the search for moving objects, such as asteroids, saving the scientists some time; *Faulkes Telescope Project* where we are able to control this huge machine in real life time and take some pretty nice photos (I've been participating in these two projects since my tenth grade); *Mini-Congresso Solar 2013* – Mini Solar Congress 2013, organized by Coimbra's University where we had to make and present a project about the sun, and we created an animation of a sunspot; I participated in the *Olimpíadas de Astronomia* – Astronomy Olympics of 2013 and, this year, 2014; and finally, this summer, I also took part in *Astrocamp 2014*, which is basically the portuguese version of ESO ASTRONOMY CAMP 2014 that takes part in Paredes de Coura and is organized by CAUP, *Centro de Astrofísica da Universidade do Porto*.

I think that is it really important to seize these amazing opportunities, since many of them are once in a lifetime and can really make a difference in your life. You get to know more about the scientific method, you get to know many more things besides those that are stuck in your school books and are repeated year after year, by your teachers. Those things are your basic education, and you obviously need to learn them, but if you restrain yourself to them, school might get a little boring.

I truly praise teachers who take an effort to drive you into these kind of projects because most of the times they don't get extra paid for that and they spend their precious time with you, knowing that the biggest reward they will probably get is your true appreciation and admiration.

At this point you might be thinking that I'm some sort of crazy obsessed person about the Universe, and only the Universe... well, that's not *entirely* true.

I am also interested in other science subjects such as nanotechnology, chemistry, psychology...

But yes, the Universe is my biggest passion.

Well, now talking more specifically about why I want to take part in ESO ASTRONOMY CAMP 2014.

I just started attending my last high school year and therefore I'll have to make this HUGE decision that everyone has to do once they reach this point - I'll have to decide what I want to do with my life, and what sort of career I want to choose.

As you probably know, the situation in my country isn't the best, both socially and economically, which means that, unless you're an engineer, doctor or something like that, you shouldn't be expecting to have a job, or one with dignity, by the time you finish university. At least not in my country, and this kills many expectations and dreams, since many of my peers are more worried about choosing something that will guarantee them a job, rather than choosing something that will actually make them happy.

I'm scared I might be one of them and it drives me crazy just to think that one day I might end up with a job I hate, or none, thinking that my life has been totally useless, and that I'm wasting my voyage.

If I had the opportunity to go to your astronomy camp, my perspective about all of these things would change. I want to know more about the subjects you have to teach, I want to know if this is what I really want to pursue, besides all the contradictions and how little importance is given to astronomy, in Portugal, unfortunately.

This is a crucial time in my life and the more I get to know about everything, the more risks I take, the more opportunities and projects I take part in, the more I see other realities, the more widely I'll be able to see, and the more wisely I'll be making a choice for my future.

For all of these reasons, I sincerely hope that you consider providing me this opportunity, so that I can live it to the fullest and make it one of the best experiences in my life.

Thank you so much for your time.

My most sincere regards,

A truly science lover,

Margarida Dimas Santiago