

notorious for clumsy accidents in the lab. However, there was one topic I excelled in and that was astrophysics. Unfortunately, the astronomy branch was closed in my second year of study. The subject was not uppermost in my mind anymore, and struggling with the prospect of becoming a researcher, I seriously considered reverting to one of my earlier career choices: becoming a teacher. I had just made it to the state final of a youth music competition in Germany and teaching music and physics in high school seemed like the perfect combination of subjects for me.

Everything changed, however, when I was selected for a summer internship at Mount Stromlo Observatory of the Australian National University. For the first time, I got an insight into the day-to-day life of a researcher and could work independently on a small project on stellar streams in the Milky Way. My supervisor Ken Freeman introduced me to the beauty and elegance of galaxy dynamics. All of a sudden, I could appreciate classical mechanics as a great tool to describe the motions of the stars. After the internship, I abandoned my idea to go to the conservatory and instead focused on finding an opportunity to carry out my bachelor thesis research project in astronomy; so I found a placement in nearby Groningen to work with Amina Helmi.

I decided to stay at the Kapteyn Institute for another two years to complete my Master of Science, thoroughly enjoying a curriculum centred on astronomy. Soon an opportunity came up to enroll in a course on observational astronomy which was to take place at the Isaac Newton

Telescope on La Palma. During our five nights at the telescope, we experienced first-hand how it felt to be an astronomer and the patience it required in case of bad weather! Yet I had found a new passion. It was rewarding to see our project grow from a little idea in our heads to typing the coordinates of targets into the telescope, and to finally present the science to our peers after reducing the data. One year later, I again found myself on La Palma, this time observing at the William Herschel Telescope for my master thesis project with Eline Tolstoy.

It was clear that I wanted to pursue a PhD in observational astronomy. In the same year, I was accepted into the International Max Planck Research School (IMPRS) on Astrophysics in Munich for a three-year studentship at ESO under the supervision of Magda Arnaboldi. For my PhD, I investigated how the halos of early-type galaxies grow through mergers and accretion. This is a challenging endeavour, as the closest early-type galaxies are already millions of light-years away, but the faint halos are very extended on the sky. I therefore use a particular type of stars — planetary nebulae — which are like green beacons in the sky, and whose velocity can be measured even at a distance of hundreds of millions of light-years.

I enjoyed being in the middle of one of the astronomy hubs in Europe and got to participate in many exciting seminars and conferences that were taking place on campus. I travelled again to La Palma to observe the halos of giant elliptical galaxies with the custom-built Planetary Nebula Spectrograph (PN.S) for my the-

sis. Since the PN.S is a visitor instrument, we spent many afternoons leading up to our observations tuning the filters and aligning the CCDs in the instrument arms. Six months later, I got the opportunity to join my ESO Fellow mentor during his duties at Paranal observatory. At last I was convinced that the next step for me would be an ESO Fellowship in Chile to get even more exposure to the forefront of astronomical research and instrumentation.

And here I am now. I have just completed the first year of my fellowship and therefore the first 80 days and nights as a support astronomer on Paranal. It has been an exciting year with a steep learning curve! I am part of the Multi Unit Spectroscopic Explorer (MUSE) instrument operations team and currently work on a project to investigate how well the adaptive optics improve the image quality. It is great working in an international and interdisciplinary team. I particularly enjoy the ritual of watching the sunset from the platform before the night starts. I also recently started to experiment with astrophotography. I like to share the wonders of the night sky with my friends in the city, where due to the bright lights, one can barely make out the Southern Cross. When I am not observing or working from Vitacura, one is likely to find me rehearsing music. While living in Munich, I was a soprano with the Münchner Motettenchor and spent a good part of my leisure time in churches and concert halls in the region. Now in Santiago, I have again taken up singing, although on a smaller scale. It is a relaxing balance to the academic world and a great way to practise my Spanish.

In Memoriam

ESO staff member, Cristian Herrera González, sadly passed away in August 2019 and will be much missed. He joined ESO and the Science Operations Department as Telescope and Instrument Oper-

ator (TIO) in 2001. During his 18 years at Paranal, Cristian worked on most of the telescopes, instruments and subsystems of the observatory. He held the role of nighttime TIO Coordinator for more than

10 years, leading the night crew and was the coordinator of the Instrument Operations Teams activities for the operators during his shifts.