

Fellows at ESO

Margaret Moerchen

I grew up in central Texas, where city lights frequently obscured the nightly show of constellations. (While we proudly refer to Texas as The Lone Star State, it isn't for this reason!) When it was time for a meteor shower, I could make a short drive into the hill country where a much richer sky was revealed — and perhaps it's because the stars weren't always in plain sight that these glimpses were so inspiring.

These night-time excursions continued while I did my undergraduate coursework at the University of Texas at Austin. I then found an even darker sky in the Davis Mountains, home of McDonald Observatory, where I had my first experience using a “big” (0.75-metre) telescope. After graduating, I took my first step into mid-infrared astronomy by working on the design of EXES (Echelon Cross Echelle Spectrograph), a spectrograph that will soon fly on SOFIA, the Stratospheric Observatory for Infrared Astronomy.

Wanting to continue in the hot field of the thermal infrared, I went to the University of Florida to participate in the building of mid-infrared instruments such as T-ReCS (Thermal Region Camera and Spectrograph) for Gemini South. I spent five monsoon seasons in Gainesville, where my thesis research employed T-ReCS and other mid-infrared cameras to study the architecture of young planetary systems by determining the location of warm dust within them. At the same time, I had the opportunity to become involved in the development of CanariCam (presently in the commissioning phase), the mid-IR facility instrument for the Gran Telescopio Canarias, the 10.4-metre segmented-mirror telescope on La Palma.

After attending the Observing Planetary Systems workshop at ESO Chile in 2007, I thought this would be a fantastic place to combine the pursuits of both scientific research and instrumentation development. I became even more sold on ESO after I had the chance to visit Paranal to assist in a post-intervention characterisation of VISIR. Now, almost three years



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later, I'm back at the VISIR console as instrument fellow and am part of the team working on its exciting upgrade project. My functional duties include support of observations not only with VISIR, but with all instruments at Unit Telescope 3 (UT3) and UT4, and at UT4 I've been able to learn more about adaptive optics and the near-infrared regime. Performing a wide variety of science programmes at the two telescopes has provided a unique perspective on the power of 8-metre telescopes, and welcoming visiting astronomers and hearing enthusiastic detailed descriptions of their projects is one of the most rewarding aspects of the support work. In fact, even driving astronomers up or down the mountain in the middle of the night offers one of the benefits we sometimes forget — to look at the night sky! I've seen the most spectacular crumbling-fireball meteors of my life while on the summit road, and they're an impressive reminder of why I travelled thousands of miles to stay up at night in the middle of the desert.

Davor Krajnović

On a warm summer night, in the company of a dentist, a physician and a manager, in the cockpit of a sailing boat that rocks slowly, while a breeze brings the smell of pine trees and the buzzing sound of a few persistent cicadas, and the stars shine on us with the intensity of a crystal-clear night, the dentist concludes: “What a good job you have: looking at the stars!”

I often ask myself, how many decisions I made to get here. Until I was more than half way through my university physics degree I was not thinking of being a professional astronomer. I had not even looked through a telescope until about that time. One of the first convincing moments was when I joined a group of fellow students on a visit to the observatory in the sleepy town of Višnjan in Croatia, where amateur astronomers were becoming professionals in their achievements of spotting Near Earth Objects. There I had a first glimpse of the life of an astronomer: it was not just star-gazing. There was a lot of careful and patient taking of pictures, comparing them, and working with different image-processing software, and so on, throughout the night, until the rain came. It was fun!

The starting point in my career was the acceptance to do a PhD at the Leiden Observatory. Very early on, I went to observe with the SAURON integral-field unit mounted on William Herschel Telescope on La Palma. The fifth observing run of the SAURON Project was 14 nights long and a number of team members came to share the time, but I stayed for the full run. Two weeks on the mountain, not having to close the dome once, catching as many photons as the detectors allowed, from dusk until dawn, and, just before going to sleep, looking at the shadow of the mountain on the clouds or the Atlantic Ocean, this was something extraordinary. I was hooked.

I spent four wonderful years in Leiden. My thesis consisted of the analysis of the nuclear properties and dynamical modelling of nearby early-type galaxies, as well as developing a method to analyse the two-dimensional kinematic maps coming from instruments such as SAURON. After the PhD, I went to Oxford where I stayed for five years. For the last two I was an Extraordinary Junior Research Fellow of Queen's College (the "Extra" actually means they were not paying my salary, but they did take care of me as a college does). There I started working in the near-infrared and with laser-guided adaptive optics observations, which unfortunately also meant that trips to the telescopes became rarer. A large part of my science, however, concentrated on a new and exciting project, the ATLAS3D survey, which I am co-leading. This is a multi-wavelength survey of a complete sample of nearby early-type galaxies, and it includes a large team of

observers and theoreticians. The first results are coming out right now and it is amazing to see how the initial ideas have turned into science.

It is now about ten years since I left my hometown and I am entering my second year as an ESO fellow. Astronomy really is not just star-watching, and ESO is a prime example of the complexity needed for successful astronomical operations. I feel rather privileged to be able to participate in it. On a warm summer night, however, when a friend says it is a good job, this star watching, one has to make a decision: to agree, or say: "Well, actually I study black holes ..."



Davor Krajnović

In Memoriam Christine Nieuwenkamp

Tim de Zeeuw¹

¹ ESO

Christine (Chris) Nieuwenkamp was born in Belgium and studied at the Higher Institute for Translators in Antwerp. She started her professional career in the purchasing department of a Brazilian mining company stationed in Belgium. She joined ESO in April 1990 as Administrative Assistant for Purchasing in the Contracts and Procurement Service at ESO Headquarters in Garching.

Through her strong motivation and dedication, Chris was able to cope with a constantly high workload, especially related to calls for tender, contracts and contract administration, and interacted with a large number of staff in both Garching and Chile. In addition Chris successfully trained and integrated new staff in the Contracts and Procurement Department. For several years Chris was an active and respected member of the ESO Staff Association in Garching. Her excellent performance as a Procurement Officer was well-recognised both inside and outside ESO and she was a pleasure to work with. She died on 18 October 2010. Chris will be remembered by her friends and colleagues at ESO and missed by her husband and two children.

