

How did you become an astronomer?

First of all, what made a great impression on me during my childhood was the launch of Sputnik, the first artificial satellite. Even though I was only in first grade, I was able to read the relevant to sputnik articles in the Greek newspapers and began also reading articles referring to astronomy and the space-events in general. I would follow every single manned and unmanned development including the first US satellite Explorer 1; I knew the statistics of all manned flights from that of Gagarin to that of the EVA (Extra Vehicular Activity) of Edward White (then the flights became too numerous, my interests shifted and I began losing track).

Along with the “space race” of the 60’s that has as a goal the moon, exploration of the planets the near and far space and Astronomy in general got a great boost. This need and desire to search for the unknown was, in my opinion, something extraordinary and exciting that led me in the direction I finally followed.

Nevertheless, my interest in astronomy which soon expanded to my interest in physics did not stop me from following the activities that a “normal” boy of my age would be interested in such as football, movies etc.

Finally, when I moved from my birth town, Kavala, to Thessaloniki, I got the chance to broaden my horizons and actually decided to focus closer to what was sort of my childhood obsession. Thus I decided to follow Physics as a career and decided to major in this field at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Today, after years of experience on the field of astronomy in NASA, would you say that you are satisfied with your achievements there?

To a certain extent the answer is of course yes. On the other hand once one has declared that he/she is satisfied, it immediately implies that he/she has relaxed his/her efforts. This is not necessarily correct at least as far as my personal life is concerned. Science is a process rather than a set of past achievements and depends on the continuous exploration and effort. The ways and means of course change and mature as one gets older and the interests also shift. The character of the excitement becomes also different, although there are moments that one can retrace the feelings of the days of youth.

In what ways have your investigations affected you as a person through the years and what are your future expectations as a scientist?

The primary aim of a scientist is to understand how nature functions, led primarily by personal curiosity but also for the pursuit of a career. You have to realize, that scientists in general, while they deal with issues not necessarily of immediate interest for the concerns of the everyday man, they are nonetheless very human; their personal development in pursuing their trade are not necessarily any different from anyone else’s who pursues his/her career with the same focus and single mind-ness. What I can say on

this issue at a completely personal is that my investigations have introduced me and gave me a much clearer view the adventure of the human spirit in its attempt to comprehend nature. My future expectations is to be able continue at the same pace for many years to come.

Is there any phrase that paves your way through life?

If you would like me to encapsulate my entire life, ways of thinking and personal philosophy in a phrase, I am afraid I cannot do that, at least not at this moment. However, I am a sort of collector of wisdom; It appear to me that every motto, every proverb, and for that matter in many wisecracks lies a piece of wisdom, all of which I find fascinating.

Finally, we would like to make a more social rather than scientific question relating religion. Do you have a religion? Do you believe in God or you just believe in the material existence of things?

I do have a religion of course; it is so declared in my identity card; I go to church, although not as often as I would like to.

The issue of personal beliefs is a little more involved to be responded with a yes or a no. Scientists, myself included, are usually asked this sort of question and are expected to provide a definitive answer because it is assumed that they are better informed and qualified to do so. Unfortunately, they can only provide qualified answers to issues related to their science. In this respect, my view is that religion deals basically with the relations between humans; i.e. that the domain of religion is that of human values. The domain of science is that of the world within which the humans live and interact. These two worlds are by and large disjoint. I say by and large because they do have humans as their common element. Religion is not (neither should be) a substitute for science; at the same time science cannot (at this point at least) provide answers to the question of human values which remain outside its domain.