



47

Curiosity, ambition and foolhardiness

Vinod Krishan

My early years were spent with my grandparents in a carefree village setting. Growing up with no thoughts of the future has its own merits, and a part of my foolhardiness, I suspect, is a result of that. By my fourth grade, however, thanks to my mother's efforts, I was restored back to Delhi to live with my parents.

One day, in my physics class, we were taught the circuitry of an electric bell. On reaching home, I sneaked into the store room and greedily recovered a rusty electric bell from the junk box. With a thumping heart, I wired the connections shown in my physics book and turned the switch on! To my utter dismay not only did I not hear any ringing, but the whole switchboard rotated (was it the J cross B force?) and the house plunged into total darkness. When my father summoned me, my honest confession brought an unexpected smile to his face, and from that moment onwards I continued to remain foolhardy, a trait perhaps essential for a budding scientist! My father never, allowed me to be complacent and urged me to pursue my career. I owe to him whatever little I have achieved and a lot that I have enjoyed.

It was a period of uninterrupted fun and games until I completed my M.Sc. in physics from the University of Delhi. This

still remains a crucial time in an Indian girl's life as it generally heralds a transition from a single to a coupled state! I was no exception!

After I got my Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee in less than three years, the very blessing of a scientist-lifemate became a formidable obstacle: finding two jobs in a single physics department or even in a single city appeared to be nearly impossible anywhere. After several years of hardship, sweat and tears, penance and perseverance we overcame the jinx.

With a position at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, an invitation to participate in the 1979 Autumn College in Plasma Physics at the ICTP, Trieste was the biggest break in my professional life. Since then there hasn't been an unaccounted moment. Being in the world of learning at the ICTP, I regained my curiosity, and, more important, my foolhardiness which propelled me to be so bold as to go against the tide and suggest that turbulence instead of dark matter can explain many of the astronomical puzzles such as the flat rotation curves of galaxies. These proposals have caused some curiosity in the community. I attribute it entirely to the spirit of fresh enquiry that the environs of the ICTP induces and inculcates in its inmates.

Equally important has been the inspiring and enthusing company of some of the most distinguished scientists from all over the world in almost all disciplines of physics. I developed interests in socio-geo-ecology issues, meeting fellow scientists from different countries and established some collaborations. The ICTP kindled in me a desire to visit countries as varied as Brazil and Japan. Working in astronomy and astrophysics provided me the whole universe. Bangalore's intellectual and cultural heritage has contributed in no mean manner to my growth as a conscientious scientist.

Careers come naturally to men; women have to make a conscious choice and plan their lives as to when and what type of a professional to marry, when to have children and how much to participate in family matters and when to say no. This is if one wants to live life to the full and especially to fill it with the joys of motherhood. It would possibly be sensible for a woman scientist

to marry an academician with a tenured job and with at least a seniority of five years in order to minimize the professional competitiveness. Family support is the absolute prerequisite!