BURÇIN MUTLU-PAKDIL

THE GALAXY SEEKER!
Hello! My name is Burçin Mutlu-Pakdil. My pronouns are she/her, and I’m known as a galaxy hunter.

-- Although I personally prefer the term galaxy finder --

-- Or galaxy explorer!

Burçin Mutlu-Pakdil

Juanele Tamal
Art & story

I got interested in science in middle school. We were assigned to write an essay about an ideal person...

Who’s my ideal person?

Well, I want to be the cleverest person in the world!

While doing research for the assignment, I became interested in Einstein, and then in physics!
IT BECAME ALMOST LIKE AN OBSESSION! I KEPT JOURNALS ON SCIENTISTS’ LIVES, AND KEPT CLIPPINGS FROM SCIENCE JOURNALS!

MY SISTER NURTURED MY INTEREST IN PHYSICS. SHE’D ALSO GIVE ME SCIENCE MAGAZINES FOR KIDS!

I WENT TO BEŞİKTAŞ ATATÜRK ANATOLIAN HIGH SCHOOL, AND THEN I WENT TO COLLEGE IN ANKARA.

WE DIDN’T HAVE THAT MANY RESOURCES, AND THERE WERE FEW OPPORTUNITIES TO STUDY ASTRONOMY OR ASTROPHYSICS IN TURKEY --

-- SO I CAME TO THE U.S. IN 2009 TO STUDY FOR MY MASTER’S DEGREE IN TEXAS

I’D LIKE TO WORK FOR NASA!
I WENT TO TEXAS TECH BECAUSE A FRIEND WAS THERE, BUT I DIDN’T REALLY KNOW **HOW** TO APPLY TO GRAD SCHOOL!

THEY DIDN’T HAVE ASTRONOMY, SO I ENROLLED IN A BIOPHYSICS MASTER’S --

I’M PIPETTING PROTEINS INTO A TUBE, LET ME JUST -- OH!

**CRASH**

**-- IT WAS CHALLENGING!**

YOU KNOW, MAYBE YOU SHOULDN’T BE DOING A BIOPHYSICS MASTER’S. YOU SHOULD DO ASTRONOMY!

I WOULD CONSTANTLY QUESTION MYSELF...

I AGREE!

MAYBE I CAN’T MAKE IT, SIS!

DON’T SAY THAT, SISTER! KEEP TRYING! IT’LL BE ALL RIGHT!

**CRASH**
In 2018, I gave a TED Talk about the discovery of galaxy PGC 1000714 -- or "Burçin’s Galaxy".

-- I got a lot of positive comments!

...but there were also many hostile comments on YouTube!

Hijab! Dress! Beliefs! Accent! How can a scientist be a Muslim?!

But my sister came to my rescue again!

Nobody wants me here. Maybe I shouldn’t be here!

People on the internet would say the meanest things even to a cute little baby!

They’re ignorant, don’t take it personally!

-- and she was right! I persevered, and after my PhD at the University of Minnesota, I got two research postdocs, at Arizona and Chicago!
BACK WHEN I WAS STILL STUDYING IN TURKEY, THERE WAS A **Hijab Ban**. IT WAS A HUGE CHALLENGE TO ME!

I WOULD USE SCARFS OR TURTLE NECKS INSTEAD -- -- I FELT LIKE I WAS HIDING MY IDENTITY!

AS A **FIRST GEN**, MY FAMILY AND I FACED SOME DIFFICULTIES WHEN I STARTED COLLEGE...

I LEFT MY FAMILY IN ISTANBUL TO GO STUDY IN ANKARA, A 6-HOUR DRIVE FROM HOME...

NEIGHBORS WOULD **CRITICIZE** MY PARENTS FOR THAT!

HOW COULD YOU LET A GIRL GO TO ANOTHER CITY ALONE? AND TO GET AN EDUCATION? ARE YOU **CRAZY**?

EVEN PROFESSORS WOULD **QUESTION** MY PRESENCE IN CLASS!

YOU'RE A WOMAN, COMING FROM THE BIGGEST TURKISH CITY TO STUDY PHYSICS. WHY? ARE YOU **CRAZY**?
PEOPLE HAVE A LOT OF STEREOTYPES ABOUT WHAT IT IS BEING A SCIENTIST. I HAD THEM TOO!

SCIENTISTS ARE LONELY GENIUSES, RIGHT? SHOULD I HAVE TO BE ALONE ALL DAY IN A LAB?

BUT THE TRUTH IS, SCIENCE SHOULDN’T BE A PRIVILEGE. IT’S FOR EVERYONE!

IT’S A VERY COLLABORATIVE JOB. YOU GO TO CONFERENCES, AND MEET AMAZING PEOPLE!

BUT I LIKE BEING SOCIAL!

SCIENCE AND RELIGION ARE VERY INTERCONNECTED. I WASN’T FORCED TO WEAR A HIJAB LIKE SOME, BUT I WAS FORCED NOT TO WEAR IT!

THERE ARE SO MANY RELIGIOUS SCIENTISTS. HAVING CRITICAL THINKING DOES NOT MEAN YOU CAN’T HAVE A FAITH --

-- AND THE OPPOSITE IS ALSO TRUE: HAVING A FAITH DOESN’T MEAN YOU CAN’T QUESTION THINGS AND LEARN MORE ABOUT THE UNIVERSE!

MY RELIGION IS MY WAY OF LOOKING AT LIFE AND EXPRESSING MYSELF!
Science and religion are like my two wings in life --

-- and I try to fly with both!

Two people can look at the same tree and interpret it differently!

Science gives me an explanation about the universe, but religion makes it colorful and beautiful!

From the two angles, it becomes more meaningful!
My family has been my biggest support. My father couldn’t achieve his goals in school due to a lack of resources.

If I had a chance, I’d become president!

Mom grew up in a small town, there was no encouragement of giving education to girls!

But it will be different for you!

We’ll support you!

If you want to get an education, do it! Follow your dreams!

Do whatever you want to do!

During hard times in school, my family supported me. I’m really grateful for that!
Outside of being a scientist, I'm a Muslim, a feminist, an immigrant, and a woman!

Knowing that diversity is out there helped me know that I'm one of many. I'm not alone!

But I don't want to just blend in. I believe being "normal" is simply being yourself!

I love different colors in my office. I want to make it a welcoming space -- particularly for marginalized students!

I find it funny that I'm horrible with directions. I'm always getting lost, but I don't get bothered by that!

I'm proud of my tenacity! Like that time at a conference when I approached someone I really wanted to work with!

Come see my poster! Take a look at my work!

WOW! You certainly have a lot of passion!

Which is a bit surprising, considering that my job is about finding galaxies!

-- And we ended up working together!
It's very important to find like-minded people, and know that you're not alone!

If you feel out of place in academia, usually the problem is not you, it's the structure around you!

In college, I'd wish I had friends like that. Since then, I've built a community!

Many amazing colleagues, mentors, and my family, all of them have helped me make it here!

We can do this!

If you're a little girl out there, know that your own identity is not an obstacle -- find your people, the ones that will support you!

I'm happy where I am, but I'm not done, I've just started!