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Full faith in myself

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I had my schooling at the Irish Convent, Loreto, in Asansol, West Bengal. Perhaps the earliest memories I have are of myself as a very determined child with a deep appreciation of and inquisitiveness regarding nature although not understanding most of it at that tender age. The most cherished moments of my childhood were those I spent in the big garden I was fortunate to have, gazing at a flower or seeing the insects hovering around it and wondering what was going on. It was probably this fascination and passionate desire to understand that led me to almost decide that I wanted to study on these lines though I did not know exactly where it would lead me. At that age, the scientist in me was already in the making, deep in my mind.

Throughout my school career I enjoyed my studies, games, music, dance, and debates, and won many prizes but the curiosity about nature remained with me. After school I did my intermediate in science from Nirmala College, Ranchi University and then enrolled for my bachelor's degree at Women's College, Banaras Hindu University where I studied Botany. I went on to do my Masters in Botany from the C.A.S. at the same university. I came across cyanobacteria in my special paper and this resulted in my becoming a cyanobacteriologist.

I began with nature in general but ended up studying the tiny but beautiful blue-green microbes! I worked for the Ph.D. with Prof. H.D. Kumar and joined Bhopal (now Barkatullah) University as a lecturer immediately after Ph.D. and have been there since.

My parents' support was a primary factor in facilitating my education right from the start. They encouraged me to pursue a different life probably because they knew I was different although I may not have known it at that time. Unlike other women of my generation, I did not have to choose between family responsibilities and career. My parents never asked me to do anything against my wishes, being aware that my studies and later career constituted happiness for me. I also realize that they made many small and big sacrifices to make my sailing smooth and therefore, for me, the greatest pleasure was not what I achieved but to see the happiness in my parents' eyes at each and every success of mine. My elder brother's selfless support in times of need and his deep affection and appreciation that I have always enjoyed and am still enjoying has been a big additional factor.

As a professional I enjoyed young investigators as my doctoral students, who trained in my laboratory and are scattered throughout the world today. International fellowships and awards, research, extra curricular activities, and music have helped me to convert all disadvantages into opportunities, to learn from them and to grow stronger within. I cannot say that my life has always been smooth sailing, but nobody's is. I have always met challenges with faith in myself. Perhaps my steely determination and confidence in myself right from the start, immense self respect, progressive aggressiveness and honesty in my endeavors, creative outlook and a wish to carve a niche for myself, and above all a deep desire to be different in a good way and stand out in a crowd, have sustained me throughout my career. The constant blessings of the Almighty and of my parents, who are unfortunately no more here to relish my success, give me unforeseen courage at times of need.

I do not know what the future holds for me but I will keep on walking the path that I have chosen for myself because I believe that at the end of the day I should be happy to reflect on a

useful, glorious life well lived. A thought I would like to share with the women who are about to choose a career in science is that nothing in life is to be feared. Everything is only to be understood. If you realize your potentials go ahead fearlessly with full faith and confidence in yourself because I believe, and you should too, that the sky is the limit, but you have to fly to understand the heights you can reach.