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STYLE**
Sunday



MICHAEL NOBLE JR./CHICAGO TRIBUNE

The sky is *not* the limit

Top MIT physics grad and Harvard doctoral student Sabrina Pasterski always looks beyond the horizon



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remarkable woman

Sabrina Pasterski

Big dreams on the horizon for down-to-earth physics whiz

BY ALISON BOWEN
Chicago Tribune

Sabrina Pasterski has always rushed toward the next goal, sometimes charting a path quite different from her peers' — whether it was learning to fly a plane long before she learned to drive a car, anticipating the next motorcycle she'll buy, or plotting dreams for a future in physics. The 22-year-old always has bigger plans.

When she returns to Harvard University in September, she'll be pursuing her doctorate in theoretical high energy physics at the Center for the Fundamental Laws of Nature. Before Harvard, she graduated in 2013 — in just three years — at the top of her physics class at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the first woman to do so in decades. In July, she was one of 12 honored with a \$250,000 Hertz Fellowship, designed to invest in the future of scientific exploration.

Her fascination with what's above Earth began early. As a child, Pasterski, who attended Chicago Public Schools' Edison Regional Gifted Center, decided she wanted to send someone to Mars. At 12, an age when many struggle with sustaining their attention span for homework, she spent nearly two years building an airplane that she later piloted herself, flying above the shoreline of Lake Michigan. (She had to secure special permission from the Federal Aviation Administration to fly the plane.)

She built the plane, she said, after a teacher from the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy in Aurora (where she attended high school), upon hearing she had flown a plane, replied: "That's nice, but what have you done lately?"

"That's become my mantra ever since," Pasterski says. "That's nice, but what have you done lately?"

These days, achievements like speaking at the same event as former Secretary of State Colin Powell or researching space-flight at NASA come up almost as an afterthought. Her website, physicsgirl.com, includes a long roster of her accomplishments. The down-to-earth Pasterski, a first-generation Cuban-American, talked to us about successes, setbacks... and chocolate. Following is an edited transcript.

Q: How did you go from being a regular kid enjoying a Chicago summer to "I want to build an airplane?"

A: When I was little, I was interested in aerospace. I wanted to build spacecraft. I was never that into sci-fi as much, because



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there's so much science fact that's so interesting. But I think science fairs probably started some of it.

Q: Tell me about the first time you went up in a plane, at 9 years old.

A: The first time was a discovery flight (which typically includes both instruction and a quick time in the air with a flight instructor). It was basically along the shoreline. That was really gorgeous. It's a nice feeling. It gives you a different perspective; everything's so much smaller.

Q: After many early achievements, you were wait-listed at MIT and initially didn't get into Harvard. After a string of successes, that must have been tough. What did you learn from that

experience?

A: It was an interesting experience because it might have actually pushed me a little bit to re-evaluate where I wanted to be. (It) was a bit of a blow. At some level, I'm glad that I didn't (apply to more schools), because if I had a safety school, I don't know if I could have pushed myself in off the wait list.

Q: It's not the setback; it's the reaction?

A: You can either take it as "Well, I'm not worthy of getting into MIT" (or) "No, I am worthy of getting into MIT." I took it more as a motivation. I don't think I would have cared as much about doing well academically had it not been for the fact that I had something to prove. When you start seeing

that people doubt you, you realize, "Hmm, maybe I need to do better."

Q: What does life look like for you in five years? You graduate in 2020 with your doctorate, for starters.

A: For now, it's just focusing on getting my Ph.D. I want to eventually found and run an interdisciplinary laboratory. The way I see it, biology relies upon chemistry, chemistry relies upon physics, and in some level when you can reduce things to simpler ideas, you have a lot more power to use them. It's good to have a bigger picture and see where you can actually go and not end up getting caught in some particular lab or a section of a company doing a particular task. In that regard, your contribution is limited to where you're at.



SCOTT STRAZZANTE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE 2010

Sabrina Pasterski in 2010 in the experimental aircraft she built.

Q: What's your guilty pleasure?

A: Chocolate. I don't really drink caffeine, so that's the closest thing.

Q: Do you have a favorite Chicago summer activity when you're home from school?

A: Whether it's summer or not, I do enjoy listening to the radio, driving my family downtown. We live in Edison Park; it's a wonderful (neighborhood), but it's not big city. It's fun to appreciate the city and maybe daydream a little bit.

Q: Many things that other people might have seen as intimidating, from getting into Harvard to flying a plane as a teenager, didn't dissuade you. Is there a good way to approach things that seem so daunting?

A: Oftentimes in retrospect, the thing that's the hardest or perceived to be are the things you end up being most proud of. If you keep that in mind, the fact that you went through it, or made it turn out the better for yourself as much as you could, makes something that you are then happy to talk about. The attitude is to take into account: How will you see this a few years down the line?

Q: Any tips for parents who have children like you, who push to do seemingly impossible things?

A: My parents have always been encouraging. (They) never really said anything was impossible. Maybe I might still be on the edge of thinking that nothing is impossible. The more you learn, the more you realize what exactly people think is impossible, and then you see where you can push a line. It's important to encourage your children. Everybody has something that they're good at, and you

(shouldn't) force people to go through the standard route.

Q: Tell me about your passion for motorcycles.

A: A small airplane is wonderful for its view. A motorcycle is great for its acceleration. A Cessna 150 is very similar to a motorcycle in that you can lean one way or the other to go that way. Every physicist should learn to ride a motorcycle. It gives one a certain physical intuition, as does flying a small airplane.

Q: How do you handle the pressure of people expecting great things from you, based on what you've already achieved?

A: I'm harder on myself than other people probably are on me. I definitely feel like I have way more to do. It's great to get recognition now, but hopefully it builds up to something. I'll hopefully be right about having some kind of gut feeling that (will become) rather big at some point. Fingers crossed.

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remarkable: Know someone we should feature in this weekly column? Tell us about her at lifeandstyle@tribpub.com.

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**BROADWAY
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Eyes on the prize

Sabrina Pastorski built a plane and solved MIT — but what's next? **Life+Style**



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SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 2015

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Foul balls, flying bats: Does baseball need bigger nets?

Maybe, but some fans prefer better sightlines to protection

BY PAUL SULLIVAN
Chicago Tribune

When a fan made a one-handed catch of a foul ball while bottle-feeding his infant son during a Cubs game in late June, the video went viral and he gained international attention.

Unusual catches of foul balls or home runs are a staple of sports highlights shows, and sometimes the battle in the

stands for baseballs is more interesting than the game itself.

But recent injuries caused by flying bats and balls leaves Major League Baseball with a complex issue that could alter the ballpark experience dramatically.

Should there be minimum requirements on how much safety netting is used at major-league ballparks, or should fans sitting in those seats take the

same risks millions of others have dealt with for more than a century?

There's no consensus on the issue, though the MLB Players Association has tried to require more netting behind the plate in previous labor talks and may do so again when the collective-bargaining agreement comes up in 2016.

Turn to **Safety**, Page 9



NUCCIO DINIZZO/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

White Sox catcher Tyler Flowers' bat flies into the stands in a game in May. Baseball is debating how to protect fans from such danger.

LOLLAPALOOZA 2015



ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

SURFIN' GRANT PARK

An audience member crowd-surfs over a barricade while rock band Metallica performs at Lollapalooza in Grant Park. The annual music festival continued Saturday with headliners Metallica and Grammy winner Sam Smith. In addition to listening to music, festivalgoers could get their arms tied. "This is really cool," said Samantha

Marnell of Gurnee. "Accessorizing is honestly important here." The artwork appeared to be the second-most-popular item concertgoers were putting on their arms, after sunscreen, as temps topped 80 degrees. Florence + the Machine and Norwegian DJ Kygo were set to close out the festival Sunday. **Chicagoland**, Page 5

You, too, can own a home by Frank Lloyd Wright

BY BOB GOLDSBOROUGH
Chicago Tribune

When writer Emily Novick and her husband, Steve Goldstein, then a pediatrics professor and physician-in-chief at Comer Children's Hospital, moved to Chicago in 2004 from the East Coast, they scoured the housing market in Kenwood and Hyde Park, looking for a home that would offer enough space to entertain.

No strangers to historic homes and historic districts, they nonetheless were surprised to stumble upon Hyde Park's Isidore H. Heller House, which was designed in 1897 by legendary architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

"I didn't think it was possible to own a Frank Lloyd Wright house," Novick said last week with a laugh. "I didn't think you

Turn to **Houses**, Page 8



ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Frank Lloyd Wright's H. Howard Hyde House in Chicago is for sale. At least nine local Wright homes are on the market.

THE GLOBAL CITY CHICAGO'S PLACE IN THE WORLD

Racing to make inroads in Cuba

As nation opens up, timing is crucial to securing business

BY KATHY BERGEN
Chicago Tribune

When Cuba's foreign minister raised his nation's single-star flag outside its newly opened embassy in Washington last month, construction equipment giant Caterpillar did the same outside its Pinar del Rio headquarters.

Caterpillar is one of a growing number of Illinois and Chicago-area companies, civic organizations and cultural institutions rushing into a nationwide race to establish a foothold in the tiny communist country just 90 miles off the Florida shore — a potential trove of new profits on an island that has been off-limits, for the most part, for more than a half-century.

"Just about everybody focuses on the tens of thousands of 60-year-old cars that are on the streets, but for Caterpillar, we focus on the 60-year-old roads they are being driven on. That's

Turn to **Cuba**, Page 10

Fall fashion: The new trend is no trends

Tribune Magazine



Tom Skilling's forecast High 90 Low 67

Chicago Weather Center: Complete forecast in Nation & World, Page 31

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