The sky is **not** the limit

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

---

**Balancing Act**
Heidi Stevens talks to a mom raising her three daughters on a sailboat

**Relationships**
For some childless women, stereotypes give birth to frustration

**Candid Candace**
PAWS Chicago's Beach Party raises funds for animal shelters

---

**Fourth Night Free**
Available August 16–28, 2015
Experience a special family retreat at a special price at America's Summer Place: stay three nights and get the fourth night FREE. Includes accommodations, and a full breakfast and five-course dinner daily. Children 11 and under stay and eat free, and enjoy complimentary children's programs, lawn games, swimming and exploring Mackinac Island in the beautiful month of August. Regular social rates apply

Must reserve by phone: 1-800-33GRAND

---

**Summer Bed & Breakfast**
Available on select dates in August
Plan a fun getaway to Grand Hotel and Mackinac Island. The Bed & Breakfast package is designed to provide greater dining flexibility for our guests. This unique package includes a full breakfast in our Main Dining Room, accommodations in one of 390 uniquely decorated guest rooms, and all resort amenities. Plus free admission to the Richard and Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum. $395 per room, per night, up to four people.

All rates subject to additional fees.
Sabrina Pasterski

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 spaceflight at NASA come up almost as an afterthought. Her website, physicsgrl.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 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 is, 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.
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: Sometimes in retrospect, the things 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.

abowen@tribpub.com
Twitter @byalisonbowen

---

Introducing the new Theater Loop with Chris Jones from the Chicago Tribune
Now with even more coverage and reviews of theater, dance and comedy; news from Broadway and beyond; and our exclusive, original Theater Loop Showcase performance videos.

Sign up for our newsletter today and keep yourself in the Loop!
chicagotribune.com/theaterloop

---

Nominated someone remarkable?
Know someone we should feature in this weekly column? Tell us about her at lifeandstyle@tribpub.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 foul ball or line drive goes into the stands, fans deserve better sightlines to the action. Baseball needs larger netting behind the backstop to prevent some of the problems that occasionally occur.

Fans are concerned about the lack of netting behind the plate and behind home plate, and whether that will change with the new season. The search for better sightlines is ongoing, but the issue remains complicated.

Some fans prefer larger nets, while others want better sightlines. The Chicago Cubs are considering installing larger nets in their stadium. The idea is to prevent foul balls and line drives from going into the stands and causing injuries to fans.

The Cubs are considering installing larger nets in their stadium, and the idea is to prevent foul balls and line drives from going into the stands and causing injuries to fans. Fans are concerned about the lack of netting behind the plate and behind home plate, and whether that will change with the new season. The search for better sightlines is ongoing, but the issue remains complicated. Some fans prefer larger nets, while others want better sightlines.