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the online ne

MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

I've always liked looking at stars. Growing up outside Tucson, Ariz., I was certainly in the right place to do so. The entire county is to the half-dozen observatories within an easy drive. We who learned to drive in Arizona are as baffled by the rest of the world's de insistence on grass being green.



The first time I became conscious of my city's ties to space was in third grade. An engineer from the University of Arizona came to Huygens probe, soon to be headed to Saturn. He described how it would take seven years for the school-bus-sized mass of antenna which time I would be 15-an unimaginably advanced age. He told us about Titan, Saturn's largest moon, shrouded in nitrogen so th atmosphere we know. Then he had us all sign a piece of paper. Those signatures, along with more than a half-million others, were l

The idea of my shaky cursive cruising the solar system fascinated me. From then on, I learned all I could about astronomy. My boc was carefully reassembled so I could learn the stories of the constellations. Stargazing became a favorite pastime, especially in mic tortured my little sister (according to her, anyway) by taking her out to our driveway in the middle of the night, where we would lie lifecycles of stars.

In high school, I found that Arizona offered me another unique opportunity. For a month each summer, the observatory on Mount s mountaintop, where days began at sunset and ended with eastern twilight, white light was forbidden lest it ruin our night vision, an casually removed from bedroom walls and chucked into dustbins.

That week I got to use telescopes professional astronomers beg for, taking pictures of distant nebulae and chasing an asteroid throu visited the Large Binocular Telescope. The telescope's two mirrors together act like an 11.8-meter telescope, making it the largest i

We had the privilege of being in the dome as it opened at sunset, and I stood awestruck next to the 8.4-meter mirrors that had been hometown Wildcats usually lost.

I left camp with a better understanding of what astronomers do and the thought that my love for the stars might not be a juvenile fascination getting letters from colleges, and the first thing I looked for was an astronomy program. Those without went straight into the recycle bin.

The next fall, I packed my bags and left for Cleveland, where a truly mind-blowing number of streetlights mixed with lovely weather make it a minor miracle to see anything dimmer than Jupiter.

My destination of Case Western Reserve University was about as far removed from the pristine Tucson skies as I could get, at least show the university's telescope is on Kitt Peak, across the valley from the mountain where I spent that amazing week. Last summer, the camp had moved mountains, and I spent another wonderful week teaching the next group of astronomers the names of Case Reserve's Warner and Swasey Observatory.

Emily Joseph graduated from Case Western Reserve in May with a bachelor's degree in astronomy. She spent the summer stargazing and traveling the country.

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