

## *The Epicenter of Equality*

“I’m going to bed now, mom!” I called. I started closing the blinds, but something caught my eye. It was a shooting star! It gleamed brightly as it rocketed across the inky black night sky. “Whoa, that is so cool!” I thought.

Then, my mom replied, “Goodnight!” jerking me out of my thoughts. I lay down and went to sleep, dreaming about shooting stars. The next night, after a tiring day of school, I was going to bed when I beheld an extraordinary sight. I started rubbing my eyes, wondering if I was seeing things. I could see a shooting star in the same place as the day before. I slowly lay down, thinking about what I had witnessed. Eventually, I drifted off to sleep with my blinds still open. After the events of the previous two days, I was almost expecting to see it on the third day, but I still gasped when I saw the shining streak in the sky. The past two days may have been a coincidence, but this was a natural phenomenon. I sat there staring at the shooting star until it passed out of view. After that, I stood there still as a statue, fascinated by this miracle. I was so intrigued that the next day, I checked out a huge book all about space, from the library.

For the next week, whenever I had spare time, I picked up the book to read. I learned about things ranging from black holes and supernovas to neutron stars and nebulas. Had you been listening to me while I was reading, you would have noticed that sometimes, tiny outbursts escaped me. If I learned a really interesting fact, I might say, “Cool!” or “Amazing!” Since I read that book, I have always been thinking about space, and it turns out that that helps me. One month later, we started a science unit about space at school. I really enjoyed learning new things about space. For example, I loved learning all about the big bang, the start of the universe. During the Big Bang, the universe started as a tiny concentration of pure energy, and then expanded trillions of times in an instant. I found this particularly interesting because this was an expansion of space itself. We even learned about shooting stars which are actually called comets and are large lumps of rock and ice surrounded by a lot of gas and dust, which make up the two main tails. After learning this, I thought back to the first shooting stars I saw, which sparked my interest in space. I remembered how I had looked at the comets in wonder, thinking about how magnificent they looked. Now that I knew exactly what they were, comets seemed even more magical. The science unit just added to my passion for space.

One year later, I was still extremely passionate about space, and when I was asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I answered without hesitation. “I want to be an astronaut.” Starting then, I studied as hard as I could to reach my dream of becoming an astronaut. I spent every spare moment learning more about space.

After fifteen long years, I finally became an astronaut. That night I rejoiced with my family, but when I looked at the news on my phone, I lost all my cheeriness. “Wha... Wha... What is this?” I spluttered. “Young man was turned down by a space agency because of his skin color and religion.” the headlines announced. I was outraged! I stomped my feet and crossed my arms. On the other hand, I was quite thankful that this had not happened to me. “I am so thankful that I live in America where everyone has equal opportunities.” I breathed. Suddenly, I became aware of my family rushing up the stairs. “What is it?” they asked breathlessly when they reached my room.

“Look at this!” I told them and showed them the news article. They all crowded around me, eager to see what I wanted to show them. I saw my sister’s jaw clench and heard my dad inhale sharply. My mom kept her composure, but I knew her well enough to see that she was angry too. “Why would anyone do this? Why this inequality?” my sister asked with her teeth gritted. Nobody responded, and after an awkward silence, my mom and dad sat me down for a

small, but a very important conversation. “Dear son,” they told me, “it is not strange that you should not fully understand it, for there are many that cannot fully comprehend equality. Equality is not always about treating everyone the same – it is about treating people in a way that the outcome for each person can be the same. We understand your frustration because discrimination, which is to treat someone in an unfair or less favorable way, is wrong and is impacting our society in a negative way. But we should all strive for equality of outcome, which can be achieved by making sure that everyone is supported to have access to resources and decision making and to be recognized, valued, and respected. We all should change the world one person at a time, and you should do your part.” Just then, the clock struck twelve midnight, so with heavy and concerned hearts we all consented to go to bed.

That night, I could not fall asleep. I lay in bed, thinking about the outrageous news article. I slowly calmed myself down by promising myself that I would work as hard as I could at NASA to bring change. Little did I know, I would do just that and much, much more. I fell asleep, barely noticing the shooting star outside my window.

Over the next couple of decades, I engaged in many projects that revolutionized space exploration. I designed a moon base, planned a mission to Mars, and many other things. As I assembled my team, I remembered that dreadful news article and my parents' guidance and decided to bring in people from many different communities and countries. After reading articles about people like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, who were not treated equally because of their skin color and died in an untimely manner, I decided to promote equality in whatever way I could. One day, I looked up at the moon base. “And to think,” I murmured, “that all this happened because of a few shooting stars and because I decided to use my equal opportunities living in the United States.”