

"Most of us go through life until something happens and we move toward something or away from it. Along the way we run into people who may or may not shape our lives. Aline Carter was someone I encountered totally by accident and ended up becoming my mentor. She was completely enamored with the universe, God and all that was encompassed and could not wait to share it with those who had no background in the science of astronomy. There was no doubt, no hesitation. God created this universe and its wonders and she was going to make sure her students knew as much as she did. This was decades before the Hubble Space Telescope and just 3 years after the first artificial Earth satellite was launched into space. I don't know if she was self taught, as many people were in those days or had formal training in the topic. But it really did not matter.

My own sense of curiosity began with the weather--looking up at the clouds and seeing figurative shapes. In the morning before going to school I can recall wondering about why the Moon was half illuminated and the day after, it was less so. I could tell that the Moon changed its appearance every week and month, repeating those same 28 day cycles over and over. During the summer she would teach a new class of young people about astronomy at the Witte Museum. I was lucky enough to join such a course in 1959. Those classes were small, about 10 or so individuals in a small room just in back of the main building. This was before video, before humans rode on rockets and satellites began to explore the planets, and before the discovery of cosmic background radiation and pulsars. Aline would mesmerize her audience with her voice alone, showing photos of the most prolific objects in the sky and describing in detail the Sun, Moon, constellations, and what made them important to her and to life on Earth. She would apply poetry from famous poets or sometimes even her own original poetry work in order to amplify the wonders of the universe. She also would add biblical quotations where appropriate.

From her own stately home in the middle of San Antonio surrounded by lit up buildings she would invite us once a month for a star party; she used the small telescope in the dome on the roof to show students the highlights of the heavens and bring them from a simple naked eye view to become up close and personal. In addition to the Moon, only the brighter objects could be seen such as the major stars of the spring, summer, autumn and winter skies, and the more brilliant planets Venus, Jupiter, Saturn and Mars. I do remember that a small elevator would slowly whisk attendees from the ground floor to the upper level where we then alighted onto the observatory structure. For someone who had never peered into a telescope before, once you looked through it, this "hands on" exposure was like being ferried by space ship from the Earth right up to the object in the scope. It was a transformational experience since you can only hear about things for so long before actually seeing them. This singular interaction is what made her classes stand out. At the age of 12, the standard public school curriculum did not feature astronomy. How lucky was I to have this early mentoring. From that point forward I knew that I would be walking on this path for the rest of my life."

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