



The Explorers Club Northern California Chapter

FEBRUARY 2022

Also available at our web site: <http://www.explorersnorca.org>

MONTHLY MEETING
FRIDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2022
GATHER BY ZOOM INVITATION

UNRAVELLING THE DARK UNIVERSEA; LOOKING BACK TO LOOK AHEAD. **Satya Gontcho A Gontcho, Ph.D. (MI'21)**

Understanding our place in the world we live in has always been a part of humanity's endeavors, in some way, shape or form. To understand our place implies having a bigger picture that we can invoke. In recent times, the branch of science dedicated to building this big picture of our universe is called cosmology.



Over the past decades, a multitude of ground-based and space observatories have continuously extended the limits of our knowledge. The universe we live in is in expansion. Not only that, that expansion has picked up the pace and is happening faster and faster. That means there are forces at play in our universe, dark components, that we are just starting to understand (dark energy, dark matter).

How are the technical advances of the past century helping us map out our universe in more detail? How do these maps inform us about the nature of our universe's dark components? How are we able to create a video of our universe's past, and use it to better understand what it is made of, and what lies ahead? We will answer those questions together!

Dr. Satya Gontcho A Gontcho (MI'21) is a French Cosmologist working at the forefront of the efforts to build, with the Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument, the largest three-dimensional map of the observable universe ever made by mankind. She received her B.Sc. from University Paris Saclay, her M.Sc. from University Paris Sorbonne, her PhD from the University of Barcelona and has worked at University College London and the University of Rochester before joining Berkeley Lab as project scientist. Her work on studying the distribution of matter in the universe in the era following the formation of the first stars and galaxies caused her to be featured as one of the Forbes 30 Under 30 in 2019. That same year she was the recipient of the Giuseppe Sciaccia International Award in acknowledgement for her scientific excellence and her strong commitment to mentor the future generations of scientists. In her spare time, Dr Gontcho A Gontcho uses her expertise as a scientist and as a performance artist to explore the various ways that storytelling can be adapted to reach a broad audience and bring the public's attention to the wonder of understanding the universe in which we live.



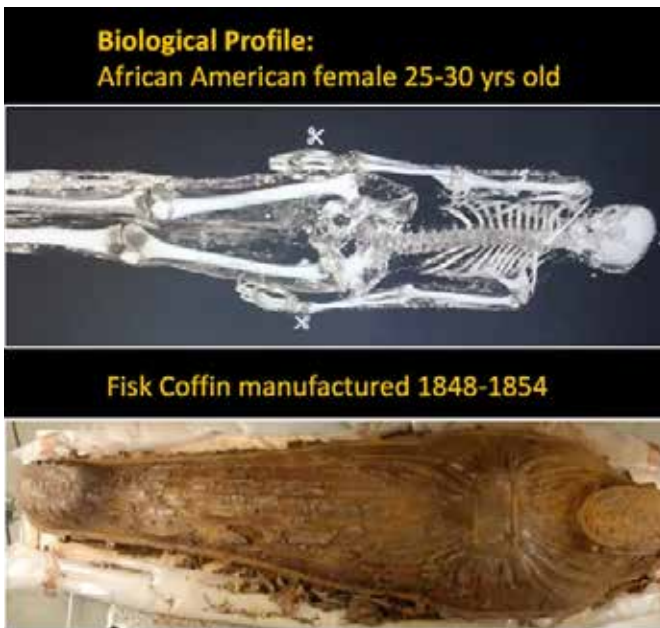
WHO WAS THE WOMAN IN THE IRON COFFIN NEW YORK'S OLDEST COLD CASE

by forensic investigator Mr. Scott Warnasch

The Chapter 2022 season kicked off with an interesting talk by Scott C. Warnasch about mid-19th century burial practices and iron coffins. Scott is a forensic anthropologist who spent his early career roaming about the US and leading field classes in South America. After the attack on the World Trade Center, he worked with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to direct recovery of victim remains and during this investigation, they uncovered two iron coffins that greatly predated 9-11. When several years later he was called to investigate some human bones that were uncovered during a construction project in Queens, he recognized a portion of an iron coffin near the bones. He was able to determine that the body had been buried over 150 years earlier. Therefore, the site was not an active crime scene, and he was curious to identify the body.



The body found at the construction site had no marker for identification, but it was the body of a woman and Scott used her bones to determine that she had been about 25 to 30 years old. She had some lesions on her hands and feet that indicated that she had smallpox. The land on which the body was found had been purchased in 1828 by Reverend James Pennington, soon after emancipation in New York State. By 1837, Rev. Pennington built an African Methodist church and the Dutch Land Cemetery that remained there until it was relocated in 1927. The timing that the cemetery was in use and presence of the iron coffin provided clues to her general time of death. The final clue to help Scott determine her identity came from the 1850 census, that, for the first time, included everyone in the country. He created a family tree and found that she most likely was Martha Peterson. The African American Registry designated November 7 as Martha Peterson Day.



Originally iron coffins were rather ornate, using Egyptian designs on the outside; later they became more like capsules. Many famous people of the time, such as Dolly Madison and Henry Clay, were buried in iron coffins. Iron coffins were first made by Almond Dunbar Fisk, a stove designer, who manufactured an iron coffin to preserve his brother's remains so they could be brought home for burial in the family plot. Pine boxes were sufficient for bodies that could be buried quickly. But in the late 1850s, people were moving westward away from their families and pine boxes could not transport bodies cross country. The iron coffins were hermetically sealed, and before germs were identified, this seal provided some protection from cholera which was rampant at the time. The coffins often had a small door to let families and friends see the person's face.



A facial reconstruction of "The Woman in the Iron Coffin" created by forensic imaging specialist Joe Mullins. Credit: Impossible Factual / Joe Mullins

Scott's talk on Friday evening covered much of his work to discover the secret of the woman in the iron coffin. For more of the story and to see a facial reconstruction of Martha, watch the PBS Series, Secrets of the Dead: The Woman in the Iron Coffin.

Lesley Ewing PhD FN'93

HONOR ROLL
Paid up Dues 2022

Members

Bruffet, Leonard
Chase, H. Keith
Cohn, Francesca
Cooper, Alan
Cromwell, Thomas
Dietz, Thomas
Diggle, Michael
Dvorak, Don
Dvorak, Elaine
Estey, Sue
Friedman, James
Friedman, Lincoln
Gontcho A G Satya
Hemming, Peter
Leonard, Cheryl
Phillips, William III
Smith, Steve
Weed, Ryan

Sirdars

Cohn, Lawrence
Crowder, Wendy
Friedman, Christen
Longo-Cohn, Mary
Miskiv, Rick
Patterson, Tom
Walker, Nigel

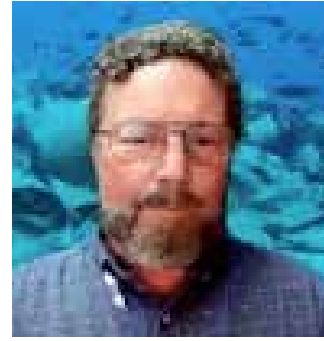
Words From the Acting Chair:

Covid remains with us but there are definite signs of improvement in northern California. We are looking forward to May for potentially the Chapter having its first in-person meeting in two years. We hope this works out as we approach the summer field season and members leave for adventures.

Meanwhile, I am urging everyone to contribute your nominal dues for the new year. Although not required, your contribution helps maintain the health of the chapter.

We have interesting speakers arranged for the coming months. Our meetings continue to be virtual but may change as the pandemic eases.

Marco Meniketti FN'10



BOOK REVIEW: IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOUNTAIN
A Memoir of Courage
by Silvia Vasquez-Lavado MN'19

“Nothing we do is ever small.” That is one of the mottos of Silvia Vasquez-Lavado’s group of Courageous Girls as well as a motto for Silvia. Those of us who met Silvia when we were having in-person meetings know her contagious smile and perpetual energy. Her book, *In the Shadow of the Mountain*, tells of her childhood traumas growing up in Peru, her college years in the US, her jobs with elite SF employers, her spirals into alcohol and sexual addictions, her moments of clarity and direction followed by new spirals. She writes of the strengths that she developed from climbing mountains and her efforts to share the message from the mountains with others who are saving themselves. *In the Shadow of the Mountain* jumps back and forth in time, from Silvia’s childhood and years being out of control, to her time on Mount Everest, first with a group of Courageous Girls (CGs) and then on her own journey to summit the Mother of the World.

To share her awe of nature and mountains, Silvia organized a trek to Everest Base Camp for two women from the US and two women from Nepal who all got out of horrific lives in sex trafficking. The standard term is that they are survivors, but Silvia pushes back against that definition because ‘one day you wake up and realize that surviving is all you know how to do’. And she wants more -- more for herself and for her CGs. The trip to Base Camp was a personal accomplishment for each of the women -- one from which they will carry home souvenirs and ‘private wisdom that no one can take away’.

In the spirit of not doing anything small, Silvia led a journey of a lifetime for her CGs, followed it by her own summit journey and then put it all into a memoir to share with the world. Silvia is a great writer, telling her stories from a place of truth. She may jump over parts of her life but does not smooth over the depths of her self-destruction. Parts of her story are hard to read, even knowing the inspiration that she embodies today. Everest shows no favorites, and she turns back or stops climbers who are better trained and mentally focused than Silvia. Certainly, Silvia is strong, gutsy and a true mountaineer, but so are all the people who start with her. But, as she acknowledged at the end of her climb, the journey to the summit is ‘knowing that climbing with others is the safest way to climb and the surest way to heal’. There is a Zen saying from Jack Kerouac, ‘When you get to the top of a mountain, keep climbing’. Silvia’s memoir is just one step in her efforts to keep climbing.

In the Shadow of the Mountain, published by Holt and Company, will be released this February. On February 24th, Silvia will be doing an in-person and virtual reading and book signing at Green Apple Books. For information on the reading or for a link to the virtual event, see <https://www.greenapplebooks.com/event/9th-ave-silvia-vasquez-lavado-rebecca-handler>

To learn more about the nonprofit Silvia co-founded, see <https://courageousgirls.org>

By Lesley Ewing, FN'93

February 2022 Issue
Northern California Chapter
Established 1973



CHAPTER OFFICERS & TEAM

Chair: Tom Dolan MN'14
tdolan@outdoorstorms.com
Vice Chair: Marco Meniketti FN'10
Secretary: Joyce Chang MN'17
Treasurer: Anna Freitas MN'17
Treasurer@explorersnorca.org
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925-322-8893

2022

January 28Scott Warnasch.
Iron coffins
February 25Satya Gontcho a Gontcho
Astro physics and Cosmology
March 25TBD
April 23ECAD
April 29TBD

2020

January 24Dr. Jo Anne Van Tilburg
Easter IslandDolan
February 28Dr. Robert Griffith
Endangered RhinosDolan
March 27Cheryl Leonard
Found Objects and MusicRESCHEDULED
April 24Dr. Paul Auerbach
EnviromedicsRESCHEDULED
May 24Dr. Sandra Cook
Foreign Devils on Silk RdRESCHEDULED
May 22, 9:30 AM:Roz Savage
The Gift of SolitudeZOOM Presentation
May 29, 7:30 PMZOOM ANNUAL MEETING
June 5, 8 PM.Eliot Jessup
24 hr Grand Canyon Rim-to-Rim.Zoom
September 20Explorers Club Chapter VP
Intro to Northern California ChapterZoom
September 25Liz Taylor and Sylvia Earle
Mission Blue- Hope Spots.Zoom
October 30Mimi George
Vaka Taumako ProjectZoom
November 20Cheryl Leonard
Found Objects and Music.Zoom
December 13.Holiday Party

2021

.Zoom
January 22Diana Pickworth & John Wilken
Explorations (2)Zoom
February 26Kent Lightfoot
Fires & indigenous land use practicesZoom
March 26Deana Weibel
Motivations for robotic space explorationZoom
April 23Brandi DiCarli & Scott Thompson
Farms from a boxZoom
May 21ANNUAL MEETING
May 21Alison Fundis
Deep Sea Exploration.Zoom
September 24.Ashley Lemke
Archaeology Below the SurfaceZoom
October 15Dr. Craig Clements
Wildfire in the WestZoom
November 19Dr Roberto Junco
Caribbean ArchaeologyZoom

CHAPTER DIRECTORS

Directors (Past Chairs)

Joan Boothe MN'07
Lesley Ewing FN'93
Lee Langan FN'99
Anders Jepsen FN'03

Alan Nichols FN'84
Bob Schmieder FE'86
Rick Saber MN'01
Stephen Smith FN'96

Elected Directors

Paul Freitas MN'10
Jimmy Friedman MN'19
Kimberly Chambers MN'16

Chapter Email Addresses and Chapter Phone Number

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vicechair@explorersnorca.org

treasurer@explorersnorca.org
secretary@explorersnorca.org

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MEETING VIDEOS

Our Chapter tries to record all of our dinner meetings. Videos of recent speakers' presentations are available on the Chapter Website.

DO YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE CHAPTER?

There are lots of tasks that come up during the course of a year: speakers, meetings, field trips, membership, newsletter, etc. A good place to get started is by volunteering to serve on a committee. Talk to any of the Chapter Officers or Directors for more information.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER DUES

The Northern California Chapter dues are paid for the calendar year. A new year started January 1st. About 20 people have already made their 2022 dues payment either by check or paypal. Member dues are \$25 annually. Sirdar dues are \$50 annually.

In the March newsletter we will start publishing the Honor Roll listing of individuals who have paid their dues. This is an easy place to check whether or not you have paid your dues. Dues can be paid on-line by clicking on the paypal link on the website. If you prefer to pay by check, please make the check payable to Northern California Chapter of the Explorers Club. Mail the check to Anna Freitas, 161 Camino Posada, Walnut Creek, CA 94595.

Please note that Northern California Chapter dues can be tax-deductible

POSSIBLE CHAPTER FIELD TRIPS

* **Pinnacles National Park:** Early 2022, possible 2-day expedition.

For more information or suggestions, contact:

Jimmy Friedman MN' 19 - sfaikido@gmail.com.