

What do scientists really do?

Carolyn Brinkworth is a 23 year-old PhD student at Southampton University. For her PhD Carolyn will be investigating the mysterious phenomenon of Black Holes.



"I was born in Coventry in 1979 and grew up in a village just outside there called Balsall Common. My brother, Rob, was born when I was 2 years old. I went to primary school in Temple Balsall, at Lady Katherine Leveson C of E School, before moving to senior school at Bablake School in Coventry.

When I was about nine my Dad took up sailing, and the rest of us soon got involved. Up to the age of 15 I dragged my family round the country, sailing a small boat called an Optimist. I competed in several national championships and made it into the National Intermediate Squad before my knees finally gave out and I quit. Since then I've become a qualified RYA sailing instructor and started to sail another type of boat called a Laser. It was about that time that we started taking regular skiing holidays again (I seem to have a knack for choosing sports that are hard on the knees), and Rob and I took lessons at the local dry ski slope every week.

One year into my GCSEs my Dad got a job in the Netherlands working for Nissan Europe. He lived out there alone for a year, flying back most weekends, while I finished my exams then we all moved out to join him. Rob and I went to the British School in the Netherlands in Voorschoten, near The Hague, where we had a fantastic time. I did my A levels (Physics, Maths, History and English) then moved back to England to study Physics with Astrophysics at the University of Leicester.

Four years later, which have probably been the best four years of my life, I've just graduated and started a PhD in Astrophysics down in Southampton. My brother is at Loughborough University studying computer science and my parents have just moved back to England too. My PhD involves using a high-speed camera called ULTRACAM, developed by my supervisor Tom Marsh and Vik Dhillon, at Sheffield University. ULTRACAM will be attached to a large telescope and used to look at gas and dust swirling in discs around stars and black holes.

In my spare time I spend time with my friends in the pub, go sailing and play my guitar (badly). I'm also hoping to take up yachting while I'm in Southampton, as I've always fancied doing a bit of big boat sailing."

Want to ask Carolyn a question?

You can email her during the Science Year 'Is there life?' theme at the Science Year website. All the answers Carolyn sends out will be shown on the website at www.scienceyear.com/chalkface/index.html, so check there first to see if she's already answered your question. Her email address is at the bottom of that page. We'll feature some of the best questions on the ASE website www.ase.org.uk