

It isn't often that you meet people who love doing what they do at work. Most people dream of a career but end up working in places that are far from their aspirations. I had the fortune to meet people who love what they do. One of them is a scientist here at JPL, Dr. Svetla Hristova-Veleva.

It is the chilly Tuesday morning after the long Independence Day weekend. Walking up a rather quiet hill, I looked at my surroundings and I slowly made my way towards building 300. The farther I get from the central mall of the lab, the more cars I see. The fancy and shiny white tag cars make way for the still fancy but perhaps less shiny green tag cars.

It truly does feel more like a campus than a laboratory.

Dr. Svetla Hristova-Veleva office is in building 300. A room cluttered with books, computers, and papers – stacks of research results and reference books. It feels almost magical to be in a room filled with so much knowledge and questions – I liken it to stepping into a classroom in Hogwarts and feeling like the 11-year old Harry Potter. Nevertheless, I had to put aside my awe and start learning what it felt like to be a scientist here at JPL.

Of course, to understand a person's job, you must first know what they do. Dr. Hristova-Veleva works with hurricane models – the ones that help us forecast the weather. Her interest in the subject started with her studies in Physics. Her childhood dream of being an Astronaut started her on the path of science but as she learned more about physics and the Earth, she found weather more intriguing.

I asked how scientists get their ideas – often times it seems like they research things we never think about, things we take for granted- but her answer was simple: “asking questions.” The science community functions well because of the communication between the researchers. Scientists share observations, ideas and questions that come up during their research. This helps them determine what is needed in order to learn more about a phenomenon.

Later, I asked her what she would like to tell people who aspire to work in a field like hers. After a moment of thinking, her answer surprised me once more. Studying weather models is a multi-discipline subject. People with different educational backgrounds are needed to make things work. Physics, computers, math, chemistry, and ecology are just some of the knowledge needed to make accurate models.

Dr. Hristova-Veleva is currently working with algorithms related to satellite data involving hurricanes and other rainy systems. Her job sounds complicated and I certainly do not fully understand all her work but one doesn't need to in order to see how much she enjoys her work. The look in her eyes are as if she is flying through the storm itself, not just looking at it from above.