



HARITINA MOGOSANU: STARRYTELLER

by Clare Knighton

Meet Haritina Mogosanu: astrobiologist, science communicator, president of the Mars Society in New Zealand, and “starryteller”. In 2012, she was commander of the first New Zealand mission to the Mars Desert Research Station in the United States.

What happens at the Mars Desert Research Station?

The research station is in the Utah Desert, where the environment is similar to that on Mars. Six-person crews stay at the station for two weeks, learning what it might be like to live and work on the planet. We wore spacesuits and helmets whenever we went outside, ate dehydrated food, and communicated with the outside world by radio. We lived in the “hab”. This is a two-storey cylinder with bunk rooms, living areas, and laboratories. We spent our time studying geology, biology, and astronomy and learning about the challenges of living together in a small space – just like astronauts do!

What was your experience like?

It was my one big chance to feel like an astronaut, and the experience changed my life. It was just me and five other people, the hab, and nothing else. I thought about my priorities and what's important to me. I also realised that we're all human beings travelling together on a blue waka called Earth.

What was the most difficult part?

Being at the station is nothing like a nine-to-five job. You're there 24/7, and it's a completely foreign environment. Sometimes it felt scary being in such an unfamiliar place.

How do you think the first Martian settlers will cope?

Finding this out is one of the main reasons the Mars Desert Research Station was established. The first settlers will need an enormous amount of self-discipline! Extreme isolation is always very difficult. It will be hard for people not to argue in such a pressure-cooker situation. I think being able to connect with family and friends back on Earth will be very important.

Where did your interest in Mars come from?

I'm equally interested in space and world peace (after all, Mars was the Roman god of war). An international settlement on Mars is something that could unite the human race. We have the chance to plan how we might live together without conflict. Although the conditions on Mars are very inhospitable, it's still the most likely place for people to live compared with the other planets in our solar system. (Recently, I also discovered that one of my great grandfather's family names was Marziali!)

So, would you go?

Of course! I would love to – but only if I had a return ticket.



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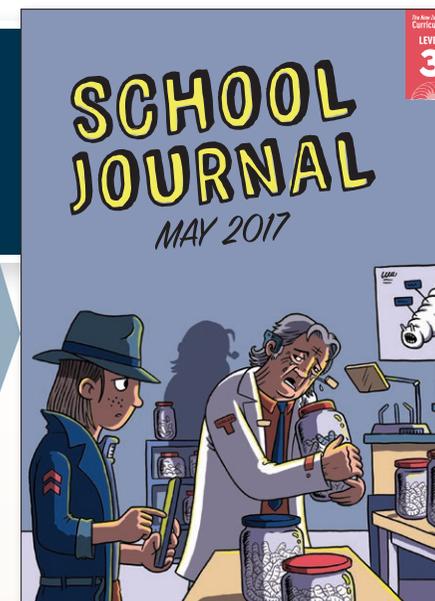
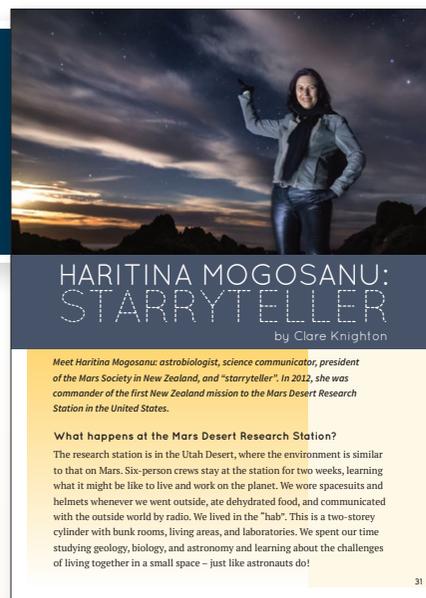
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