Karl Blasius, a Short Autobiography

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I grew up in older northwest suburbs of Detroit, MI, the towns of Ferndale and Pleasant Ridge, in a large extended family which introduced me to all the fine cultural and educational resources the metropolitan area had to offer. I remember with particular fondness many trips with my parents and brother to the Cranbrook institutions (Art Institute and Science Institute), the Detroit Museum of Art, the Detroit Historical Museum, the municipal aquarium and greenhouse, and the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village. We were also an active outdoor family taking many weekend day trips to regional parks to enjoy their trails.

I grew up in a home filled with music and significant discussions about science and human nature, along with the usual dynamics of loving but complex extended families of both parents. Since I did well in school I naturally aimed for a substantial college education in an exciting field. At Michigan State University I explored many interests, eventually settling on astronomy. The immediate inspiration for that choice was the excitement of the first robotic missions to the Moon, but there were also earlier roots. I recall, at Junior High age, my father took me to a Cranbrook Institute lecture on galaxies and nebulae illustrated with amazingly colorful photography. The universe was no longer simply pinpoint white lights on a black background. Michigan State was a huge school with opportunities to study under great teachers in many departments. Before I finished I had changed my undergraduate major three times, physics to philosophy to physical geography to astronomy, and I completed some coursework as a graduate student in geography.

I went on to graduate school to study Planetary Science (geology and astronomy) at Caltech in Pasadena, CA. I married a high school girlfriend and we moved to Pasadena together. My two children were born during grad school years. The quality of teaching and scientific dialogue at Caltech was amazing. It was one of the great blessings of my life to have been able to attend seminars by resident and visiting scientists of the very highest caliber. I finished my doctorate in Planetary Science and Philosophy with a thesis focused on the exploration of the planet Mars, primarily through images taken form orbit. I remained in Pasadena with a private company where I could pursue additional similar research funded by contracts from NASA and its Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

After about six years NASA funding of planetary research waned, and the burden of writing numerous proposals outweighed the rewards of the research, so I moved on to the geophysical exploration business, working first for a medium size oil company and then for a navigation systems company focused on marine exploration. After about six years the oil business was deeply depressed, so I moved on aerospace. I found I could apply my expertise in remote sensing imaging to the machine vision problems of creating photorealistic data bases for aircraft fight simulators, training systems for pilots. This work was also fun and productive for about six years. I looked around my company for other interesting opportunities and identified a business unit building remote sensing instruments for civilian spacecraft in Santa Barbara. I transferred and thereby got back into the space science business, much of it focused on Mars, via instrument engineering. I remained in Santa Barbara in this work for 13 years, plus 1 year retired from work and back to being a student.

My current interests, which are mostly shared with my spouse (second), include psychology, physics, astronomy, music, art, philosophy, gardening, and a growing extended family. My son, his wife, and my grandson of 18 months live in Flagstaff, AZ. My recently married daughter and her husband live here in Santa Barbara. I have a new one-man consulting business in space mission design and instrumentation. No paying customers yet.

My wife and I are both students in fine arts at SBCC. The faculty and program are exceptional. The SBCC Adult Education Program has also been a big part of our lives for several years now. We’ve focused on music, psychology, physical fitness, jewelry and fine arts courses.