



Marc Kaufman

Now that I've shared with you some of what I learned during my time at ELSI, let me tell you a little about myself.

I've been a writer for more than four decades – mostly in the newsrooms of The Washington Post and the Philadelphia Inquirer, but also as the author of two books. “First Contact: Scientific Breakthroughs in the Search for Life Beyond Earth” was published by Simon & Schuster in 2011 and “Mars Up Close: Inside the Curiosity Mission” was published by National Geographic Books in 2014.

For the past two years I have also written a NASA-sponsored column about exoplanets and astrobiology

called Many Worlds (www.manyworlds.space)

Although most of my reporting in the past decade-plus has focused on space, astrobiology and science, I previously spent many years as a reporter and foreign correspondent writing about most everything except science. That changed when I began covering NASA for The Washington Post and I've never looked back.

It has been both a wonderful challenge and a great pleasure to learn about what so many men and women of science are studying, measuring, hypothesizing and discovering. And I thank those at ELSI for taking the time to talk with me about their work.



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Nerissa Escanlar . Photographer

I came to ELSI in 2015 and set out to put a very human face on the scientists and staff of the institute. Before ELSI, I worked with fine art photographers and photojournalists for ten years. I think the most important things they gave my photography were our friendships and adventures, and the ways they made me a better person.

As a long-time photographer, I pretty much think and understand visually. For me, traveling, not being on the clock and interacting with people is where inspiration and ideas come from.

How a subject engages with me is a big part of creating images. How a person

is standing, his or her expressions, their comfort (or discomfort) with the setting they are in – this is the kind of information I'm looking for when taking pictures. Put these demeanors together, and add quite a few others, and a photographer has a chance to capture some of the qualities that define a person, something pretty deep inside.

I feel very strongly about the need to show the public who ELSI scientists are; to give them the exposure that they deserve, and that will hopefully allow others to understand them better. They are a wonderful, and patient, bunch.



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All photographs by Nerissa Escanlar unless otherwise stated.

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Images:

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How and why did a planet like Earth form? How did geochemistry on prebiotic Earth later become biochemistry and life? What happened, and what made the emergence possible?

Those questions are at the core of ELSI's scientific mission.

The questions are not easy to answer and not at all limiting for a growing origin-of-Earth and origin-of-Life institute. To understand how that change occurred means studying the formation and dynamics of our planet, the evolution of our core and atmosphere, the “messy” process through which the building blocks of life and then life emerged, the possibility of life on other planets, and how life evolved and changed the Earth. And inherent in the quest is the scientific ambiguity about what life is and how life expresses itself.

Quite a full plate for any group of scientists and quite a thrilling challenge.