

Character 2

Cranberry Lake High School "500 Words or Less" Essay Contest

Marie Skłodowska Curie - A science story or a love story?

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Many people know Marie Skłodowska Curie (1867-1934) as an early feminist who overcame many obstacles to pursue her love of science and mathematics. After all, she is world-famous for being the first person to win two Nobel Prizes - in physics and chemistry - and for being a pioneer in research on radioactivity. She was also the first female professor at the University of Paris, even though she was Polish, not French, and would later in her career name an element - polonium - after her home country.

It is not surprising that Marie became a famous scientist. Her father was a science and mathematics teacher. And she was very determined to get an education. Her family did not have money to send her to post-secondary school, so she made a plan with her sister that involved working for two years to finance her sister's education in Paris in exchange for the same in return (her sister was to work for two years to pay for Marie to study in Paris).

But there was also another side to Marie that rarely gets attention - her romantic side. While Marie was working as a governess, she fell in love with the son of her employer. However, his family did not like the idea of their wealthy and intelligent son marrying someone poor and unworthy. Marie did not care. She waited for him and even turned down offers by her sister to just forget about the man and come to Paris to attend school. But when her lover wrote her sister a letter saying he could not be with Marie, the talented young woman went to Paris, earned two degrees and fell in love with physics professor Pierre Curie. Initially they were drawn together by their mutual attraction to the science of magnetism.

Together the Curies made world-changing discoveries in physics and chemistry. But their love affair ended when Pierre was run over and killed by a horse and carriage. Marie herself died from a blood disorder that was caused by her passion for her work - she was continually carrying around substances that would later be known as dangerous and even fatal to handle without protection.

We will never know if Marie would have been so active a participant in the world of science if she had been able to marry and stay with her first love. What we do know though is that after she let go of him, she put her love of science before all else, even fame. Albert Einstein is reported to have remarked that she was probably the only person who was not corrupted by the fame that she had won.