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Profession inventor: Ann Makosinski (Interview)

Ann Makosinski is almost 20 and she's been an inventor for a while.

I found Ann while I was leafing through the pages of a book called *Goodnight stories for rebel girls* and I was reading about amazing women from the past. When I saw her birthdate - 1997 - the first thing I thought was: *She's alive now! Why I've never heard her story in Italy?* Since I can't interview dead people, women who have been forgotten by history because they were females of course (that's why this book was published), I decided to know more about this young inventor.

Ann (Andini) Makosinski lives in Canada and she's very famous overseas for creating the "Hollow Flashlight," the first flashlight powered entirely by body heat. Compared to other manually-powered lights, that generate energy with shaking or even hand cranking, it shines the moment you pick it up.

The Idea and The Awards

Ann had the idea after learning that a friend in the Philippines didn't have enough light to study during the day without electricity. The project, realized with only \$ 26, was recognized with several awards at the 2013 *Canada-Wide Science Fair*, won the 2013 *Google Science Fair* for the 15-16 age category, and won several awards at the 2014 *Intel International Science and Engineering Fair*. In 2014 she was named one of TIME magazine's 30 **Under 30**. In 2017 she was named one of Forbes 30 under 30.

We barely heard about her in Italy. But she could be a great example for all the girls interested in STEM in a country in which women are still fighting against social prejudices. Studies confirm that young girls don't apply to science faculties because they don't feel "good enough".

How does it feel to be called inventor at fifteen? How does it feel to be a girl interested in STEM in a world dominated by stereotypes? How does it feel to be a young woman who speaks at scientific conferences? Let's find out.

1) You appear as one of the 100 extraordinary women in GoodNight Stories For Rebel Girls, a book written by two italians in order to celebrate women empowerment. Your name is next to Rita Levi Montalcini and Cleopatra! Do you know that? How do you feel about it?

It was a surprise, I wasn't told I was placed in the book until people started tweeting me pictures of my pages in it. It's an honour, I never thought I would be placed in the same book/level with all of these amazing women. I don't think I will ever be at the same "level" as them, but it's an honour to be in it nonetheless.

2) You've been defined as an "inventor" since you were a teenager. I guess it is cool but also hard. Have you ever been treated like an outcast at school for that?

Well I am/was quite naive, so I sadly didn't really understand when people in middle school or high school would make fun of me for looking like a "nerd" and liking different things than they did. I'm glad I was not popular, as I think I would have then placed too much priority on my social status and appearance in high school rather than working on things that mattered, like my science projects.

3) Which was your parents' reaction when you told them about your ideas? Have you ever felt unappreciated or alone?

No my parents have always been very supportive! I have never felt unappreciated by them, except the time I brought a surprise cat home last summer without telling them :P .

4) It's clear that you have uncommon interests compared to many other girls of your age. Do you ever feel like you can't talk freely about your interests with your schoolmates, your dates or your friends? Have you ever felt like you were considered boring?

Well if I was considered "boring" for talking to them about my interests, then I certainly wouldn't stay friends with them for very long, would I? There are lots of girls out there in the world who are also interested in STEM, they just haven't gotten all the attention that I got by chance. My boyfriend and any other boys previously I had been interested in have all been extremely supportive and interested in my work. Of course, I can't always talk to one of my school friends about all my licensing and company troubles, because they won't relate as much as one of my entrepreneur friends would.

5) Have you ever felt like you weren't taken seriously because of your age or gender? On which occasion?

I've had some occasions at conferences where men at their companies booths wouldn't take me seriously, and were shocked to find out I was the keynote speaker afterwards. I have developed a relatively good radar (I'm still working on it!) on people who aren't genuinely interested in me or my work, so I can weed out those people pretty quickly and not engage with them, to minimize unpleasant events or conversations.

6) I read you are studying literature now. Many people would think that is "weird". What do you see in your future?

I don't think it is "weird" that I'm studying literature. Was I supposed to go into science because everyone else expected me to? It's my life and I can do what I want. And I'm very interested in both science and film. I keep my technology and business learning outside of school in the real world, and I work on my storytelling/art skills inside of school. In my future, I see many cats and a house somewhere warm. I would like to have a show where I showcase other young inventors and entrepreneurs regularly, so other teenagers can feel that they are more relatable and also that if that teen on the tv screen can make a company, I can too.

The message it's very clear but not so common. Ann is a girl determined to do what she wants with her life, but most of all, she wants other talented teen to know that they can make it. We live in a world in which effort is no longer admired. The less you can do the more you'll be famous, especially on the new social media. Ann's message is very different, her philosophy is, "*The only way to find out is something is possible is to build it.*" (literally)

And I totally agree with her.

Alessia Pizzi

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