

# BIOGRAPHY



MARGHERITA HACK



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# DAUGHTER OF THE STARS

**CHARACTER:** MARGHERITA HACK

**DATES:** Florence 12 June 1922, Trieste 29 June 2013

**COUNTRY OF ORIGIN:** ITALIA

**HISTORICAL PERIOD:** XX/XXI century

**SUMMARY:** Marga lived in Florence, she was a happy little girl, despite the fact that the winds of war swept across Europe. She studied, played sports and had anti-Fascist ideas that risked compromising her school career.

Margherita enrolled at the University of Physics, became an astronomer and made many discoveries. She was director of the Trieste Observatory. She loved cats and proclaimed that all living beings are children of the stars.

**KEYWORDS:** stars, astrophysics, observatory

**GENRE:** BIOGRAPHY

**AGE:** 5 - 6 YEARS

**AUTHOR:** BARBARA LACHI

# DAUGHTER OF THE STARS

Little Margherita, whom everyone called Marga, lived in Florence with her parents in Via «Leonardo Ximenes, astronomo», in a small house with a garden where they had planted a fir tree that served as a Christmas tree, so too big to remain in the house. Her vegetarian and anti-fascist parents had passed on to her a love of nature and animals, a respect for all living things. Her father had lost his job for his anti-fascist views and it was her mother who took care of the family.

Margherita was a happy child and full of life, resolute and shy but imbued with a cheerfulness that was contagious. Sometimes she would play with the hoop in the garden at home, pass it over her head, hold it on her hips and then wave it around as if it were the rings of Saturn.



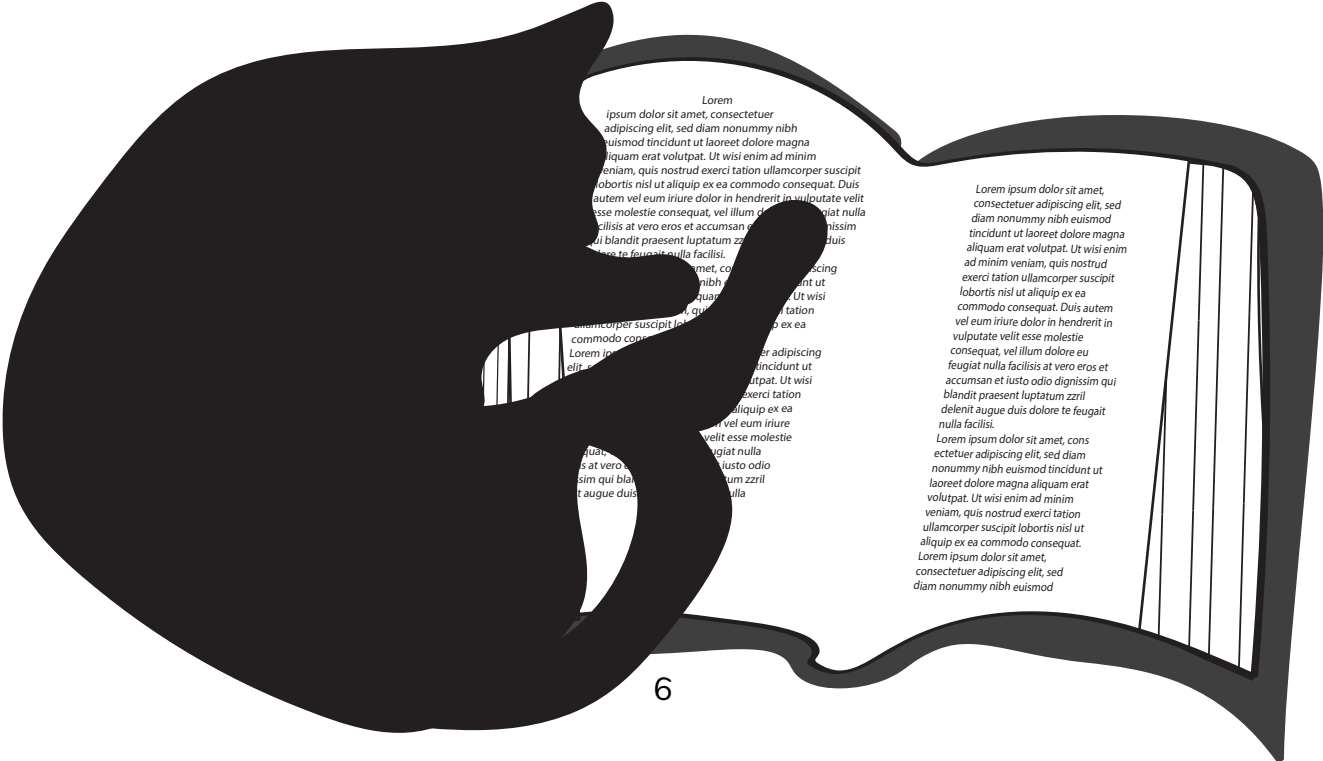


The thing she loved most, however, was running. She ran as fast as she could, in great leaps almost flying over the grass, her hair clinging to her forehead from sweat and her mouth open in a smile, her blue eyes wide open as if to embrace everything around her. She climbed the trees to see Florence, which lay placidly below her. Together with her father she often went to the Bobolino gardens. While he sat reading on a nearby bench, she climbed trees and ran across the lawn with irrepressible gaiety. Sometimes she would fall but didn't seem to mind too much, immediately getting up and quickly climbing another tree.



One day she was all alone playing with the ball, kicking it boredly and bouncing it, deep in thought. Two boys and a little girl approached her, Margherita had seen them coming but had pretended not to notice. The taller child stepped forward and in a gentle voice asked «Can we play with you?». Margherita smiled with her mouth and eyes, throwing the ball at her feet in response and starting to run. «I am Aldo,» shouted the boy, throwing the ball to her, «I am Margherita,» she replied as she hit the ball with her foot, hurling it at the other two, who had followed them. The lawn filled with laughter and happy shouts.

Every day Margherita went to the garden, waiting for the children to come but especially Aldo. She felt her heart remain in suspense if he had not yet arrived, and as soon as she saw him from afar, she would sigh loudly and happily and rush off to play. However, Aldo soon left Florence one morning with his family, his father had been transferred for work. Margherita felt a squeeze in her heart, a small emptiness inside, but soon life resumed its rhythms, Margherita immersed herself in her studies.



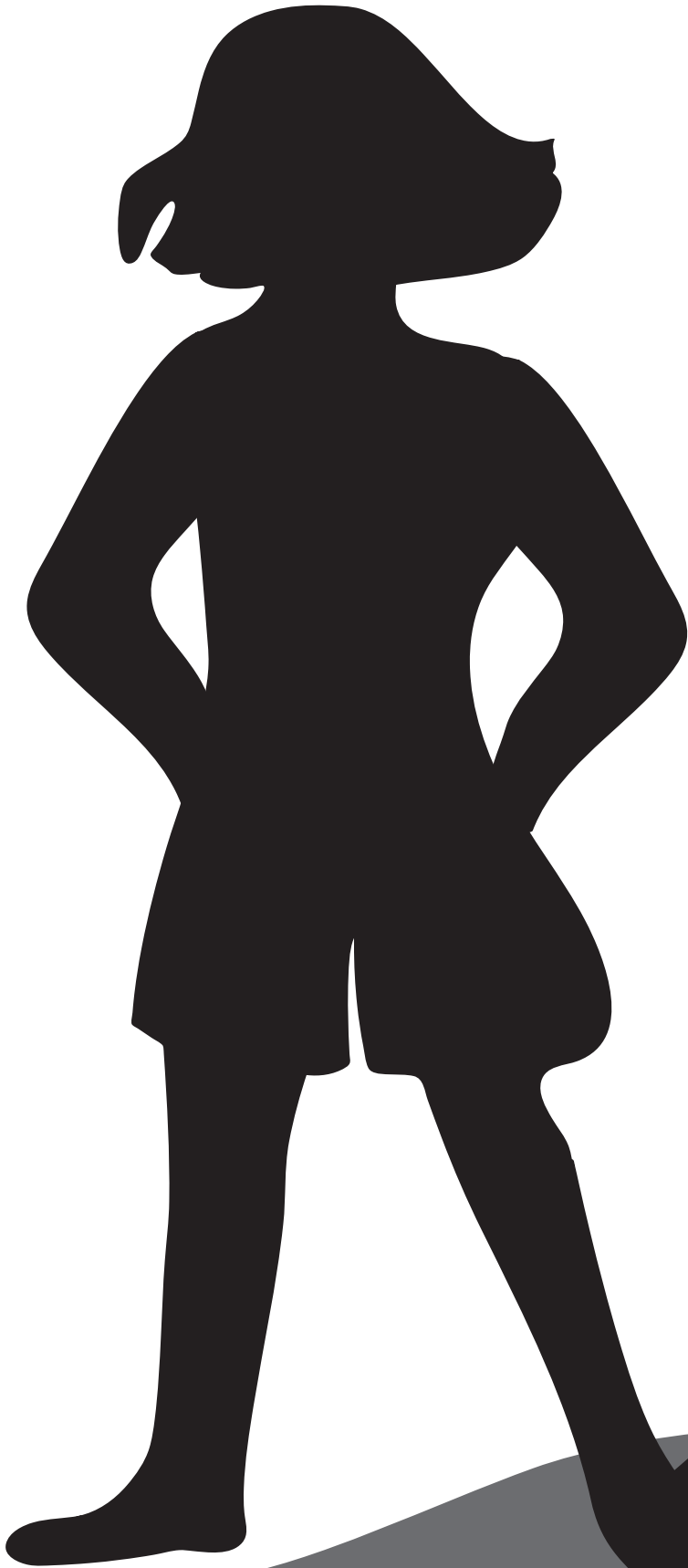


She was good at school without being at the top of the class, she liked to study but also did sports, especially running. During the years of the regime, pupils and school children participated in numerous competitions, even Margherita, who loved running and jumping, so she took part and won.

The winner of the games was allowed to stand on the podium and give the fascist salute. Margherita, who was very proud of her victory, did not want to give up her placement and as she stood on the podium she raised her arm, but as soon as she did, she felt stupid and wrong: the vanity of that moment had made her forget her ideals and principles.

However, when the regime in 1938 proclaimed racial laws that prevented Jews from working and going to school, Margherita was blinded with anger and started rallying her classmates about how petty and unfair those laws were. The teacher who was called away by those shouts wanted Margherita expelled from school, but war was declared and everyone graduated: even Margherita who had to decide what she would do as a young adult.

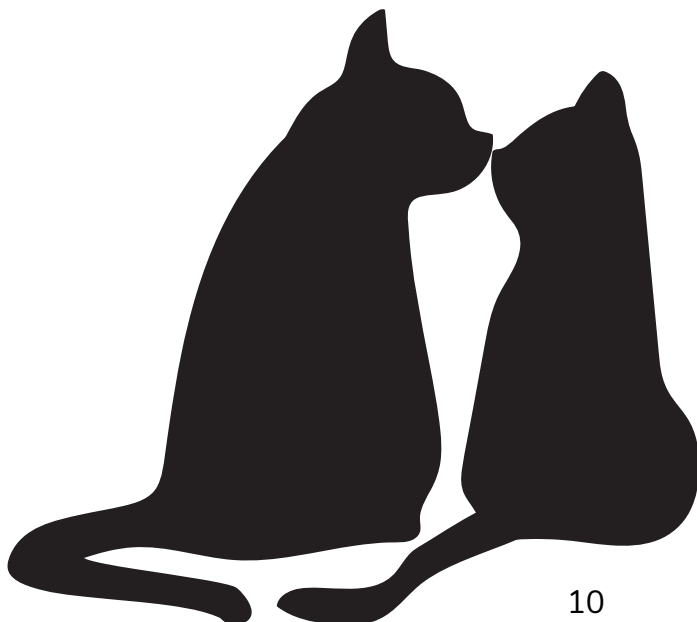




She enrolled at the university of literature but after only an hour of class, in which she had barely managed to hold back her yawns, she left, snorting with boredom, realising that this was not her path. One of her close friends had enrolled in physics and Margherita decided to follow her. Right from the beginning the subjects seemed interesting to her and she finally felt that she was in the right place. Even Cicino, her favourite cat, seemed to agree and, curled up on her lap or open books, helping her study.

Meanwhile, the war raged on and soon there was a shortage of food, while bombs fell, destroying houses, bridges and roads in the process. One day, when ten years had passed since she had last seen him, Aldo returned.

The feeling that had once united them now seemed distant: they bickered every time they met and every topic was a source of disagreement. Margherita had arranged to meet her friends at Piazzale Michelangelo. Aldo had arrived first. Margherita saw him; from afar he still looked like the tall boy who had made her heart beat, and their story picked up where it left off.





The war was ending, the Germans had begun to retreat, destroying roads and bridges so that the Allies could not pursue them. Florence woke up in the rubble. Only Ponte Vecchio had been saved. On her bicycle, Margherita rode through her city made unrecognisable, just like people's hearts around her.

But the war was over and life resumed its course. Aldo and Margherita married and she was finally able to graduate in astronomy. Margherita changed cities, moving to Milan and then Trieste, winning competitions and scholarships that took her to Russia and the United States, to Paris and Utrecht in Holland where her talent and discoveries were recognised and appreciated.



With her curious blue eyes, she scrutinised the sky and especially the stars, discovering their secrets. She would spend hours, days behind the telescope, noting every pulse, glow or signal. Through the light, the stars told their story, which Margherita knew how to listen to. She became the head of chair of Astronomy in Trieste and director of the observatory, turning it into a centre of international interest.



With Aldo accompanying her everywhere, they made a life in a small villa with a garden surrounded by four cats: Celestino, Cicciolina, Jenny and Luna and a dog, Zacchi, and more than twenty-three thousand books, showcased not only in bookcases but also on tables, chairs and above the sofas, in the bathroom and in the kitchen. Time passed quickly without Marga noticing, even if her outward appearance was now that of an elderly lady in her eighties, inside she continued to be young and surrounded herself with young people, supporting and encouraging them in their studies because young people are the future in which Marga never stopped believing.

She died on 29 June 2013, but her eyes and heart never stopped looking at the stars.







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