Marie Curie

RADIATION revolutionary

History's foremost female physicist was in her element pioneering groundbreaking advances in science and medicine.

Ray of hope

Curie proved that atoms of some elements release high-energy particles in a process called radiation. With Pierre, she DISCOVERED TWO NEW ELEMENTS—polonium (named after Poland, her home country) and radium (named after the Latin word for "ray"). They also coined the term "radioactivity," and found that radiation could help treat diseases such as cancer.

Did you know?

Curie's research papers are radioactive, and are stored in protective lead-lined boxes.

Scientific schooling

Maria Salomea Skłodowska was born in Poland in 1867. She was introduced to science by her parents, who were both teachers. A TALENTED STUDENT, she moved to Paris, France, in 1891 to study physics and mathematics. She married French physicist Pierre Curie four years later.

Who came before...

German physicist WILHELM ROENTGEN discovered X-rays in 1895. The radioactive element roentgenium is named after him.

In 1896, French physicist HENRI BECQUEREL discovered that uranium is a radioactive element. He shared the Nobel prize with the Curies in 1903.
Double award

In 1903, Marie and Pierre won the Nobel Prize in Physics. Pierre died in a tragic accident three years later, and Marie took his teaching position, becoming the first female professor at the Sorbonne University in Paris. Her research led to another Nobel Prize, in Chemistry, in 1911.

By the way...

I was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize, and am the only person to win Nobel Prizes in multiple sciences.

Mobile X-ray unit in use during World War I

Wartime wounded

During World War I, Curie developed a smaller, mobile version of a hospital X-ray machine for ambulances to scan wounded soldiers in the field en route. Years of being exposed to radiation caused her death in 1934. The Marie Curie organization was set up in 1948 to care for terminally ill patients.

How she changed the world

At a time when science was a male domain, Curie did not let gender hold her back. She devoted her life to the subject and, despite paying the ultimate price for her radiation research, has improved the lives of millions.

Who came after...

New Zealand scientist Ernest Rutherford revealed the structure of an atom and split it apart in the first demonstration of nuclear physics.

Daughter of Marie and Pierre, Irene Joliot-Curie followed in her parents’ footsteps, winning the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1935.