NEXT MAGAZINE

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THE SCIENCE OF FINDING OUT

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Fran Scott grew up on a farm in West Yorkshire, U.K., where there was plenty of opportunity for her to be hands-on and practical. Her affinity toward science and engineering was patent.

"I would always make things, test things out," says Scott. Her parents, both scientists, encouraged her homemade experiments. "If I didn't understand something, instead of giving me the answer, they'd say, 'let's go find out.'"

Even though at the time, the little girl may have wanted her parents to just give up the answer, Scott was already beginning to internalize a notion that would guide her future.

"The finding out *is* science," she says, simply.

Scott has always aimed high, starting with her desire to be a Nobel Prize-winning scientist in primary school. After ranking top of the class in her first year at the University of Nottingham in the U.K., Scott won the opportunity to spend her third year in Australia. A neuroscience major, she chose to work on stem cells and stem cell regrowth in the lab. Scott returned to the U.K. enriched by a fascinating experience but sure that lab work wasn't her bailiwick. She spent her fourth year at the university earning a Master's in Science (MSci) degree, providing her a combined Bachelor's and Master's in neuroscience upon graduation.

On an afternoon trip to London, Scott's friends coaxed her into visiting the famed Science Museum. They knew she'd like it. Turned out she loved it, so much that she left the museum with employment contacts that soon led to a job interview. In a short timeframe, Scott started her career as a science communicator at the museum.

Initially, she spent a lot of time presenting how the science exhibits worked to museum visitors and went on to write the museum weekend presentations and workshops.

Scott soon became enthralled with building props and demonstrations and crafting the presentation narratives.

From farm to doughnut fetcher to fame as a popular children's science TV show demo maker, engineering enthusiast and presenter Fran Scott gets paid to do what she loves.

After a while at the Science Museum, her thoughts turned toward television, specifically, television's reach.

"I love what the Science Museum did, but people had to come to us," says Scott. "What if we could go to them? What if we could be in their front room when they flip on the telly, and science is there?"

She started researching children's science programs, sorting her findings on a spreadsheet.
"I was really worried that we were missing an opportunity to educate our children well through engaging television that gets the science right," says Scott. "It's not necessarily that I wanted to be that person in front of the camera. I just wanted someone to do it who was female. It just so happened that person was me."

A tipoff from a friend led her to interview for a new children's science show on CBBC called Richard Hammond's Blast Lab. She was offered a job as a runner, and left her position at the museum, taking a drastic pay cut. After a short while making tea and buying the office staff doughnuts she couldn't afford, Scott noticed the TV series producer looking up how to make giant bubbles.

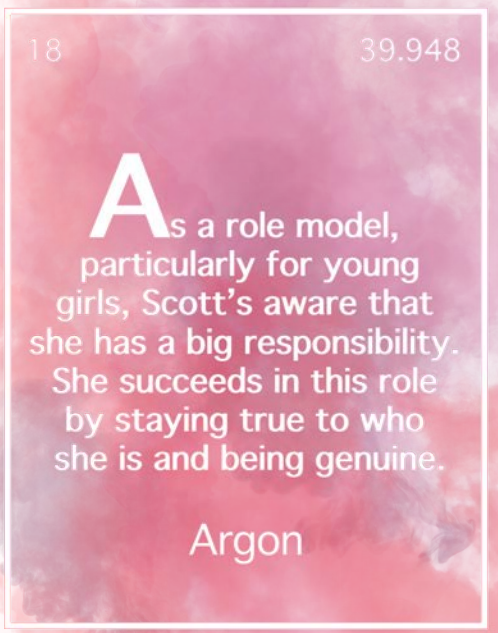
"Oh, I hope you don't mind me saying," she said to him, "but if you want to make big bubbles, you need to use glycerin." And she offered to go buy some.

Her days of making tea runs ended that afternoon. While she describes it as "being just in the right place at the right time," it was the beginning of a winning match-up. "I knew the science, and they knew how to make telly."

Scott was the only scientist on the team. She designed all the in-studio science games, oversaw the explanatory graphics, briefed presenters, and crafted some of the large science stunts.

"I worked so hard. It was my dream job," she recalls. "It was a fantastic stepping stone for me, and it made me realize how much I love developing demonstrations."

Her other behind-the-scenes TV experience included work on programs such as Horizon and Bang Goes the Theory, along with BBC-branded science stage shows.



Lights! Action! Fran!

In 2012, a chance meeting landed Scott a screen test for a new science-based CBBC show called Absolute Genius with Dick and Dom. She won the role.

For five seasons, Scott joined Dick and Dom as they explored how science and engineering has changed the world. Her specialty was the demonstrations.

She wasn't seeking a spot in front of the camera and didn't know if she'd be any good. But she knew what she didn't like to see on children's television. In the science shows she watched as a kid, the boys would know everything while the girls pointed and giggled at things.

Even as a kid, Scott could sense when people in front of the camera didn't quite know what they were doing. "What if the person presenting totally knew what they're doing and wasn't just reading lines?" she mused. That's the person Scott wanted to be on camera.

Much of her career to that point was inspired by the lack of female scientist role models on children's television. As a role model, particularly for young girls, Scott's aware that she has a big responsibility. She succeeds in this role by staying true to who she is and being genuine.

"I don't want to encourage the epidemic of kids just wanting to be famous. It's not a life, and it shouldn't be an aim. What I do on TV is what I do day-to-day. They just happen to be filming me on TV for some of the time," Scott says.

"It's okay to be a girl and be intelligent and do science. That's not a bad thing. Having someone visually there for young people is a good sign, be that me or be that another person," she adds.

Engineer Rising

These days, Scott is involved with more adult-oriented programs, where her "engineer at heart" takes center stage. Late in 2018, she was featured as the engineering judge for the second season of LEGO Masters in the U.K. and has been an engineering expert on programs such as *Engineering Catastrophes*, *How Hacks Work*, and *Abandoned Engineering*.

Scott is also the science content producer at the Royal Institution, where she develops and builds the demonstrations for the institution's renowned Christmas Lectures. She's the perfect fit for this series of annually produced programs that introduce young people to science subjects through spectacular demonstrations.

And when she's not revealing engineering prowess on television or crafting science demonstrations for the Royal Institution, she's running Great Scott! Productions, her white label science communication company. Her team develops high-caliber stage shows, demonstrations, and workshops for schools and businesses in the U.K. and abroad.

"Sometimes children's eyes aren't opened up to how amazing science and engineering can be. It's no fault of the teachers," says Scott. "That's where my job and people like me come in."