



## STILL MADE IN NEW ZEALAND

A Kiwi icon celebrates its 75th anniversary.

Most Kiwis can retrospectively plot their personal history by the cost of a Popsicle.

Memories of summer days devouring the likes of Jelly Tips, Rocky Roads and Eskimo Pies span the generations – the anticipation as balls of cool, creamy lusciousness are scooped from cartons at the beachside dairy or tubs from the home freezer.

A tour of the Tip Top factory at Mt Wellington – with its giant slabs of chocolate, and the free ice cream at the end! – is almost a rite of passage for Auckland children. A 1980s ad campaign for Trumpet even launched the career of a supermodel from Glenfield (you-know-who, above).

Tip Top ice cream – unlike other big-name brands – is still made in New Zealand from home-grown ingredients, and it came out ahead of several luxury lines in a recent tasting for *Consumer* magazine.

Around 50 million litres are produced each year and unique flavours such as hokey pokey and goody goody gum drops have become Kiwi classics. To mark the company's 75th birthday, some old favourites are making a comeback: a limited-edition mint choc Trumpet and, as a result of a consumer Facebook campaign, the grapefruit and lemon FruJu. Happy licking.

STACEY ANYAN

# Life, the universe and everything

» Backyard astronomer Jennie McCormick's final frontier.

She's discovered an asteroid. She's co-discovered a solar system and 11 planets. Yet how many people have heard of Jennie McCormick?

By day, she's customer-services manager for an East Auckland arts centre. By night, in her backyard observatory at Farm Cove, she points her telescope at the sky.

The first female amateur astronomer to co-discover planets, McCormick also does research work, primarily for US universities, who don't pay her but help provide equipment, collaborators and an online community. "Ohio State for planets, Columbia for stars, Harvard for comets and asteroids, the British Astronomical Association for black holes," she says.

Shucking off the science-geek stereotype, the fizzy 47-year-old shows me around her wee shed of an observatory, with its giant telescope protruding through the roof. A camera on the back of the telescope picks up what the naked eye can't see. Images and data then flash onto her computer to be checked and processed. "Most people think we just sit there staring and taking notes, but there's more to it."

In April 2009, to mark the International Year of Astronomy, McCormick co-ordinated the global 100 Hours of Astronomy, which involved 2300-plus events in more than 100 countries and saw three million people from Ireland to India take their first peek through an observatory telescope. McCormick watched online. "Seeing astronomy excite everyday people and unite a worldwide community brought me to tears."

A die-hard *Star Trek* fan, her first childhood memory is of gazing up at the stars. "Mum said, 'Look, that's the Pot, from the Orion constellation.' That's when astronomy got me." What still gets

McCormick is the excitement of the chase and the possibility of the unknown. And as computer modelling improves, she believes Earth-like planets and perhaps even life will be found. "Given the vastness of the universe, we'd be ignorant to think we're the only ones."

The mother of two grown sons, McCormick admits her night-owl hours obliterate any social life, although she's currently seeing another astronomer.

"My [ex] husband used to go, 'What are you looking at?' When that marriage ended, I realised I have to be with someone who understands what a full-width half-maximum is, because sometimes you're out all night, working with men."

For many years, she and the guys from the Auckland Astronomical Society (which she's writing a book about) would load up their cars on a clear evening and find a spot to set up their telescopes.

"Eventually I thought, 'Well, I think I've seen everything. Now I want to contribute to science.'" So she built her observatory and, on a whim, emailed some data to Ohio State University. Her research career went from there.

While McCormick is often invited to speak overseas, not being attached to a particular institution means she doesn't receive any funding to go. "Having no PhD makes it even harder to be an astronomer in New Zealand."

So, in 2006, a letter that arrived addressed to the new Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (for services to astronomy) was a welcome shock. As was the heart-pounding moment when *Star Trek's* Gates McFadden (Dr Beverly Crusher) visited Auckland's Stardome Observatory to ask for her autograph. McFadden signed a book for McCormick in return: "From the doctor in space to the real discoverer who went boldly where no one had gone before."

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