Perhaps unexpectedly, Picasso’s brush strokes touch her is a born pioneer. Flanked Cristiane de Morais Smith beyond the stars physics heart more deeply than Newton’s formulas. Beyond the wall her wings. spirit of discovery. So, she will never fold the boundless universe deserves a boundless Gian village girl’s conviction not to keep the sky that, every night, made their village of Paraguaçu Paulista seem even smaller than it already was. ‘Cristiane, what do you think lies beyond those stars?’ he asked her. ‘I think... more stars, papai.’ ‘And beyond that? Even more stars.’ ‘What about behind those stars?’ ‘Maybe... a big wall?’ ‘Ah. And beyond that big wall beyond the stars?’ Silently, father and daughter continued to stare upward. Such moments strengthened the Brazilian village girl’s conviction not to keep the large wings of her curiosity hidden, but to spread them fully. She still believes a boundless universe deserves a boundless spirit of discovery. So, she will never fold her wings.

On the bathroom floor
She wasn’t called to physics specifically until years later, at age thirteen. A teacher presented her class with a difficult task: calculate the acceleration of objects sliding down a slope without friction. Indeed: Galileo’s famous experiment. The teacher enjoyed having his class struggle with this problem, only to surprise them with the counter-intuitive insight that mass has no effect on acceleration. De Morais Smith can still recall the scene: ‘He came to check at my table and suddenly he cried out with joy. All the students looked up in bewilderment, because we knew him to be a very subdued man. We had already written down the right equations. I asked him if I could solve more fun problems, and he responded: “I know no boundaries. As long as my body didn’t give up, I continued to learn.” Sixteen hours a day. For months. Often at night she would lie on the cold bathroom floor with her textbooks, fighting sleep to keep her dreams alive.’

Strange behaviour
‘If a path doesn’t already exist, I’ll create one myself!’ That attitude got De Morais Smith to Switzerland as a young twenty year-old, as a Brazilian physics student. How different would life be there? She found that out soon enough. ‘Before my first symposium, my professor called me over and said: “You are a woman. So, during your presentation, I don’t want you to smile; it distracts the scientists here. I don’t want you to smile.”’

Harmonious zone
As a member of the Delta ITP Board of Directors, De Morais Smith sees an important mission ahead. ‘Many brilliant students leave academia. Why? Because they never stop smiling. My smile is my inner spirit of discovery is overshadowed by increasingly fierce competition and more and more bureaucracy. Through Delta ITP we can create a harmonious space where we can follow our curiosity wherever it leads us. Beyond the wall beyond the stars, if possible.’