

**EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH - TAKING 'BABY STEPS' USING MOTIFS FROM SCIENCE FICTION, LITERATURE AND MUSIC.** M. R. Tirumalai<sup>1</sup> and G. E. Fox<sup>1</sup>, <sup>1</sup>Biology and Biochemistry, University of Houston, Houston, TX 77204-6934. Corresponding author: mrtirum2@central.uh.edu

Introduction: My first novice introduction to EPO was through NASA's FameLab Astrobiology event at the USRA Campus, in Houston, in January 2012. I participated in the next year's (2013) event at the same venue, but this time, I was honored to be part of the panel of Judges. That same year, I participated in the Second Annual MarsFest in the Death Valley National Park: "Linking Extremes of Earth and Space!" in 1-3 March, 2013, organized jointly by the SETI Institute, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, NASA's Ames Research Center, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Caltech, and the National Park Service. I had the opportunity to make an hour long presentation on "Surviving High Radiation Environments – Bacterial Spores redefine the Limits of Life on Earth" addressing the general public, who were visitors at the park.

Following that, I have given EPO talks at the Post Oak High School, Houston, the monthly meetings of the Estes Park Memorial Observatory, Colorado, twice at the Highland Road Park Observatory, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the Fort Bend Astronomy Club, Austin Astronomical Society, the San Antonio Astronomical Association, the North Houston Astronomy Club, the Astronomical Society of South East Texas, Beaumont, TX, and scheduled to give one the Johnson Space Center Astronomical Society.

These nascent 'baby' steps have posed creative challenges as well as the opportunity to use motifs and characters from popular science fiction, literature and movies and getting the audience actively involved in my presentation. Furthermore, the discussions following each presentation have been enriching, in terms of getting a broad perspective of the perceptions that people in general have, regarding astrobiology in particular and science in general.