

DATA VERSIFY

Tomomi Suwa

Researcher Background:

Tomomi got her PhD in plant biology. She worked for six years as a data scientist at the Field Museum, and then moved into the corporate sector as a Senior Data Scientist. In this role, Tomomi analyzes credit and fraud risks, forecasts long-term trends, and develops, implements, and monitors credit risk models.

Q: Why did you become a biologist?

A: I always loved spending time outside in nature.

Q: What is your favorite part about your job?

A: I get to work in the museum with very great people who care about the same things as I care about. Also, the Museum is a really fun place to work because there are so many cool things everywhere and I always get to learn new things!

Q: What obstacles have you overcome to get where you are?

A: One of my biggest obstacles was language. Learning different subjects at school in English was hard, communicating with friends and teachers was hard. Sometimes,



people didn't/don't take me seriously. But at one point, I needed to embrace myself and feel comfortable with who I am. As Rosita from Sesame Street once said (I recently watched this clip with my kids), being able to speak multiple languages is a "superpower"!

I originally thought I wanted to become a professor to pursue research. However, over time, I realized that I wouldn't have the freedom to choose where I wanted to live, which became a significant obstacle in continuing my academic career. As a queer person who wanted to have kids, it was important for me to be in a big city with LGBTQ+ resources and support. I don't see very many LGBTQ Asian people, or LGBTQ people with kids in STEM.

Q: What are hobbies and/or interests that you have outside of your research?

A: Gardening (native plants and vegetables), running, dancing

Q: What is your favorite thing about gardening?

A: Gardening brings me so much joy! Even though I've changed my career to data science, my love for working with plants hasn't changed. I transformed my small front yard into a mini native plant garden and built raised beds in the backyard to grow vegetables. I enjoy spending time outside and getting my hands dirty - especially with my kids!

Q: Why is it important for scientists to have hobbies?

A: I believe it's important for everyone to have hobbies and interests. Like many people, I don't have much free time with three little kids and a full-time job, but I still think it's essential to make time for things I enjoy. My hobbies make me happier, healthier, and more fulfilled. Sometimes, I even come up with new ideas on completely different topics while I'm gardening or running!

Q: What advice do you have for aspiring biologists?

A: Be true to yourself and be happy. Stay curious!

