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# Sally Ride



Written by Bea Silverberg

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Launch of the STS-7, Sally's first mission in space

## Introduction

Half a million people cheered when Sally Ride took off at Cape Canaveral, Florida. The space shuttle *Challenger* shot into space on June 18, 1983. Sally was the first American woman in space. And she was the youngest American astronaut, male or female, at age 32.

Sally and four other astronauts were strapped inside the space shuttle. The shuttle was attached to a huge fuel tank. Two smaller rocket boosters were mounted onto the fuel tank. They helped power the shuttle into space. The tank and boosters dropped into the ocean after they used up their fuel. In 44 minutes and 27 seconds, the *Challenger* was circling the Earth.



Sally Ride and her crewmates on the STS-7 mission



A photo of the Earth-orbiting space shuttle *Challenger*, taken on the STS-7 mission

Sally was the flight engineer on board. During the time in space she and John Fabian, another scientist, worked on forty experiments. They also tested a 15-meter (50-ft) robot arm. It was used to pick up broken satellites in space. The whole crew returned to Earth in six days. They had traveled 4 million kilometers (2.5 million mi)!

## Growing Up

Sally was born on May 26, 1951. Two years later, her parents, Dale and Joyce Ride, had another daughter, Karen. The family lived in Encino, California. The planets, stars, and galaxies always fascinated Sally. Yet she never thought about becoming an astronaut. When Sally was nine, the whole family spent a year traveling in Europe. She started to get an idea of how big the world was.

In high school, she was very interested in science. Sally loved sports. She worked hard at tennis, often winning big matches. She went on to college and earned degrees in physics and literature. She even earned a Ph.D., making her Dr. Sally Ride. Her field was astrophysics—the study of stars and other bodies in space.

## Early Astronaut Training

One day Sally saw an ad recruiting NASA astronauts. NASA is short for National Aeronautics and Space Administration. NASA was looking for the very best people to learn about space travel. Sally was chosen for the 1978 NASA astronaut class. She was very proud. Two women from the Soviet Union had already been in space. She wanted to be the first American woman in space.



Sally training  
in a simulator



Piloting a plane

Learning to become an astronaut was hard work. Sally had to learn to pilot a plane. She had to learn how to control the launch and reentry of the shuttle. She needed to know how to operate the computer systems and switches on the shuttle. As flight engineer, she had to learn to use the shuttle's robot arm to pick up satellites from space.



On the shuttle

## Sally in Space

On Sally's first ride in space, she sped along at 28,164 kilometers per hour (17,500 mph). The space shuttle circled the Earth in ninety minutes. It circled the Earth rather than flying off into space because of the Earth's gravity. The shuttle's speed was just fast enough to keep it from falling back to Earth. It circled about 322 kilometers (200 mi) above the Earth.

Sally wrote a book about her space travels. She wrote that the best part of being in space was being weightless. She told how the crew moved around by grabbing onto something on the wall to keep from floating away. When they were working on a machine, they were always strapped in. Most of the time they ate with spoons. They ate sticky food so that it wouldn't float away. They used straws to drink. They stored all their trash and brought it back to Earth.



Using a  
sleep restraint  
to keep  
from floating  
around while  
sleeping





Cyprus and Turkey as seen from the orbiting space shuttle *Challenger*.

The astronauts took exciting pictures as they circled the Earth. These pictures help all of us see the wonders that the astronauts saw. Sally wrote, “Through the small windows of the space shuttle, I looked down on Earth and saw the oceans and land that make up our planet. The view was spectacular.”



The space shuttle *Challenger* beyond Earth's horizon

With these space photos, scientists learn more about the Earth. They use them to study how humans and other living things are changing the planet. The pictures are also used to learn about the layers of air surrounding the Earth.

Sally returned to space aboard the *Challenger* on October 5, 1984. This time, there was another woman astronaut aboard—Kathryn Sullivan. On that trip, Kathryn was the first American woman to walk in space. Sally launched a weather satellite. The satellite would be used to find out if the air surrounding the Earth was getting warmer.



Kathryn Sullivan

## NASA Space Travels

Many space shuttles were launched in 1983 and 1984. Judith Resnick, a classmate of Sally's, had been in space in August, 1983. Many new experiments were completed. Some of the crew walked in space with small jet packs on their backs. They repaired a satellite in space for the first time. Space travel seemed safe and exciting.



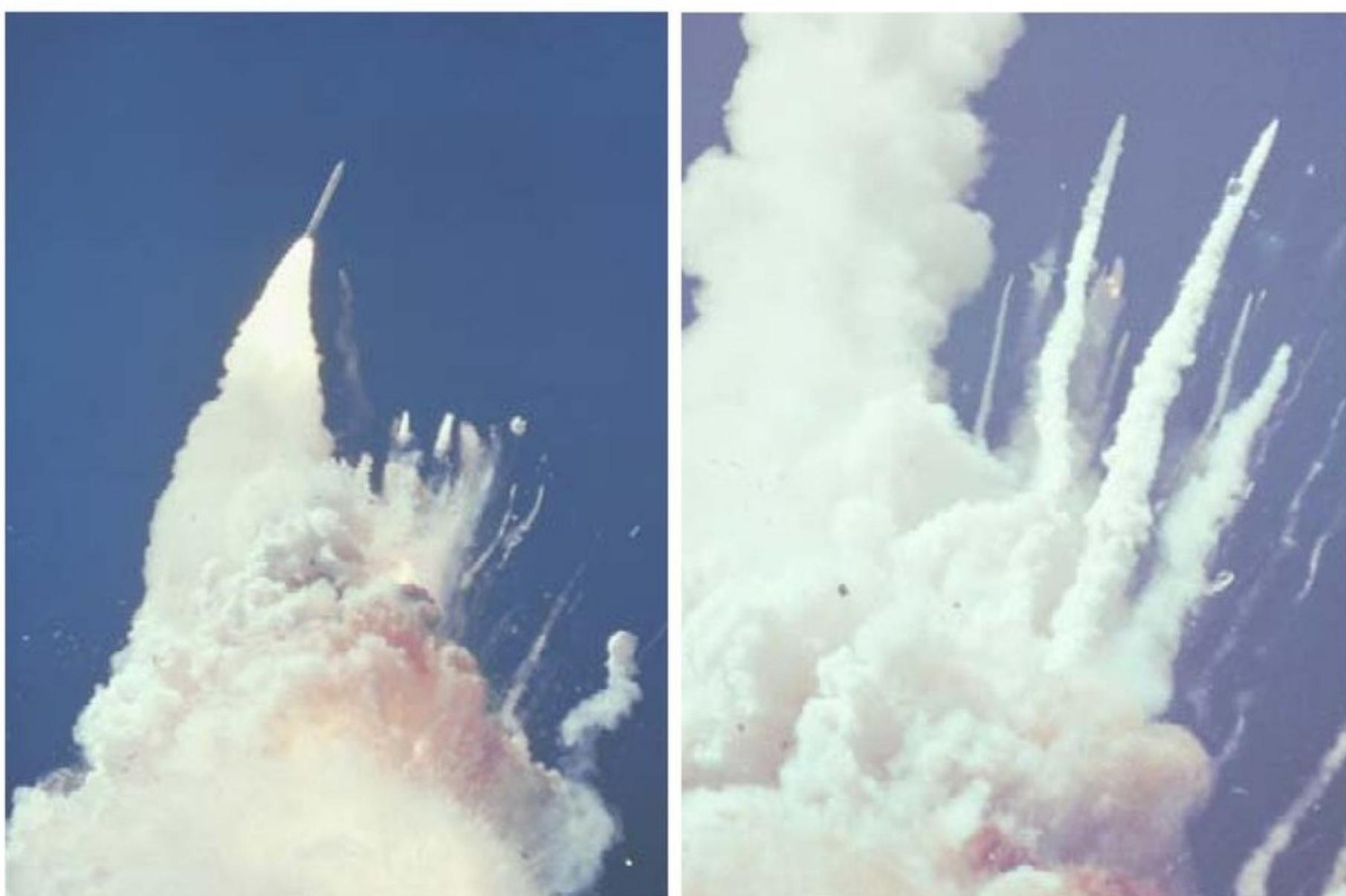
Judith Resnick



Christa McAuliffe

After so many successes, NASA decided that ordinary people could join the astronauts aboard a spaceship. The first one chosen was Christa McAuliffe. She was an elementary-school teacher. She planned to give lessons about space as she circled the Earth.

The *Challenger* was ready to launch on January 28, 1986. Its crew of seven included Judith Resnick and Christa McAuliffe. With the world watching on TV, the *Challenger* launched into space. But just over a minute after launch, there was trouble. The *Challenger* exploded. The sky filled with fire and a huge cloud of smoke. The shuttle and its crew were lost. The accident caused NASA to stop its space program for a while. They needed to make space travel safer.



The *Challenger* explosion



At a conference about women in space

## Sally as Educator

After this terrible accident, Sally Ride decided not to go on another shuttle trip. She kept working at NASA. Then she went to work teaching college science. Before her death in 2012, she also worked to teach young children about the wonders of space travel. She wrote books and taught classes to interest children in space. She continues to be a role model for girls who want to work in science.



Sally Ride was the first American woman to go into space. She helped teach us the wonders of space. She showed us that dreams can come true with courage and hard work.

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