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Bio4Kids: Christa McAuliffe (1948-1986)

Brief Outline

From more than 11,000 applications, Sharon Christa McAuliffe was chosen to become the first civilian in space in 1985. Christa, as her friends called her, was an extraordinary teacher with a dream of riding on the space shuttle. So when the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had a contest to take a teacher into space, McAuliffe jumped at the chance and applied.

Born Sharon Christa Corrigan on September 2, 1948, she graduated from Framingham State College in Framingham, Massachusetts, in 1970 and married Steven McAuliffe soon after. She began her career teaching American history and English to the junior high school students in Maryland.

McAuliffe and her family moved to New Hampshire and she began teaching high school in Concord. When NASA announced that they chose McAuliffe to go into space, the whole town rallied behind their teacher. McAuliffe saw the space mission as a chance to go on the ultimate field trip. She believed that by participating in the mission she could help students better understand space and how NASA works. She went to Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, for training in September 1985.

On January 28, 1986, McAuliffe's friends and family, including her two young children, anxiously watched and waited for the *Challenger* shuttle to take off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Shortly after liftoff, the shuttle exploded. Everyone aboard died, including McAuliffe. A shocked nation mourned their passing.

After her death, this courageous educator received the Congressional Space Medal of Honor. As a tribute to her memory, a planetarium in Concord has been named after her as well as an asteroid and a crater on the moon. The Christa Corrigan McAuliffe Center has been established at Framingham State College to support teachers and offers science and mathematics programs.

Related Websites

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