

## 35 Years Since Sally Rode...

### Description

**June 25, 2018:** On June 18, 1983, Sally Ride became the first American female astronaut, following in the space footsteps of Soviet cosmonauts Valentina Tereshkova (1963) and Svetlana Savitskaya (1982). Just three years later, 10 women had flown in space, and in early 1986, Judy Resnick (a classmate of Sally's) and Christa McAuliffe (the first teacher in space and who would have been #11) were the first female astronauts killed in the name of space exploration. According to [NASA's 2017 update](#), 59 women have flown in space, roughly 10% of the 560+ space travelers from around the world.

I was a young girl at the time of Sally's historic flight, and I don't recall much of the hype surrounding the launch. However, looking back and seeing how she and her five female astronaut classmates (and 29 male classmates) changed – in fact, [equalized and enabled](#) – spaceflight probably had some effect on my career trajectory. I do know that by working on the ultraviolet telescope mission, [STS-67](#), and meeting [Tammy Jernigan](#) (astronomer) and [Wendy Lawrence](#) (pilot), two astronauts who flew on that mission, my plans to do research in space science were solidified.

But before Sally Ride came the [Mercury 13](#), another set of women who completely inspired me when I learned their story later in my life. These 13 fearless female aviators were tested by Dr. Lovelace in 1959 to see if women also had “the right stuff” to fly in space. Given that Sally didn't fly until 1983, I'm sure you've figured out the result of this study, but I encourage you to read the story by [Martha Ackmann](#) (and/or see it now on [Netflix!](#)). Spoiler alert: These women were not invited to be a part of the space program. Just a few of them are still alive, and at least one of them [still wants to fly in space](#). I hope she does.

Thank you, Jerrie Cobb, Wally Funk, Sally Ride, Eileen Collins, Peggy Whitson, and all the other “first” females who helped pave the way toward space exploration! The first female astronauts were special: they were not asking to be included in the Space Shuttle program but instead [were being invited to be an integral part of a larger grand design for exploring space](#). And now that grand design includes me. But women have not yet set foot on the Moon, and we still have a [shortage of women in science and engineering fields](#) in general. We've come a long way (baby), but we still have a long way to go.

I'd love to hear thoughts from others in the comments below: How did these female astronauts influence your career? And who thinks it would be empowering for a woman to be the first person on Mars?

**Other links:**

Read more about [Sally Ride's legacy](#)

Listen to the [NPR interview with Lynn Sherr](#), Sally Ride's biographer

USPS announcement: [Sally Ride Forever Stamp](#)

Though studies of "[Why So Few?](#)" go back to at least 2010, here are a few recent references for women in STEM:

[2017 Update on Women in STEM](#)

[Growing the STEM Workforce](#)

**Category**

- Women in Science

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nzellner

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