

# Almost Astronauts: 13 Women Who Dared to Dream

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**Almost Astronauts: 13 Women Who Dared to Dream** Tanya Lee Stone

**They had the right stuff. They defied the prejudices of the time. And they blazed a trail for generations of women to follow.**

What does it take to be an astronaut? Excellence at flying, courage, intelligence, resistance to stress, top physical shape — any checklist would include these. But when America created NASA in 1958, there was another unspoken rule: you had to be a man. Here is the tale of thirteen women who proved that they were not only as tough as the toughest man but also brave enough to challenge the government. They were blocked by prejudice, jealousy, and the scrawled note of one of the most powerful men in Washington. But even though the Mercury 13 women did not make it into space, they did not lose, for their example empowered young women to take their place in the sky, piloting jets and commanding space capsules. ALMOST ASTRONAUTS is the story of thirteen true pioneers of the space age.

## Almost Astronauts: 13 Women Who Dared to Dream Details

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# **From Reader Review Almost Astronauts: 13 Women Who Dared to Dream for online ebook**

## **LauraR says**

This book is one that I have wanted to read for a long time as I have seen it on many award- winning literature lists. This biography tells the story of 13 young female astronauts, but specifically Jerrie Cobb. Jerrie always wanted to go into space and when the opportunity to take part in some of the same physical and psychological tests as those on the Mercury 7 came up, she jumped at the chance. Taking place in the late 1950's and early 1960's, the role of women during this time frame was very different than today. Women were not allowed to have the same jobs as men and most were never given the chance. This story explains how Randy Lovelace went against the wishes of NASA and tried his best to make the women's space program a reality. Unfortunately, regardless of the ability to prove that women would be a better addition to the space program, that reality was never made for these 13 women. This powerful story of equal rights and women's rights is told from the perspective of a women, which makes it more powerful.

A majority of the illustrations are black and white, which would make sense given the time period this book takes place in. The illustrations are also real photographs of what each of the women looked like and stills that represent an even in history. Reading this book on the kindle was great because I was able to expand the pictures and examine them more in depth.

A wonderful book to use with upper elementary students based on the heavy wording. However, the theme is one that can be applied to younger students and this book could be used a reference for teachers when explaining women's rights.

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## **Becky Soledad says**

When I was in 5th grade I wanted nothing more than to be an astronaut. I had no idea that this was a field that had only recently opened to women. I had watched "The Right Stuff" probably a hundred times with my father. I had no idea there were 13 women who took the same agonizing tests and passed them with flying colors. In fact on some tests they did BETTER than their male counterparts.

When I picked this book up I just wanted to look at it quickly so I could be ready to mention it in the book talks tomorrow. I couldn't stop and now two hours later I have finished. To say that this book opened my eyes is an understatement. I was completely blown away by the strength and grace these women have shown in the face of such blatant and staggering prejudice.

I enjoyed the sometimes conversational tone that Stone uses even though sometimes it made things a little awkward. I hope that it will keep students interest in a topic to which they might not have normally been drawn.

Jobs in science and technology are still not as readily open to women as they are to men but we have come so far thanks to women like the "Mercury 13" who are willing to stand up and fight for their dreams.

I still dream of being among the stars...maybe someday.

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## **Kate says**

I'm a 7th grade teacher, and my students can always tell when I'm reading an especially good book during our sustained silent reading time. I'm a reader who wears her literary heart on her sleeve and I'm not always quiet about it. The kids heard me gasping in shock as I read Suzanne Collins' *THE HUNGER GAMES*, laughing out loud at Erin Dionne's *MODELS DON'T EAT CHOCOLATE COOKIES*, and most recently, grumbling with indignation as I read Tanya Lee Stone's latest work of nonfiction for middle grade readers, *ALMOST ASTRONAUTS: 13 WOMEN WHO DARED TO DREAM*.

Known informally as the Mercury 13, these women were the best of the best: pilots who had earned their wings and wanted more. They fought to prove they were just as qualified to be astronauts as the men being trained by NASA, and they had test data to support that argument. *ALMOST ASTRONAUTS* tells the story of why they never made it into space - a story that serves as a shocking reminder of how deeply ingrained sexism was in American society in the early 1960s.

This book is loaded with compelling details, from vivid descriptions of the testing and training these women endured to media reports from the time period that illustrate just the kind of bias that kept the women out of space in the end. Modern students reading this account will be intrigued by the historical and scientific details, outraged at the attitudes of the powerful people who put up roadblocks for the women who might have been America's first female astronauts, and inspired by the manner in which these women paved the way for others.

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## **Amanda Healy says**

The book "Almost Astronauts: 13 Women Who Dared to Dream" is a fascinating book about women's struggles at accomplishing their dreams in a male dominating society. Women were not allowed rights into space until 1978, and author Tanya Lee Stone really addresses the process and struggles towards becoming an astronaut. Stone does an admirable job of compiling her facts and figures and of profiling these strong and adventurous women who dared to dream. Stone also used black and white photographs throughout the book to help readers further picture the text. As the book progressed, I found it really interesting that she transferred into full color photos. The use of the images to tell the story also helped me get a better perspective of the time period and age. This book also really helped establish gender privileges, prejudices and challenges between men and women. Knowing that this book is a nonfiction book, and has real life events and stories involved, I would recommend this book to any child age 10+. It is a highly informative book and I believe it would be very helpful in a literature-history cross analysis class. It gave me a new insight to women's rights and struggles, and would be a great addition to any library. I would highly recommend it also for those interested in women's history and struggles through the 1900's.

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## **Brandy says**

In 1959, pictures appeared in newspapers and magazines showing the first seven Americans who would explore space. All of them were men. They'd been tested in military positions and had been through a battery of physical and psychological testing. Men were braver, stronger. But were they, really? Randolph Lovelace, the doctor who had tested the men, didn't think so. Lovelace believed that women could be every bit as good

as men as astronauts, with the added bonus that women are smaller and lighter and would therefore save NASA huge amounts of money in lifting them into space. Lovelace started with one woman, Betty Skelton, who passed the same tests the men had been through but politically was never considered a real possibility. Later she recruited Jerrie Cobb, a pilot with more than 7,000 flight hours under her belt, and subjected her to all of the same tests as the men. Jerrie passed not only with high marks, but with far less complaining than the men. 12 other women followed in Jerrie's footsteps, but despite their high scores both physically and mentally, they were not permitted to become astronauts. Reasons ranged from sexism to racism to "NASA would have to redesign suits to fit you."

Stone's prose is clear and engaging, detailing the entirety of the fight to get women into the space program. The tone is a little incredulous at times (as in, "can you *believe* what those men thought?") but that could just be my own feminist outrage projected into the writing. The book isn't about the space program, exactly, but about the social and political climate that kept the women out. An excellent choice for budding girl scientists, but also a good choice for boys interested in the history of the space program, because this is a major element of it that doesn't get a lot of press otherwise.

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### **Luann says**

Before reading this, I had not known very many details about the 13 women who wanted to be astronauts but were denied. I was so impressed that these women passed all the tests the men did and in many cases did much better. It's a shame that none of them ever got to go into space!

I enjoyed reading this, but at the same time I wondered if it is fair to judge people's actions in the past by today's standards. I'm not saying that these ladies were treated fairly by any means, but, for example, I would like to know how John Glenn feels now about his actions and words then.

This won the Sibert Medal in 2010.

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### **Mrs. Romaniuk says**

Almost Astronauts: 13 Women Who Dared to Dream by Tanya Lee Stone is an incredible book. It tells the story of thirteen women and their quest to go into space in the 1950s. The few who were on the women's side argued that the costs would be considerably smaller to send women into space because they weighed less and required less oxygen. They also compared themselves to Russia, which was training a woman to send into space during that time. However, they faced numerous obstacles and were truly "ahead of their time."

#### Authority:

The book has a long Bibliography list and gives credit for all the included photographs. It is clear that the author did her research well.

#### Accuracy:

There is no question about the accuracy of this book. It won the Robert F. Sibert award and was recommended by the curator of the National Air Space Museum as a worthy book she was waiting to be published that she could finally suggest to young adults. It is meticulously researched and includes a great

description of the author's writing process: coming up with the idea, researching, rewriting, publishing companies asking her to drastically change her first draft. It is moving and infuriating at times, telling a complex story in a simple, straight forward way.

#### Appropriateness:

To prove that women were just as good as men, the thirteen women were put through rigorous testing. The book offers a stunning overview of some of these tests: the injection of freezing water into the ears, drinking radioactive water, having three feet of rubber snaked down their throats, etc. The most intense was the water isolation bunker which interestingly enough the men were not subjected to. Young adults will be very engaged by the descriptions and pictures.

#### Literary Artistry:

Stone offers a fascinating exploration of gender roles during this time and how these particular women were considered abnormal and misfits who could not fit into natural roles of motherhood, having dinner on the table for their husbands when they came home, etc. The media and most male astronauts didn't help. The women were the topic of many degrading jokes, cartoons, and court testimonies that was meant to keep them in their place: at home. As the story of the thirteen women is told, the author offers a glimpse of how popular media and what shows were on television during that time. Furthermore, Stone's first intention was to have the book include poetry she wrote about each one of the women but her editor advised her against this. However, she has these poems available online for those who are interested in further study of the topic.

#### Attractiveness:

The book is filled with engaging pictures, real documents, and an appealing layout, making the reader flip to the next page. As the book progresses, the photographs that appear are in color and we finally see how the thirteen women opened doors for other women and minorities to explore space years later. These women were ahead of their time and the book tells this story that most individuals and young adults do not know.

Overall, this text is a great way for teens to explore the history of the struggle for equality but also take a critical look into how far the women's rights battle has come. After all, even today, women still earn less than men do.

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### **Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says**

Tanya Lee Stone did a great job of taking this complex political situation and making it intelligible for young readers. I really had no idea how complex it was until I read this book. These 13 women were passing the astronaut training tests with more than flying colors, but were never allowed to complete the tests due to simple male prejudice. These women were trying to overcome a deep-seated attitude toward women that pervaded society at the time. It makes me realize how far we've come today. I was also surprised to hear of the mean-spirited undermining of these women by Jackie Cochran, about whom, up until now, I'd only read good things.

Stone cleverly uses illustrations to emphasize how much better the situation is today. Throughout the chapters on the 13 women and the hearing that finally ended their quest, the illustrations were all in black and white. As soon as she starts talking about today's female astronauts, the illustrations change to color. A subtle but telling statement.

I highly recommend this book to all aspiring astronauts, male or female, and to anyone else who wants a better understanding of the America's astronaut program.

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### **Kylie Svoboda says**

Audience: 4-6th girls

Appeal: This book would appeal to perhaps the girls who need a role model in their life or motivation that they can do great adventurous things. The book breaks the typical girl stereotype and empowers women to follow their dreams and fight for what they believe in.

Award NCTE Orbis Pictus Award

### **FOR ME E-BOOK**

I choose an E-Book from the website Pebble Go. I myself love killer whales and so I read the Killer Whales book under Animals then mammals and then lastly there is a killer whale prompt to read about.

Audience: pre k-2

Appeal: The book as talked about in class is a "high/low book" so high interest level but low reading level.

Kids love learning about huge ocean creatures and how much they eat.

Award: NA

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### **Alison says**

1.) John Glenn is a terrible person.

2.) Jackie Cochran is also a terrible person who should never be allowed to represent women because she betrayed the advancement of women when she testified against Jerrie Cobb and the other women of "Mercury 13."

3.) President, then Vice President, Lyndon B. Johnson is a terrible person and although I never had one before he is now my Least Favorite President. When presented with the ideas of women and minorities going into space his only response was "Let's stop this now!" If only John F. Kennedy were never assassinated, the women of Mercury 13 may have been allowed to actually pilot a spacecraft in the '70s, not the late '90s. Also, the U.S. would have had the first woman in space considering Russia's first woman in space just sat in the cockpit, and even told Jerrie Cobb that she was her inspiration. Your inspiration is a woman who exceeded all of the tests to be an astronaut that men took, but then was never allowed to even sit in on a mission to space let alone pilot a spacecraft. Nice.

4.) NASA should be ashamed.

I am now going to research how to become an astronaut. But you should read this book if you like space or women's rights, or basically learning about events in history that you have never heard of before a la Devil in the White City. It will amaze, astound, inspire and infuriate you, in a good way.

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## **Jennifer Wardrip says**

Reviewed by Candace Cunard for TeensReadToo.com

When I was ten, I wanted to be an astronaut. I checked out books from my local library, I worked hard in my science classes, I visited the Kennedy Space Center, and I read a lot of science fiction so that if I ever ran into aliens on my mission to Mars, I'd be prepared. Reading this book made me realize how lucky I was to have grown up in an atmosphere where the abilities of women were respected more or less regardless of their gender. The same year I turned ten, Eileen Collins became the first woman to pilot a space shuttle.

But back in the 1960s, aspiring women had no such role models; if they wanted young girls to understand that it was possible for women to perform just as well as men, they would have to become the models for future generations. In this book, Stone tells the story of the "Mercury 13," a group of thirteen women who fought tooth and nail for entrance into the space program decades before NASA let any women in. The combination of clear prose, firm social and historical grounding, and the detail-oriented nature of this account had me hooked from the beginning, opening a window into the history of women in space.

Stone portrays her facts convincingly, utilizing quotes from contemporary media sources like newspapers and magazines along with first-person narratives from the women involved and historical photographs. This combination of sources makes the experience of reading this book visceral, something you feel in your gut. This was particularly evident to me in the chapters where Stone describes in a play-by-play manner the physical and psychological tests that the Mercury 13 underwent in order to prove that they were just as capable as men. For a moment, I felt like I was in that isolation tank, or battling with my first experience of zero-gravity.

Throughout my reading, my emotions oscillated between shock at the unbelievable attitudes toward women that prevented the Mercury 13 from ever seeing space and horror at the realization that these events had occurred less than fifty years ago and are still supported to this day by a vocal minority. Although at times it was difficult even to imagine the level of discrimination that these women faced, Stone makes it quite clear that these women had the kind of boldness and courage borne of intelligence and self-respect that allowed them to continue fighting against these obstacles.

ALMOST ASTRONAUTS tells a story of courage against the odds, but also of a desire to expand beyond horizons, from the boundary of Earth's atmosphere to the assumed boundaries between genders. It makes a good source for a research report, but the clean and clear writing style makes it much more interesting and easy to follow than the average non-fiction work. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in space and the people allowed to go there.

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## **Sesana says**

Every self-respecting space nut should know the story of the "Mercury 13". These women took the same tests the much more famous Mercury 7 astronauts took, and sometimes even harder tests, and even outperformed them in some cases. But they never saw space, because society at large, not to mention the decision makers in NASA and Washington, could not accept a woman as a hero for all, in any roll other than wife or mother. Worse, if they let women be astronauts, they'll have to let blacks be astronauts, too. It can be



a hard read, both for the casual, pervasive sexism and for the details of the grueling testing process. The determination of the Mercury 13 is inspiring, though, and they're individually very interesting people. There are lots of quality photos, many of which are from the testing process. It's a great read, even an essential one, if you have any amount of interest in space exploration.

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### **Natalie Moreland says**

American "hero" John Glenn on why women shouldn't be astronauts: "The men go off and fight the wars and fly the airplanes and come back and help design and build and test them. The fact that women are not in this field is a fact of our social order."

Also, when I was 9 years old, the first female pilot of a space shuttle, Eileen Collins, took flight. This book is the first I've heard of her. Seriously, why did no one tell me at the time? It should have been a big deal.

#whyweneedfeminism

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### **Edward Sullivan says**

Stone tells the fascinating, dramatic true story of the "Mercury 13," a group of women aviators who proved to be as courageous, intelligent, and fit as any man, but were nonetheless barred from NASA's astronaut program because of their gender. When NASA was created in 1958 and the astronaut training program established, visionaries like Randolph Lovelace, the physician who tested the Mercury 7 astronauts, were determined to prove women as capable as men to meet the demands of space travel. At the center of the story is Jerrie Cobb, a veteran pilot who successfully completed every test given to male astronauts. Through the tests of Cobb and others, Lovelace proved women had the "right stuff," but these findings were not enough to overcome the prevailing prejudices of the time. It took 20 years before NASA admitted women into the astronaut program. Stone poignantly chronicles how the efforts of Cobb and her colleagues were ridiculed and thwarted by everyone from Vice-President Lyndon Johnson to Mercury astronauts Scott Carpenter and John Glenn. In a bitter irony, their campaign was also sabotaged out of jealousy and spite by Jackie Cochran, a highly respected, trailblazing female pilot. Stone offers great insight into how deeply ingrained sexism was in American society and its institutions. Handsomely illustrated with photographs, this empowering story will leave readers inspired.

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### **Pamela says**

"It was 1961 when they took their shot at being astronauts. Back then, women weren't allowed to rent a car or take out a loan from the bank without a man's signature; they could not play on a professional sports team at all. They couldn't report the news on television or run in a city marathon or serve as police officers. They weren't allowed to fly jets, either . . . None of that kept these women from trying to be astronauts. They were too determined."

Tanya Lee Stone has written some wonderfully insightful, non-fiction books utilizing language geared towards middle-grade/young-adult readers. As an adult, I find her topic choices and writing style, despite the

simplistic language and spartan depth, delightfully engaging; oftentimes leading me to related topics and/or websites and/or suggested books for further exploration.

Almost Astronauts: 13 Women Who Dared to Dream exemplifies why I enjoy Stone's writing and topic choices. This ultra-fascinating book, filled with a bevy of captivating photographs, brings to light the little-known story of the women who gruelingly tested and exceedingly qualified - unofficially - for inclusion into NASA's space program during the nineteen-sixties. Stone interweaves brief bios of each woman, going into greater detail with key figures (for various reasons) such as: Oklahoma native Jerri Cobb.

"Slender, with sky-blue eyes, twenty-eight-year-old Jerri Cobb had been flying airplanes since she was twelve . . . logged more than 7,0000 hours in the air - far more than John Glenn's 5,000 hours and Scott Carpenter's 2,900 hours. She had ferried military aircraft all over the world and set the world altitude record, as well as a world light-plane speed plane record . . . All she had ever wanted was to keep going higher, faster, farther."

The story of how these brave and deserving young women fought to be included in the space program is bittersweet, finely-researched and well-written. And told quite respectably. Not to mention, the photographs are absolutely fabulous!!! Both in quality and quantity. I'm such a visual-arts, visual-enhancement enthusiast; especially when it comes to history and many non-fiction topics. Compelling photographs and lively formatting are also advantageous for captivating middle-grade readers who often have fickle attention spans. Editorial cartoons, advertisements, and other graphic inclusions also shed light on the social mood of the times.

Big round of applause to all those responsible for graphic-content and layout.

In addition to insight into these pioneering women's accomplishments, and the many great photographs, Stone includes information about women pilots from the nineteen-twenties up to the publication date. As well as inroads of science and technology across the board. The advancements in these fields by men and women are truly mind boggling.

Much has been gained, with still more to go. Stone explains in palatable terms, the controversial and volatile pulse of the sixties. Social norms and expectations were changing, and not everyone approved. Many misnomers about what women could and couldn't accomplish were being challenged. As were political ideologies. In which I commend Stone for remaining primarily objective.

A highly-recommendable read for ages nine to ninety-nine.

Five \*\*\*\*\* Strong Role Models \*\*\*\*\* Stars

Other books related to flying and/or strong role models:

Courage Has No Color: The True Story of the Triple Nickles, America's First Black Paratroopers

Women Heroes of World War II: 26 Stories of Espionage, Sabotage, Resistance, and Rescue

The Powder Puff Derby of 1929: The First All Women's Transcontinental Air Race

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