

Generations of STEM: Valentina Tereshkova

First Woman in Space

Valentina was born in Russia and worked in a tire factory and then a textile factory while completing correspondence courses from a technical school. At age 22, she made her first amateur parachute jump and was an avid skydiver.

Her skill as a parachutist gained her entry into the Soviet Space program. She was selected from a pool of 400 candidates, and trained with five other women to withstand the rigors of a rocket launch. In 1963 she was launched into orbit, spending 71 hours and 48 orbits before ejecting at 20,000 feet and parachuting back to earth. She was instantly famous, and went on 42 different trips abroad between 1963 and 1970.

Valentina wanted to continue her career as a cosmonaut and engineer, but was encouraged to instead marry a fellow cosmonaut and be politically active in Russia. She earned a doctorate in aeronautical engineering and remained an instructor at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center. No women cosmonauts entered space again until the 1982 and in the US with Sally Ride in 1983. There is a crater on the far side of the moon named after her.



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