

The Road to NASA

In 1977, Mae graduated from Stanford with a Bachelor of Science degree. Now she had to choose whether to pursue a career in science or professional dance. She decided to study medicine and was accepted to Cornell University Medical College. While she was there, she decided she wanted to learn more about the world. She went to Cuba and Kenya to continue her studies. She also worked at a **refugee camp** in Thailand.



Dr. Mae

In 1981, Mae received her medical degree and began work as a doctor. She then traveled to West Africa as a medical officer with the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps is an organization that sends volunteers to underdeveloped countries to help with health, education, industry, and farming. Mae spent several years doing research in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

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Life is full of adventures. Some of them will be more demanding than others, but they all teach us about the world and ourselves along the way. Learn from your experiences—they shape who you become.

—Mae Jemison, *Black History Month: Mae Jemison*, Persephone Magazine, 2011.

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Dr. Jemison in her office in Los Angeles. She worked as a doctor in the U.S. before joining the Peace Corps in Africa.

Becoming an Astronaut

Mae was always looking for new challenges. So in 1987, she decided to apply to NASA's astronaut training program. Almost 200 people applied to the program. Mae was one of only 15 people chosen. She was the first female African American to be accepted. She thanks people like Morgan Watson and Walter Applewhite with helping to break down racial barriers at NASA. They were some of the first African American scientists to work at NASA several decades earlier.



The Johnson Space Center is in Houston, Texas. It is the main center for space flight training and research in America.

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I called down to Johnson Space Center. I said I would like an application to be an astronaut. They didn't laugh!

—Mae Jemison. PBS: *The Secret Life of Scientists and Engineers, I Wanted to Go Into Space* interview, 2016.

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NASA and Equal Rights

Dr. Jemison is proud of NASA's role in advancing equal rights for women and people of all races. As NASA was building its space program in the 1960s it hired the best scientists in the country, regardless of their race or gender. NASA took a leading role to give people of all races the same rights and opportunities for careers. This helped lead the way for Mae.

Dr. Mae Jemison becomes the first African American female astronaut in 1991.



Mae in Space

After more than a year of training, Mae's lifelong dream of traveling to space finally came true. In September 1992, she became the first African American woman in space. She joined six other astronauts aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour's STS-47 Spacelab-J mission. Mae conducted scientific experiments on weightlessness and motion sickness on the space shuttle's crew. The mission lasted eight days and Mae logged over three million miles orbiting Earth. She even danced while in space!



A NASA scientist performs tests on Mae's space suit in preparation for the Spacelab-J mission on the Space Shuttle Endeavour.



Doctors Jan Davis and Mae Jemison conduct gravity tests aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour.

Mae's Space Kit

As Mae prepared for space travel, she felt it was important to take things into space that represented her African American heritage. When she was growing up, the achievements of African American people weren't always celebrated. To change this, she packed a poster of Judith Jamison, an African American ballet dancer; a Bundu statue from the women's society in West Africa; and a flag from Alpha Kappa Alpha—the oldest African American women's sorority, or organization of female college students, in the United States. This was Mae's way of celebrating her achievement as an African American female and sharing it with others.



Advancing Science and Space Exploration



The Jemison Group consults on the design and implementation of solar power systems like these in Africa.

Science and Society

In 1993, Dr. Jemison left the NASA program. She created the Jemison Group in 1994 to continue her work using science in our everyday lives. Her company researches, develops, and markets technologies to help improve the lives of people around the world. One of the group's projects consults on the design and installation of solar power systems in developing countries. Another project uses satellite-based **telecommunications** to help deliver health care in remote areas of Africa. They also work to develop medical products using NASA technology.

Excellence in Education

Mae, along with her brother and sister, created the Dorothy Jemison Foundation for Excellence in honor of their mother Dorothy Jemison. Dorothy always inspired a high standard for personal excellence in Mae and always pushed Mae to become better. This organization develops teaching materials and programs to improve education around the world. Its aim is to inspire individuals to achieve excellence as they reach for their personal goals. Mae believes that each person can—and should—be expected to make a unique contribution to society.



Dr. Jemison serves as Bayer Corporation's national science literacy advocate.

Space Camp

As part of the Dorothy Jemison Foundation for Excellence, Mae created The Earth We Share international space camp. It brings students from the ages of 12 to 16 together from around the world to solve global problems. They discuss issues such as, "How many people can Earth hold?" or "Should we try to develop a weather machine?" Students learn how science connects to everyday life. They also learn what kinds of careers are available in science and technology, and how their own skills and interests might fit in these jobs.



Along with her international space camp program, Mae works with other camps across America to help students learn science.

Space cam

Many kids love science and have a natural curiosity about the world. They ask questions such as, "Why is the sky blue?" and "Why do I need to breathe?" Mae believes we need to do a better job to keep students interested in science as they grow up because science is so important to the health of our planet. It shapes the way we grow our food, the kinds of cars we drive, and the homes we live in. By keeping students engaged with science, we will improve their science literacy, or knowledge and ability. This will help them make better decisions as we work to improve life on Earth.

? THINK ABOUT IT

Why is science literacy so important to Dr. Jemison?



Mae Jemison helps a teenage hospital patient conduct a science experiment.

100 Year Starship Project

Dr. Jemison created the 100 Year Starship project to plan the next steps of **interstellar** travel. She hopes to get humans to travel beyond our solar system in the next 100 years and to use research to improve the quality of life on Earth. In April 2016, Mae was part of a team of scientists and businesspeople that announced the Breakthrough Starshot Project. This project aims to send many tiny robotic spacecraft to the nearest star system to Earth to collect data. New technology will need to be developed to help the spacecraft travel up to 100 million miles per hour (160 million kilometers per hour). This speed would get them to the star system in just 20 years, rather than 78,000 years using current technology.



Dr. Jemison speaks at the "Starshot" project press conference in New York.

What's Next?

Daring and accomplished, Mae Jemison is one of the most admired women in the world. She has served on numerous boards and committees and has won countless honors and awards, including earning a place in the National Women's Hall of Fame and International Space Hall of Fame. She has become a doctor, scientist, professor, astronaut, TV star, and role model. It's hard to say what great things Mae will accomplish next—the sky's the limit!

Mae became the first real astronaut ever to appear on the TV series Star Trek: The Next Generation. She is shown here at the world premiere of the movie Star Trek: Nemesis.

