

Valentina Tereshkova

Valentina Vladimirovna Tereshkova is a retired Russian **cosmonaut** who was the first woman to fly in space. On 16th June 1963, she piloted the spacecraft Vostok 6, orbiting Earth 48 times over a period of almost three days before returning home.

After being selected from more than 400 others, Valentina's mission was mainly to find out how the female body reacted to spaceflight. She also controlled the spacecraft, kept a flight log and took some incredible photographs of Earth from space. Some of these were used to identify aerosol layers within Earth's atmosphere, helping scientists to understand the effects of global warming.

Early Life

A daughter of **Belarussian** parents, it wasn't immediately obvious that Valentina would grow up to be such a **pioneering** space explorer. Born in central Russia, Valentina grew up in a village called Maslennikovo. Her father was a tractor driver and an army tank leader who fought in the Second World War, while her mother worked in a textile plant. Having started school aged eight, Valentina left when she was just 16 as she had discovered her passion for skydiving.

In 1959, while working in a local factory as a textile worker, Valentina made her first jump. She was 22 and it was her skill as a skydiver that eventually led to her being picked as a cosmonaut.

Space Training

Valentina's involvement in politics brought her to the attention of the **Soviet** Space Programme. Being such a skilful skydiver and having joined the Young **Communist** League when she was younger – as well as having a war hero as a father – Valentina was seen as the ideal candidate to join the cosmonaut corps.

Five women were picked in total but only one of them was needed for the spaceflight. It was up to Valentina to prove that she was the one they wanted.

The training was intense, with the candidates undertaking many physical and mental tests. This included months of weightless flights, periods in isolation and lessons in rocket theory and spacecraft engineering. They also undertook 120 parachute jumps and trained in MiG-15UTI jet fighters. Training concluded with exams and, in 1962, Valentina passed with two of the other candidates, Irina Solovyova and Valentina Ponomaryova.

The State Space Commission nominated Valentina as the Vostok 6 pilot a month before the flight and, on 16th June 1963, Vostok 6 was ready for launch. After being sealed inside the Vostok capsule for a two-hour countdown, the spacecraft launched into the atmosphere. The mission went without fault and, within minutes, Valentina had become the first woman in space.

The Flight

Being confined to such a small space, Valentina felt cramped and sick for the majority of the flight but managed to survive the three days until her return.

Quick Facts

Known for: First woman in space

Nationality: Russian

Date of birth: 6th March 1937

Place of birth: Bolshoye Maslennikovo, Central Russia

Occupation: Cosmonaut, politician, engineer

Spacecraft: Vostok 6

Space time: 2 days, 22 hrs and 50 mins

Legacy

Out of the five female candidates that trained to become a cosmonaut, only Valentina actually made it in to space and it took 19 years for anyone to follow in her footsteps. In 1982, Svetlana Savitskaya joined Valentina in the record books when she became the second woman in space aboard Soyuz T-7.

During her life, Valentina married twice. Her first husband, Andriyan Nikolayev, was also a cosmonaut and, in 1964, they had a daughter, Elena. Elena was the first person alive whose parents have both travelled in space!

As well as being a cosmonaut, Valentina was an engineer and politician during her working life. Now retired, she remains an inspiration not only to women but to men, budding space travellers and scientists throughout the world.

Awards

- Hero of the Soviet Union
- Order 'For Merit to the Fatherland'
- Order of Lenin
- Order of the October Revolution
- Order of Alexander Nevsky
- Order of Honour
- Order of Friendship

Glossary

Belarussian: A native of the country Belarus.

Communist: A political point of view with the belief that everything should be shared equally.

cosmonaut: A Russian astronaut.

pioneering: Involving new ideas.

Soviet: From a group of countries which used to be called the Soviet Union.

Questions

1. Who was Valentina Tereskova and what was she the first to do?
2. Pretend you are Valentina Tereshkova and you are aboard Vostok 6 orbiting the Earth. What might you write down in your log book?
3. **It wasn't immediately obvious that Valentina would grow up to be such a pioneering space explorer.** From what you have read in the text, why do you think this was?
4. Why is **pioneering** a good word to describe Valentina?
5. What made Valentina the ideal candidate to join the Cosmonaut Corps?
Tick **three**.
 - her political views
 - who her parents were
 - her piloting skills
 - her photography skills
 - her skydiving skills
6. How long did Valentina's space flight last for?
7. If Valentina had any regrets about the space flight what do you think they may have been? Explain why you think this.
8. **Now retired, she remains an inspiration not only to women but to men, budding space travellers and scientists throughout the world.** Why do you think Valentina remains an inspiration to both women and men?