

Wally Funk

Mary Wallace Funk (also known as Wally Funk) is an American aviator, who has set many records in her lifetime in her career in aviation and space travel. She was recognised as 'The Most Outstanding Women in America' in 1965 and is now also the oldest person to have travelled to space, having travelled there at 82 years old. Read on to find out more about Wally's impressive life and achievements.

Wally Funk was born on 1st February 1939 in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Her mother and father owned a shop. From a very young age, she was fascinated by planes and even had her first trip to see a plane when she was only one year old. At the age of seven, she was interested in the mechanics of planes and began building them out of wood. She had her first actual flying lesson when she was nine.

Early Life



Education



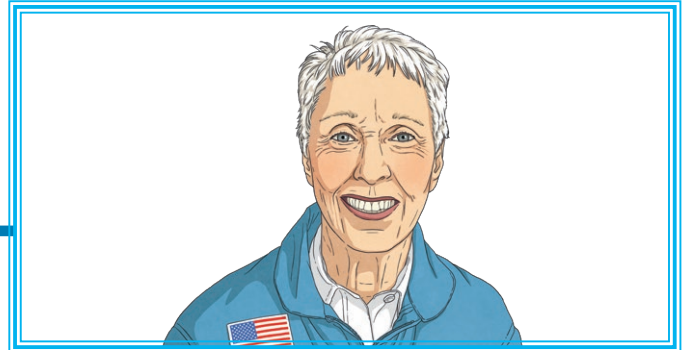
At school, Funk was not allowed to take the courses that she wanted because she was a girl, which she thought was very unfair. Consequently, she left early and went to Stephen's College instead. She graduated in 1958 with her pilot's licence and an art degree. After that, she studied at Oklahoma State University. She earned lots of aviation awards, including the Outstanding Female Pilot award.



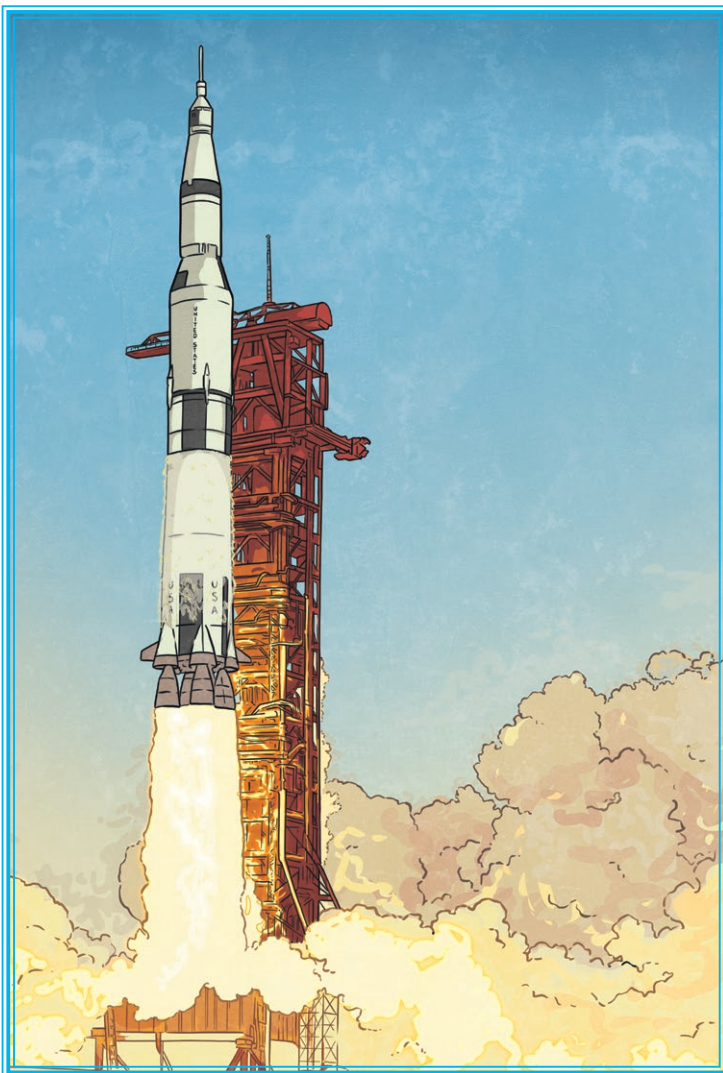
Wally Funk

When she was only 20 years old, she became a professional aviator in Oklahoma - she was the first female flight instructor at a US military base. In 1971, she became the first female Flight Inspector and in 1974, she became the first female Air Safety Investigator. She also flew in lots of air races and helped to train hundreds of pilots.

Career



Space



In February 1961, Wally volunteered to be part of the 'Women in Space' programme. People had thought that women would not be able to complete the tough training programme. 13 women graduated from the training (the Mercury 13); some of them scored better than the men. Funk was the youngest of these as she was only 21. Unfortunately, the programme was cancelled so they never got to space.

Despite not going to space when she was younger, she set a record in 2021 as the oldest person in space at the age of 82. When she got back, she said, "I can hardly wait to go again!"

Wally Funk has had many 'firsts' in her life and is a great role model for women in stereotypically 'male' careers. She has published a memoir, starred in a film about her life and flown over 18,600 hours in her lifetime.



1. In which year did Wally win 'The Most Outstanding Women in America' award?

2. How do you think the nine-year-old Wally felt when she had her first flying lesson?

3. Which adverb is used to link cause and effect in the 3rd paragraph?

4. Why did Wally join Stephen's College?

5. Wally claimed three firsts during her career. List them below:

a.

b.

c.

6. How do you think the men she trained felt, considering this was back in the 1970s?

7. How old was Wally when she became Flight Inspector?

8. Why did Wally not get to go to space as part of the Mercury 13?

9. In what year did Wally set the record for oldest person in space?

10. Would you like to go to space? Explain your reasons.

1. In which year did Wally win 'The Most Outstanding Women in America' award?

1965

2. How do you think the nine-year-old Wally felt when she had her first flying lesson?

Various answers which include emotions such as nervous, excited etc.

3. Which adverb is used to link cause and effect in the 3rd paragraph?

consequently

4. Why did Wally join Stephen's College?

Her previous school wouldn't let her study the subjects she liked.

5. Wally claimed three firsts during her career. List them below:

a. first female flight instructor

b. first female Flight Inspector

c. first female Air Safety Investigator

6. How do you think the men she trained felt, considering this was back in the 1970s?

Own answer, but must take into consideration that this was the first time a woman had ever done the job.

7. How old was Wally when she became Flight Inspector?

35 years old

8. Why did Wally not get to go to space as part of the Mercury 13?

They cancelled the programme.

9. In what year did Wally set the record for oldest person in space?

2021

10. Would you like to go to space? Explain your reasons.

Own answer, but must explain the reason they feel like this.

***Disclaimer:** We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. As far as possible, the contents of this resource are reflective of current professional research. However, please be aware that every child is different and information can quickly become out of date. The information given here is intended for general guidance purposes only and may not apply to your specific situation.