

# The Six: The Untold Story of America's First Women Astronauts

by Loren Grush

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## About the Book

In the bestselling tradition of **HIDDEN FIGURES** and **CODE GIRLS**, the remarkable true story of America's first women astronauts --- six extraordinary women, each making history going to orbit aboard NASA's Space Shuttle.

When NASA sent astronauts to the moon in the 1960s and 1970s, the agency excluded women from the corps, arguing that only military test pilots --- a group then made up exclusively of men --- had the right stuff. It was an era in which women were steered away from jobs in science and deemed unqualified for space flight. Eventually, though, NASA recognized its blunder and opened the application process to a wider array of hopefuls, regardless of race or gender. From a candidate pool of 8,000, six elite women were selected in 1978: Sally Ride, Judy Resnik, Anna Fisher, Kathy Sullivan, Shannon Lucid and Rhea Seddon.

In **THE SIX**, acclaimed journalist Loren Grush shows these brilliant and courageous women enduring claustrophobic --- and sometimes deeply sexist --- media attention, undergoing rigorous survival training, and preparing for years to take multi-million-dollar payloads into orbit. Together, the Six helped build the tools that made the space program run. One of the group, Judy Resnik, sacrificed her life when the space shuttle *Challenger* exploded at 46,000 feet. Everyone knows of Sally Ride's history-making first space ride, but each of the Six would make their mark.

## Discussion Guide

1. Each of the Six blazed a different path to become an astronaut. Which path did you find the most interesting? Which was the most unlikely?
2. The Six had to endure many difficult, tedious and at times seemingly random trials in their preparation to become

astronauts --- everything from mental math to flying fighter jets. Which trials were the most interesting or surprising to you? What would you have struggled with?

3. The story of the Six is filled with rich side characters, including Nichelle Nichols, Jerrie Cobb, George Abbey, Carolyn Huntoon, Bob Crippen and so many more. Who stuck out to you as endearing? Who added the most to your personal experience with this book?

4. How did you feel reading about the sexism the Six faced? Did any instances of sexism particularly surprise or anger you?

5. At the July 1962 House subcommittee hearings on qualifications for astronauts, astronaut John Glenn said, "Let me preface my remarks by one statement: I am not 'anti' any particular group. I'm just pro-space." Discuss the parallels with cultural discourse today. How much do you agree with this statement?

6. A lot has changed since the era of the Six --- but maybe not as much as we thought. What is the same and what is different about attitudes surrounding representation and diversity in the 1970s and '80s versus now?

7. For Americans especially, the *Challenger* explosion was one of the most significant events of the 20th century. How did the knowledge of Judy Resnik's death shape your reading experience? How did the context of the *Challenger* explosion influence what you took away from the other missions, which were generally celebratory occasions?

## Author Bio

Loren Grush is a reporter for *Bloomberg News* specializing in all things space. Previously, she was a senior science reporter for the technology news website *The Verge* and hosted the online show "Space Craft," which took her across the country to explore what it takes to train for space. The daughter of two NASA engineers, Grush grew up surrounded by astronauts and Space Shuttles. She has also been published in *The New York Times*, *Popular Science* and *Nautilus* magazine, and has appeared on several TV networks as an expert commentator.

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**Publication Date:** September 12, 2023

**Genres:** History, Nonfiction

**Hardcover:** 432 pages

**Publisher:** Scribner

**ISBN-10:** 1982172800

**ISBN-13:** 9781982172800