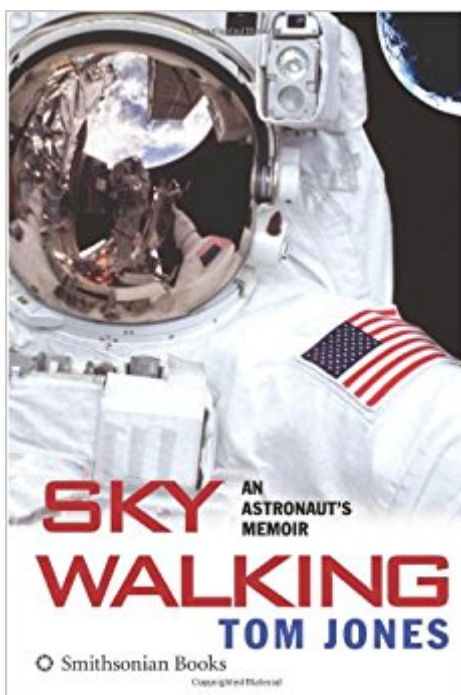


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Sky Walking: An Astronaut's Memoir



Synopsis

A gripping first-hand account of life in space and the making of an astronaut. What is it like to fly the space shuttle and work on and in the International Space Station? Veteran NASA astronaut Tom Jones is uniquely qualified to give the details: he flew four shuttle missions and led three space walks to deliver the US Lab to the Station. . From B-52 pilot during the Cold War, to a PhD in planetary science, to the unbelievable rigors of astronaut training, his career inevitably pointed him toward the space shuttle. Until the Challenger exploded. Jones's story is the first to candidly explain the professional and personal hardships faced by the astronauts in the aftermath of that 1986 tragedy. He certainly has 'The Right Stuff' but also found himself wondering if the risks he undertook were worth the toll on his family. Liftoffs were especially nerve-wracking (his mother, who refuses to even get on a plane, cannot watch) but his 53 days in space were unforgettable adventures. Jones uses his background as a scientist to explain the practical applications of many of the shuttle's scientific missions, and describes what it's like to work with the international crews building and living aboard the space station. Tom Jones returned from his space station voyage to assess the impact of the 2003 Columbia tragedy, and prescribes a successful course for the U.S. in space. Stunning photographs, many taken in space, illustrate his amazing journey. 25 b/w photographs

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Customer Reviews

With humanity and passion (and less swagger than Mike Mullane), Jones powerfully brings to life the world of the modern NASA astronaut. Confined to low Earth orbit, no longer tasked with

high-profile trips to the Moon, a small corps of dedicated professional space travelers work on serious science and dream of the day they will fly into space. Countless on-the-ground training hours prepare the astronauts for the rigors of space travel—practicing an extravehicular space walk in a 10-million-gallon tank or being flung around in a 100,000-horsepower centrifuge to acclimate to the eight g's of force experienced on lift-off. A tested B-52 bomber pilot and planetary scientist, Jones still feels and expresses wonder at space flight: "I was thirty-nine when I stepped out on the pad [in 1994] with the rest of the crew, but I gazed up at Endeavor with a child's amazement.... I shivered with excitement at the sight of my now-ready spaceship." While the twin tragedies of Challenger and Columbia hang over the story like a pall, Jones still manages to fire the spirit and invite the reader to imagine a place for humankind beyond planet Earth. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Jones' memoir of his work as an astronaut in the 1990s is an unusually expressive contribution to the spaceflight genre. His descriptions of launches and landings--Jones made four of each in the space shuttle--are as engrossing as any in the literature, as is his appreciation for the extreme peril facing those who volunteer to ride a rocket into space. So why do they? Jones' personal explanations are probably typical: NASA's 1960s missions excited and intrigued him, and he ascended the aerospace technology career ladder by flying B-52s, earning a doctorate, doing engineering for the CIA, and joining NASA. Clearly professional advancement is one motivation, but the exhilaration of being in space, and the spectacular extraterrestrial vistas it affords, remains an inspiration self-evident in Jones' account. Still, being a meticulous technologist is the sine qua non of the astronaut, and lies behind the author's recurring comment that his greatest anxiety was not the prospect of death but making a mistake in his tasks. Jones will claim space buffs with his frankness and jargon--free fluency. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I just finished reading the book 'Sky Walking' and wanted to say I enjoyed it very much. I really liked the way author Tom Jones told the various stories, the application process, selection, training, takeoff, etc. I laughed out loud at times (Dr Hind) and was moved to tears at others. I particularly liked the words of reflection added before, during and after the spacewalks. Additionally, I enjoyed seeing the mention of his family, hometown and friends. I also enjoyed the references to walking and training in the same areas as the folks that preceded him in the space program, a very nice touch. Overall I found the story fascinating as I never really thought about what the process would be

to achieve the title of astronaut. I admire Dr Jones for his many accomplishments throughout his career as well as his talents as an author. My experience of having been a drone of County government for over 25 years, I was also impressed with his frankness when it came to his feelings and opinions regarding NASA. Again, it is something that the average guy never stops to think about, but the bureaucracy that was and remains involved, well, enough said. Anyway, I really liked the book and recommend it to anyone who has an interest in space travel, NASA or personal achievement, this book is a must read. George Hensler

"Sky Walking" is the second space shuttle astronaut biography I have read after Mike Mullane's "Riding Rockets". I enjoyed both books a lot but they are very different in style. Mike Mullane's book concentrates mostly on humorous anecdotes from his astronaut career (although there are serious parts) whereas Tom Jones has more of the detail involved in astronaut training and I would have to say that if you want to know the fine details about being an astronaut, get this book. I haven't seen anything better in this regard. Tom Jones started his astronaut career in 1990, just about the time when Mike Mullane was winding down (he was in the 1978 astronaut class) so the two books cover virtually the whole Space Shuttle era. Tom eventually flew four missions, the last being the outfitting of the Destiny laboratory on ISS in 2001. As the title suggests, there is a lot about space walking but Tom didn't get to do any until the last mission. He was scheduled to do a spacewalk on STS-80 but, as described in the first chapter, the airlock wouldn't open. The book is simply packed with detail on mission training and the space walk training in the NASA WETF and NBL training facilities is described so well that your body almost starts to ache in sympathy. Being an astronaut is definitely not an easy job. As you would expect, there are numerous anecdotes throughout, one of my favourites being Story Musgrave staying on the Shuttle flight deck during the STS-80 re-entry so he could video it. Certainly a man with the right stuff. If you just want to get an overview of astronaut training rather than the full detail I would probably recommend Mike Mullane's book ahead of this one. There isn't as much humor in "Sky Walking" either but it's still worth five stars.

There are many excellent books written by and about the Right Stuff astronauts who flew during the earlier days of the space program. However, until recently, there has been a nearly total lack of books by and about the shuttle astronauts who fly now. For better or worse, today's space program is as different from the program of the early days as the shuttle is different from the Apollo capsules. And today's astronauts are different, too. Mike Mullane was the first of the shuttle astronauts to write about his experiences in his book Riding Rockets. However, Mullane was a member of the group

that made the transition from the Apollo program to the shuttle program, and the tone of his book is almost wistful; he clearly wanted to be one of the Right Stuff guys-- and he means guys-- but he ended up being a shuttle technician. Sky Walking is a memoir by a very different sort of astronaut. Tom Jones was very young during the "glory days" of the space program, so he has no Right Stuff preconceptions about astronauts as death-defying heroes. Rather, he is an Air Force Academy graduate who flew B-52s, earned a PhD in planetary sciences, and became a dedicated, professional shuttle program technician. That could have made for a dull, technical book if it weren't for his intellect and, more importantly, his powers of observation and ability to reflect on what he experienced. Jones flew four shuttle missions and took three space walks on his final mission, which was dedicated to construction on the International Space Station. His accounts of what space walks are like-- and of the hundreds of hours of training that precedes each one-- are first rate. His descriptions of the ISS and of the issues surrounding its planning, funding, and construction are excellent. I don't know of any other insider's book that deals with the ISS in such detail or with such authority. This is because Jones was an administrator in the ISS program between his third and fourth shuttle flights. The subtitle says that this is "an astronaut's memoir," and that's exactly what it is. Jones takes us through his selection as an astronaut, his general training, his years of waiting for flights, his training for those flights, and the flights themselves. There is considerable technical information in the book, but Jones does an excellent job of clarifying it for non-experts. The real focus is on Jones himself-- what he sees, thinks, and feels about what's happening to him. This is an outstanding book. It answers the two basic questions many of us have always had: "What's it REALLY like to fly in space?" and "What are those people REALLY like?" I thoroughly enjoyed Sky Walking, and I recommend it most highly.

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