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**SALLY RIDE SCIENCE**

## The San Diego Union-Tribune – “Sally Ride: Astronaut who reached for the stars, not stardom”



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May 17, 2020 (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/the-san-diego-union-tribune-sally-ride-astronaut-who-reached-for-the-stars-not-stardom/>) by Sally Ride Science (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/author/mking/>) · Posted in "In the Media (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/category/in-the-media/>)" · Tags "Sally Ride (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/tag/sally-ride/>), Women in science (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/tag/women-in-science/>), Women in STEM (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/tag/women-in-stem/>)" ·

The San Diego Union-Tribune and the Women's Museum of California are celebrating a century of female achievement in San Diego to mark the 100th year of women's suffrage in America. The second installment of this series pays tribute to pioneering female scientists and researchers who pushed boundaries in exploring our world—and beyond—and helped cultivate new generations of curious thinkers. Sally Ride, the first U.S. woman in space, encouraged girls' interest in science with her namesake educational program, Sally Ride Science, based at UC San Diego. See a PDF of the Union-Tribune's *Phenomenal Women* (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Sally-Ride-Feature-5-17-2020-SDUT.pdf>) feature.

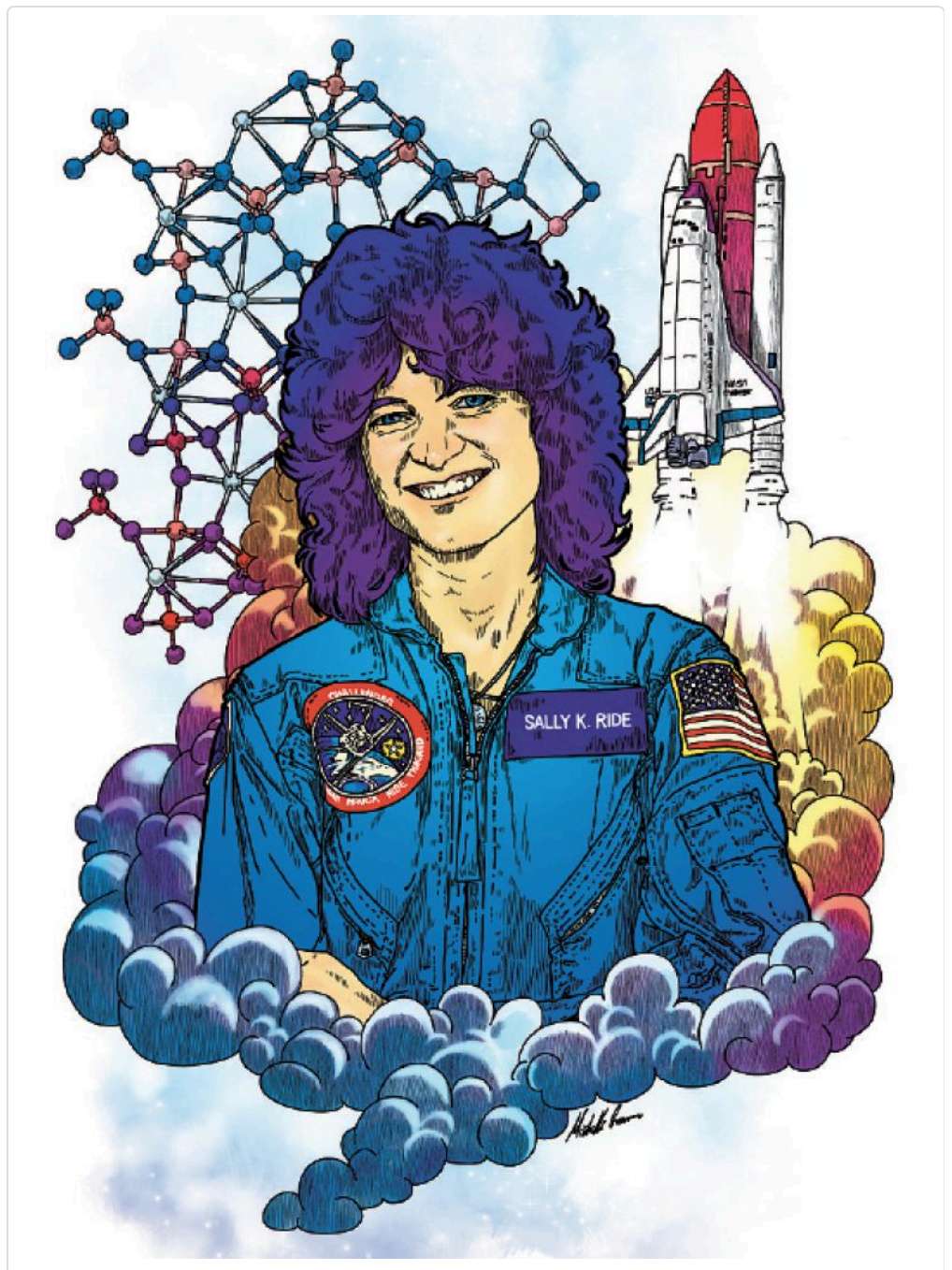
**By John Wilkens, The San Diego Union-Tribune (<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/>)**

Sunday, May 17, 2020

Sally Ride believed this: "You can't be what you can't see." So she probably would have been OK with the Barbie doll.

It came out last August, seven years after Ride's death, and it captures the astronaut in all her celestial glory: Powder-blue coverall, helmet under one arm, communications headset atop her curly brown hair. The first American woman in space, a role model on terra firma.

The opportunity to inspire — that was the only part of fame she openly embraced. In the walk-up to her June 1983 shuttle Challenger mission, she frowned at the radio stations playing "Mustang Sally" ("ride, Sally, ride," goes the chorus). When she came back to Earth, she turned



down an appearance on a Bob Hope TV special. She never wrote her life story or authorized anyone to do one while she was alive.

But she co-authored children's books about space exploration. She helped launch an educational program for girls, initially called "Imaginary Lines" but later changed to "Sally Ride Science" to capitalize on her enduring name recognition. She was willing to put up with that kind of stardom.

"When you turn on the TV, any engineers you see are apt to be male, not female," she said in an oral history recorded for NASA in 2002. "When you open the newspaper, you read about male engineers, not female engineers. As a result, 12-year-old girls don't really think of those areas as possible careers. We thought that there was an opportunity here, because coming out of elementary school, lots and lots of girls like science and math. We thought if we could capture that enthusiasm, that fascination, before they lose it, then maybe we could inoculate them against some of the stereotypes and keep more of them in the pipeline."

Ride's own inoculation came from her parents, who told her while she was growing up that she could do and be anything. Early on that was tennis. She was good enough to drop out of Swarthmore College and turn pro, but not that good, she realized after a few tournaments.

She returned to school, at Stanford, and earned two bachelor's degrees. While she was working on a doctorate, she saw a notice in the school newspaper: NASA wanted female astronauts. She'd never thought about going into orbit before. Now the idea consumed her, even as it meant putting up with questions from clueless male engineers about what kind of makeup kit to put on the shuttle.

When she climbed aboard Challenger for six days in that summer of 1983, she was not just the first American woman in space, but the youngest American, too, just 32. (It's still the record.) And after she died, the public learned that she was gay, which made her the first acknowledged LGBTQ astronaut, as well.

But milestones didn't interest her much. This did: "I'm sure it was the most fun I'll ever have in my life," she told reporters after her shuttle mission.

She went again in 1984 and was scheduled for a third mission when the Challenger exploded in 1986. Her reputation and expertise were such that she was put on the presidential commission that investigated the disaster, and then on the one that probed the 2003 Columbia disintegration—the only person to serve on both

panels.


Ride left the space program in 1987 and two years later joined the physics faculty at UC San Diego. Working with her longtime partner, Tam O'Shaughnessy, and others, she started Sally Ride Science, offering festivals, classroom materials and activities aimed at getting (and keeping) girls interested in science, math and engineering. It's now a nonprofit run by the university, with O'Shaughnessy as its executive director.

Since her death from pancreatic cancer at age 61, Ride has been memorialized in other ways. She was a Google doodle in 2015; people using the search engine's homepage on what would have been her birthday saw animations of her operating a robotic shuttle arm, talking to school kids, floating in space. A year later, the Navy commissioned the Sally Ride, a 238-foot research vessel that's the first ever named for a woman. There was a postage stamp of her in 2018, and Stanford put her name on a residence hall last year.

The Barbie doll may be the most surprising sign yet of her legacy. There have been other astronauts in the toy line, but those were about dressing up. One came with a hot-pink flight suit. The Sally Ride doll, part of an "Inspiring Women" Barbie collection that also includes the likenesses of Rosa Parks, Frida Kahlo and Amelia Earhart, is about something else.

It's about looking up and dreaming big. Shooting for the stars.

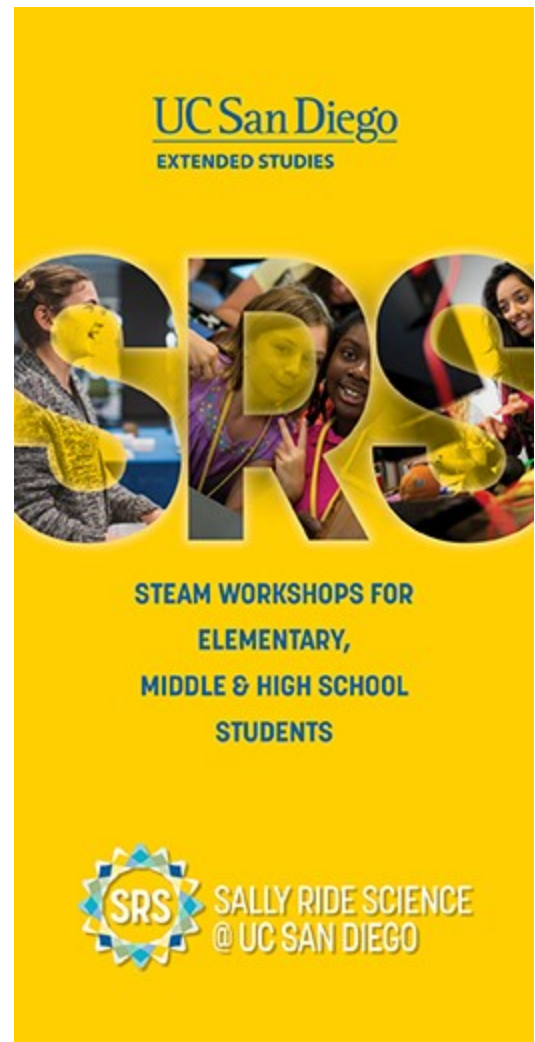
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