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**SALLY RIDE SCIENCE**

# Animated Video Revives Sally Ride's Lost Conversation With Gloria Steinem



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February 5, 2016 (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/animated-video-revives-sally-rides-lost-conversation-with-gloria-steinem/>) by Sally Ride Science (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/author/sally-ride-science-ucsd/>) ·

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When Sally Ride was preparing to make history as the first American woman in space, reporters kept asking questions that seemed beside the point. What type of makeup would she take with her? What were the bathrooms like in space? And did she cry when training got tough?

Shortly after Ride returned from her 1983 mission aboard the space shuttle *Challenger*, feminist icon Gloria Steinem interviewed her about the experience—and about the pressures she felt before and during the flight. The interview, part of Steinem’s ABC series *In Conversation with . . .* was largely forgotten.

A tape of the interview was later discovered in Smith College’s archive of Steinem’s papers. Now the conversation—by turns frank and funny—has been turned into an animated video, *Sally Ride on Dumb Questions*. PBS Studios’ *Blank on Blank*, a platform that uses animation to give new life to lost interviews with major cultural figures, released the video Feb. 2.

During mission SST-7, Ride, a physicist, conducted science experiments and became the first person to use the shuttle’s robotic arm to deploy and retrieve a satellite. For her, the hardest part of breaking the gender barrier in space was not completing the grueling training or fitting in to NASA’s culture. Instead, Ride told Steinem, the greatest pressure came from the media.

“Really, the only bad moments in our training involved the press,” Ride said. “The press was an added pressure on the flight for me. And whereas NASA appeared to be very enlightened about flying women astronauts, the press didn’t appear to be. The things that they were concerned with were not the same things that I was concerned with.”

Ride recalled the questions that kept cropping up. Everyone was curious about how she went to the bathroom in space. Also, she said, “Everybody wanted to know what kind of makeup I was taking up—they didn’t care about how well-prepared I was to operate the arm or deploy communication satellites.”

When Steinem asked which was the “dumbest” question of all, Ride had a ready answer: “Without a doubt, I think that the worst question I have gotten was whether I cried when we got malfunctions in the simulator.”

On a more serious note, Steinem asked what it felt like to blast into space.


“The moment of launch—when the engines ignited and the solid rockets lit—everyone on the crew was, for a few seconds, just overcome with what was about to happen with us,” Ride said. But NASA’s training had prepared the crew well, she added. “We were able to overcome being overcome and just do the things we were supposed to do.”

While Ride felt at home with her NASA colleagues, she admitted that she wished there had been another woman on her first flight. “I wish that two of us had gone up together. I think it would have been a lot easier,” she said.

Ride also talked about what it was like for a girl interested in science in the 1960s, when she attended Westlake School for Girls in Los Angeles. “At the time, it was a classic school for girls with a good tennis team and a good English teacher, and essentially no math past 11th grade and no physics and no chemistry,” she said.

After her NASA career, Ride devoted herself to science education. She cofounded Sally Ride Science to inspire students—especially girls—to stick with science and math and to pursue science careers.

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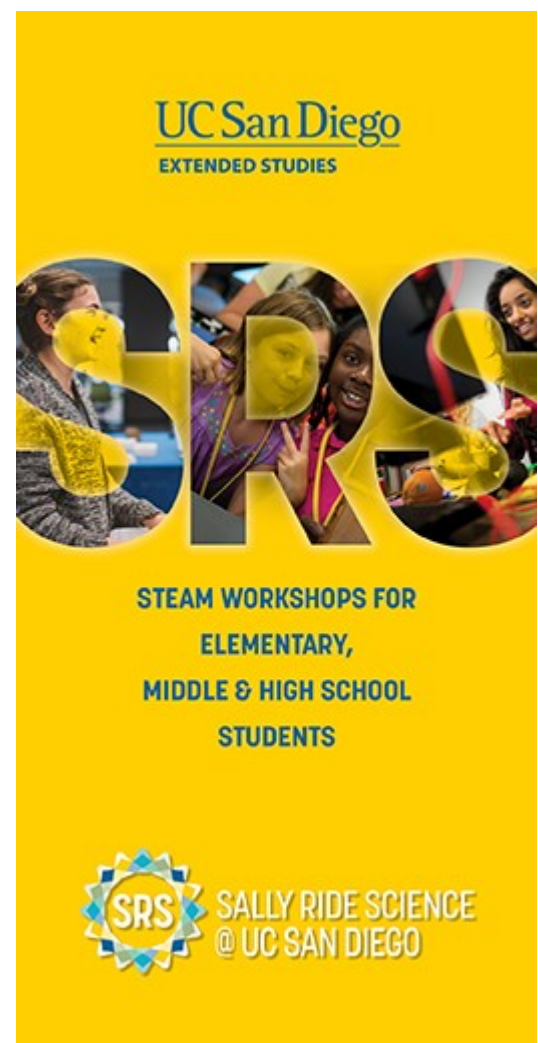


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