

ТЫ ИДИ, ДЕВОЧКА! YOU GO, GIRL!

At 16, Svetlana Savitskaya snuck out to parachute without her parents' knowing. When her father found out, he—the Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Soviet Air Defense—slapped her on the back and roared: “You go, girl!”

By her 17th birthday, the soft-spoken Sveta had made 450 jumps. The next year saw record-breaking stratospheric dives, as she plummeted from 14,250 meters—nearly out of this world! In certain circles, she became known as “Miss Sensation.”

No surprise that when she graduated from high school, she enrolled in the Moscow State Aviation Institute. At 22, slim and petite, a pretty brunette with bangs, she became a certified flight instructor. She set her sights even higher: to become a world class test pilot.

Her record of 2683 km/hr in an MIG-21 remains unbroken. Her star rose even higher when, at 32, in a Yak-18, she won the women's world aerobatic championship in Britain—modestly accepting the award in a dress she'd sewn herself.

Then, in 1980, she was chosen for cosmonaut training and four years later blasted off from Baikonur to rendezvous with two male colleagues aboard the Soyuz space station. They greeted her with an apron and asked: “What's for dinner?”

Sveta quickly established “a working professional relationship.” but not before accepting a bouquet of flowers grown in orbit. On her next mission, two years later, she rolled up her sleeves (so to speak) to cut and weld metal—the first woman to walk in space.

Plans for an all-women Russian crew led by Sveta to celebrate International Women’s Day kept being put off. It was finally cancelled when Sveta became pregnant—she wasn’t to be the first mom in space—that was an American, Anna Lee Fisher.

Now, in her seventies and retired, does she stare up at the heavens, think if they offered her a one-way trip to Mars, she’d take it. Why not—as long as they didn’t hand her a broom and expect her to sweep up all that dust!