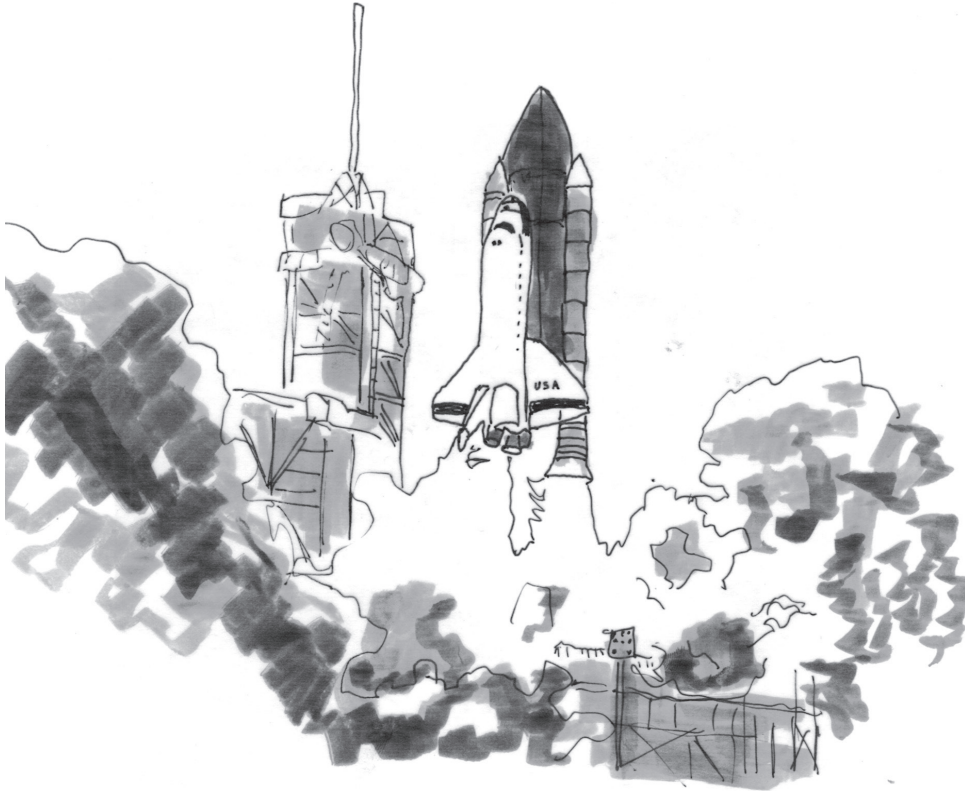


Big TV Moments

Remembering the Challenger



In just about every person's lifetime, there's that big TV moment. It's an event that you never forget, that you experienced simultaneously with millions of other viewers.

My big TV moment was in 1986 when I was about 10 years old. It was the Space Shuttle Challenger launch that was shown live on TV. I was home sick, so my mother and I got cozy in bed to watch the launch together.

Back then, space shuttle launches were a big deal. And the Challenger launch was an even bigger deal because the crew included not one, but two female astronauts! One of whom was an elementary school teacher.

Big TV Moments

The shuttle was attached to rocket boosters that would separate and fall back to earth before the shuttle left the atmosphere.

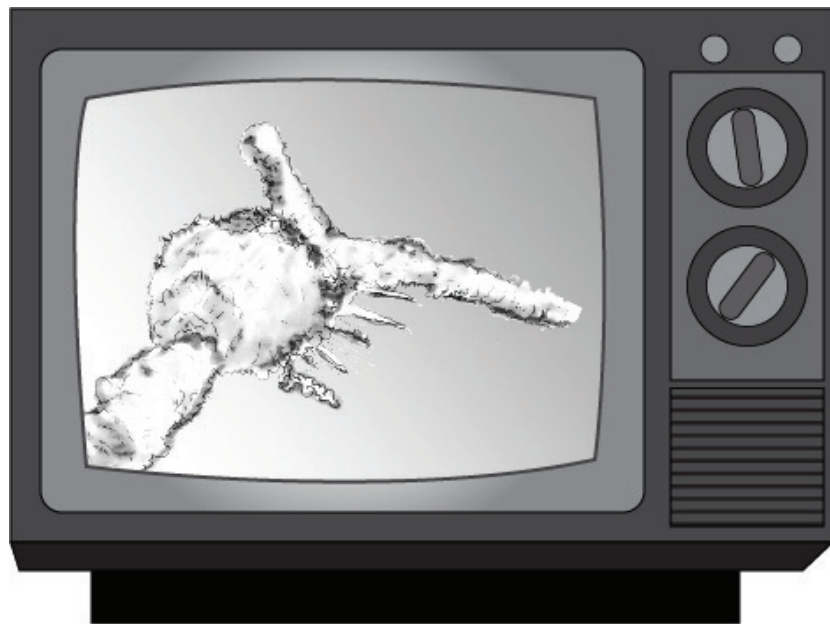
“T-minus 4, 3, 2, 1. And we have liftoff!” Fire spewed out from under the boosters as they pushed straight up into the sky.

Together, millions of people watched with us as the shuttle climbed higher and higher into the sky, leaving a cylindrical trail of smoke in its wake.

The TV announcer said, “So the twenty-fifth space shuttle mission is now on the way after more delays than NASA cares to count...”

Suddenly, there was a big blast of fire—a giant fireball. We couldn’t see the shuttle anymore because of all the white smoke. Then the smoke forked off in two different directions.

“It looks like some of the boosters blew away from the shuttle,” said the TV announcer.



Big TV Moments

We could hear the cries of confusion coming from the crowd on the ground at the launch.

“We’re looking very carefully at the situation. Obviously it’s a major malfunction,” said the NASA announcer.

Many thin white streaks formed as parts fell from the sky. No one wanted to believe the worst, not even NASA’s engineers.

“We have a report from the flight dynamics that the vehicle has exploded.”

People in the crowd began to shake their heads. They cried out in disbelief and covered their mouths with their hands, just like my mother and I did at home.

Everyone was in shock. We just watched the last moments of the astronauts’ lives. We knew their families were watching, too. All our pride in America’s achievements and in these new astronauts blew up in the sky in front of our eyes.

The news replayed the crash for days and days after the event. My teacher rolled a TV set into our class to watch news about it. How did this happen? Whose fault was it?

To this day, I can’t help but think about the astronauts’ families and how I was there to share this tragedy with them.

