

Reach for the Stars with Colonel Chris Hadfield

Imagine zipping around Earth in the International Space Station, seeing a new sunrise every 90 minutes. While orbiting you're weightless, so instead of walking you fly and float. Right outside the Space Station there is no air and no pressure. In the sun it's extremely hot: 250 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. In the dark it's immensely cold: minus 150 degrees. Now imagine a marshmallow inside the Space Station. If not secured, it will float. Take the same marshmallow outside on a spacewalk, and because there are air pockets trapped inside, it will swell. In the sun it will become a gooey mass; in the dark it will freeze and become a snowball. Indeed, life is very different in space than it is on Earth!

Colonel Chris Austin Hadfield was born on August 29, 1959, in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada, and grew up on a corn farm in Milton, near Toronto. Since the age of nine, after seeing the first moon landing on television, Hadfield dreamed of becoming an astronaut. Canada had no astronaut program, but Hadfield was determined. He spent his time learning mechanics on tractors and old cars, and on flying with his father, an airline pilot, and brothers whenever he could.

Hadfield entered aviation with the Royal Canadian Air Cadets at age 13, won a glider pilot scholarship at age 15, and a powered pilot scholarship one year later. After graduating from high school, Hadfield decided to "bum around" Europe for six months, living frugally as a ski instructor.

Hadfield joined the Canadian Armed Forces in 1978 and then attended military colleges in Canada. He graduated in 1982 with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. After training as a fighter pilot, he flew planes for the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD). Hadfield next transitioned to test-pilot training and was stationed in Maryland, where he flew fighter jets. By the early 1990s, Hadfield had flown more than 70 different kinds of aircraft, and was named the U.S. Navy test pilot of the year in 1991. He received a master's degree in aviation systems in 1992 from the University of Tennessee. That same year Hadfield reached his dream when the Canadian Space Agency (CSA) selected him as an astronaut, a profession from which he retired in 2013.

In 2001, Hadfield was working outside the International Space Station on his first spacewalk when he was struck blind due to the anti-fog solution used to polish his spacesuit visor. He eventually called down to Houston for assistance, and with their help he could start to see again. Hadfield told Houston, "I'm OK," and got back to work.

Whether your dream is to become a doctor, lawyer, teacher, professional athlete, or astronaut, it is imperative that you, like Col. Chris Hadfield once did, dream big and reach for the stars!

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