

# JUDAICA THEMATIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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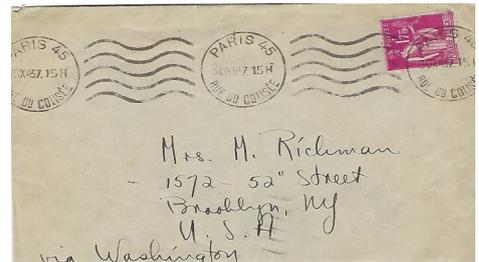
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## GEMS FROM MY COLLECTION

BY

### SEYMOUR NUSSENBAUM



Sometime in the late 30s I was walking home from the subway station in Brooklyn to my home when I spotted a trash bin next to the curb. I saw some envelopes being thrown out and I went over to investigate.

The stamps were French. At the time I hadn't started to collect Judaica yet but the stamps interested me so I plucked 4 envelopes out of the bin and took them home. It seems I already had the stamp which appeared on all 4 covers, so I put the covers away and forgot about them for some 15 years. After going to war and graduating college and going to work I went back to collecting. By that time Israel had become a state and I had discovered Judaica collecting. I began to dispose of some of the stuff I had collected which no longer interested me, and in doing so I came across these 4 covers. The name on the cover intrigued me as I believed it to be Jewish, and since the covers still had their contents, and being a bit of a "yenta", I investigated further. I was surprised at what I found! It seems the letters were written by a young woman who had gone to Paris to study art and was writing home to her parents. What she wrote gave an insight into the conditions for Jews in France shortly before the outbreak of World War II. I'll give you a few excerpts from the letters.

The first letter was mailed in Paris on December 30, 1937 and had the following observations: "Then there was when the Surete , (Police to you), uncovered the German attempt at overthrowing the French government two weeks ago. They discovered cellars full of ammunition and cannon just in time. Was there an uproar! The papers were full of the "complot" until they discovered that there was a rich "Jewess" and a de Rothschild involved. Then they began on the Jewish question. I guess you have been reading about the installation of "ghetto benches" in all universities outside of France and England for the Jewish students. In Poland it is as bad as it was under the Russian regime.

And queerly enough, Russia is condemning Poland for her attitude on anti-semitism."

The second letter was mailed in Paris on January 1, 1938 and said, in part "Firstly, the political situation which you think is not so bad, will probably burst out again after the Austrian plebiscite April 10th. Especially after England has given Berlin permission to go ahead with Tchecoslovakia (sic)..... "I'll probably be back for Pesach".

The third letter was sent from Paris on January 5, 1938. "Pernikoff has decided to send Ossia to Roumania (sic). I think he's crazy – the conditions are so bad there and will probably get worse. I admit quite cheerfully that Ossia will probably be killed there – he's as hotheaded as they come and if somebody said "dirty Jew" to him, that would be the end of the somebody and Ossia".

The last letter was sent from Paris sometime in March, 1938: "I haven't written again except to send a letter of introduction for a German Jew (also a doctor) who doesn't know anybody in America. I thought perhaps Stan might be able to help him".

I think these letters summed up some of what it must have been like to live in Europe during that period. I don't know the rest of the story. I assume that she went home for Pesach and decided not to go back. I hope that is what happened. Incidentally, all 4 covers looked very similar so I only depict one illustration. (Reduced in size).

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# REMEMBERING JUDITH RESNIK, THE SECOND WOMAN “SHUTTLENAUT”

BY

UMBERTO CAVALLARO

Credit: NASA



January 28, 2021 marks the 35th anniversary of the Challenger Space Shuttle tragedy, which resulted in the deaths of Judy Resnik and six other astronauts on board of Challenger STS-51L – the 25th flight of the American Space Shuttle program and the 10th mission of the Space Shuttle Challenger – that on January 28, 1986 disintegrated over Cape Canaveral, 73 seconds after lift-off, when O-ring seals failed, causing leaks in the right booster rocket.

It was her second spaceflight after participating as a mission specialist, in August 1984, in the STS-41D mission and becoming the second American woman to fly in space after Sally Ride and the fourth woman worldwide.

Judith Arlene Resnik – born in Akron, Ohio, on April 5, 1949 – was the daughter of an upper-middle-class first-generation Jewish-Ukrainian family devoted to their religion. She attended Hebrew school for many years at Beth El Synagogue in Akron where she also started to study Hebrew, even if she did not practice Judaism and disliked any reference to her as “the first Jewish astronaut.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Judy was the first Jewish American in space. The first Jew in space was the Russian cosmonaut Boris Volynov, in 1969.

Her father, Marvin Resnik – to whom she was so close as to choose to live with him after her parents divorced when she was 17 years old – was a respected Akron optometrist and a part-time cantor, and had served in the Army in World War II. He affectionately called his daughter *K'tanah* (which is Hebrew for “little one”) and proudly hung in the reception area of his optometry office a picture of his daughter on the Shuttle, greeting him with a floating sheet of paper reading in large letters “HI DAD.”

Judy Resnik on the middeck of the Space Shuttle Discovery during her first mission, STS-41-D (1984). Credit: NASA



Judy was noticed early on for her brilliant intelligence. Soon after entering kindergarten, she was able to read and to solve simple mathematical problems, so she was admitted to the elementary school one year in advance. A strong-willed girl, her talents became more evident over the years when – very diligent and methodical – she began to excel in mathematics, science, and French. Teachers and friends described her as extremely bright, disciplined and curious. She also was a gifted musician and played piano with more than technical mastery, appreciated by all for her vividness, but also for her perfectionism – qualities that she brought with her all her life, in almost anything else she tried. “I never play anything softly”, she said in an interview. She graduated as valedictorian of her class from Firestone High School in 1966.

After high school, she considered to become a professional classical pianist and was offered a spot at the prestigious Julliard Academy to study piano performance, but, after achieving the highest possible score on the mathematics component of her SAT test (the only girl to reach that goal that year, and one of only sixteen female students to ever do so at the time), she decided to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics at the Carnegie Tech (today Carnegie-Mellon University) in Pittsburgh. She changed however her plans in her freshman year after she began to date Michael Oldak, a fellow engineering student, and on visiting some of his classes she realized that “she liked more practical aspects of science,” as Michael recalls.

She entered therefore engineering and graduated in 1970. Shortly after graduation, she married Michael. Both were then hired by the RCA (Radio Corporation of America) and went to work in Moorestown, New Jersey. Judy was employed in the missile and surface radar division, working on .....(continued on next page).....

custom integrated circuitry for phased-array radar control systems and engineering support for NASA sounding rocket and telemetry systems programs. Her paper concerning design procedures for special-purpose integrated circuitry caught the attention of NASA. The following year, the couple moved to Washington, DC, where Judy received her master's degree in Engineering from the University of Maryland and began working as a biomedical engineer at the Laboratory of the Neurophysiology of the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, where she performed biological research experiments concerning the physiology of visual systems.

In 1975, she and Michael separated but the two remained friendly and she continued to share milestones of her life with her former husband.

Not long after her divorce, while she was completing her doctorate in 1977, she spotted an advertisement for NASA's astronaut program that began recruiting women and minorities to the space program. Though she had never shown particular interest in the space program (until then, it would have been unthinkable for a woman to fly in space) and although she did not think NASA would select her, however – encouraged by her advisor and mentor, Professor Angel Jordan – she suddenly decided to apply: "She was looking for a purpose in her life," her father would say later. After receiving *magna cum laude* academic honours for her doctoral work in electrical engineering, she accepted a job with Xerox as a senior systems engineer and relocated to Redondo Beach near Los Angeles, California.

To her amazement, in January 1978, she was called for a NASA interview. Her background in electrical engineering had made her a primary candidate for the mission specialists needed to conduct scientific experiments in space.

At age 29, Judy was one of six women accepted into the program. After completing a one-year training and evaluation period in August 1979, she worked on a number of projects in support of orbiter development, including experiment software and training techniques and, spent six years focused on the operation of the Remote Manipulator System (RMS) she helped to design, to move objects outside spacecrafts.



Both of her missions were marked by technical problems and delays. The launch of the first – the maiden flight of *Discovery* STS-41D – was postponed four times.

The first task of Judy as mission specialist was to operate the robotic arm that she had helped to design, to open the OAST-1 solar array (Office of Application and Space Technology) – a device 13 feet (4.0 meters) wide and 102 feet (31 meters) high that carried five different types of solar cells. It was the largest structure ever extended from a manned spacecraft and demonstrated the feasibility of large lightweight solar arrays for future application to large facilities in space, such as the International Space Station.



Judy was also mission specialist on STS 51-L. responsible in assisting her colleague, the Mission Specialist Ellison Onizuka in photographing Halley's Comet using a camera known as the Comet Halley Active Monitoring Program (CHAMP) and operating the Shuttle's robotic arm to release SPARTAN, a platform with scientific instruments that would float in space to study Halley's Comet. STS- 51-L was the 10th mission of *Challenger* and the 25th Shuttle launch in NASA's history.

The launch day of the ill-fated Challenger STS-51L was an a typically cold day for Florida, with long icicles hanging from the launch tower.

Credit: NASA



The lift-off of the ill-fated *Challenger* STS-51L, was delayed five times for inclement weather and technical problems. Finally it was decided to launch the mission on January 28, 1986, an atypically cold day for Florida and the coldest weather conditions under which a Shuttle launch had ever been attempted, with long icicles hanging from the launch tower, as shown in many impressive photographs, and a temperature of 27°F (-2.7°C). The low temperature had prompted concerns from Thiokol engineers, who had recommended to postpone the launch: the temperature was below the minimum for take-off (which was 33°F) – beyond the tolerances for which the rubber seals of the O-rings were approved.

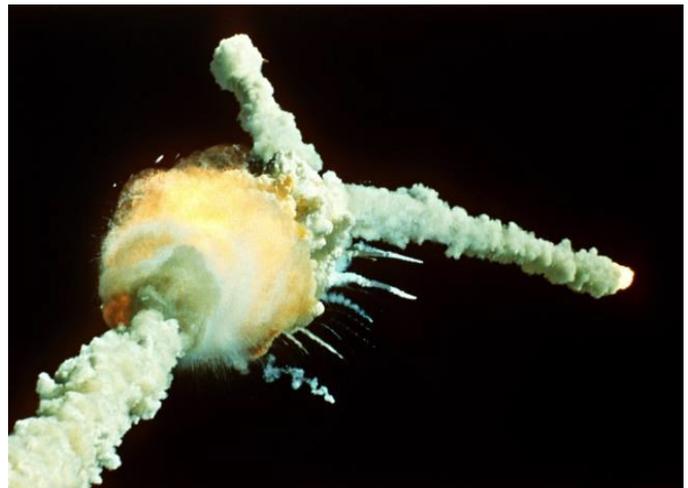
But NASA was under pressure to keep this mission on schedule, both because it was expected that the weather would get worse in the following days and because there was some impatience to watch the first “Teacher in Space” who had to deliver two lessons followed by schoolchildren across the nation, providing a publicity boost for the space agency. The risk was deemed acceptable.

The copious amounts of ice on Pad 39B forced an additional two-hour delay to permit thawing and finally the green light was given at 11:38. The decision to go ahead with the launch on such a cold morning had proven fatal. Years later, McAuliffe’s mother, Grace Corrigan, insisted that the general atmosphere in the weeks leading up to *Challenger*’s fateful launch was that the Shuttle was far safer than an airliner, simply due to the higher number of precautions taken by NASA.

Fourteen seconds after take-off, Judy Resnik was heard to scan “LVLH” (local-vertical/local-horizontal), reminding all crew of a cockpit switch configuration change. These were her last words heard from the Control Center, which seconds later gave the order “Go at throttle-up” (“Full speed ahead!”). Commander Dick Scobee confirmed: “Go at throttle-up!”

A flame appeared and then the explosion.

Seventy-three seconds after launch, with millions of people watching on live TV, the Space Shuttle Challenger broke up in a forking plume of smoke and fire. Within seconds, the spacecraft broke apart and plunged into the ocean, killing the entire crew of seven astronauts. The devastating tragedy shocked the world and threw NASA’s Shuttle program into turmoil. Credit: NASA



Investigators would later conclude that cold had caused the failure of both primary and secondary O-ring seals at the base of the right-hand booster that, under the pressure of acceleration required to reach the escape velocity, were no longer able to contain the exhaust gases, causing the catastrophic explosion 73 seconds after launch, when the most dangerous phase of the ascent was already over.

As the investigation demonstrated, Judy Resnik and Ellison Onizuka were still alive when the crew cabin separated from the rest of the spacecraft, and they were fully conscious after the breakup and during the entire descent until the impact with the ocean at a speed of roughly 207 miles per hour (333 kilometers per hour). But, unfortunately, there was no crew escape: This was one of the costs that NASA had cut.

Senator John Glenn, who was the first American astronaut to fly into Earth orbit, concluded his eulogy held in Akron, the birthplace of Judy Resnik, a few days after the incident by saying:

“As we reflect on Judy’s life, and Challenger’s last voyage in the days and weeks ahead, let’s never forget the last words that came from that spacecraft: ‘Go at throttle-up’. Those are far more than a courageous epitaph. They are America’s history. They are America’s destiny. And they will turn tragedy into triumph once again.”

In 2004 Judy posthumously received the Congressional Space Medal of Honor. She also had an engineering lecture hall at the University of Maryland. The Society of Women Engineers’ annual award, the “Resnik Challenger Medal”, goes to a woman who changed the space industry as voted on by her peers

A lunar crater named after her along with a crater on Venus, a star and an asteroid all bear the name of Judith Resnik for future generations.

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