

BOOK ONE

# THE SHUTTLE SAGA



THE CHALLENGER:  
TRIUMPH, TRAGEDY  
AND TRANSITION





# 'Everything was a challenge'

Whatever his goal, young Greg Jarvis always pushed himself to accomplish it, says his father, Bruce. 'He wanted to succeed.' Later in life, Greg's successes in the field of communications satellites earned him a place in history.



CHAPTER 3

Challenger

7

By Joan Heller

On a day of mix-ups and near misses, Greg Jarvis came perilously close to being born in a convent.

Bruce Jarvis thought he had it all figured out. Frequently driving his expectant wife to a west Detroit theater, he'd point to the tidy Mount Carmel complex and say, "You'll be going there pretty soon."

When the long-awaited day finally came, Bruce dutifully helped his wife, Lucille, into the car and headed toward the familiar landmark.

"We went in, and there was no one around," he said.

Finally a nun appeared and informed the anxious couple that they were in a convent. The hospital, she said, was down the road.

At Mount Carmel Hospital, the elder Jarvis paced the floor that August day in 1944 and passed the time with another expectant father. When the stranger got the news about his own child's birth, Bruce gratefully accepted his invitation to see the newborn in the hospital nursery.

He wouldn't know until hours later that his own son was the baby next to the stranger's.

"The nurse thought the doctor told me that Greg had been born. The doctor thought the nurse told me," said Bruce, now an Orlando resident. "I didn't find out about it until three hours after he was born."

At home, Greg would talk soon and walk sooner.

An active 9-month-old, Greg once rolled down the cellar stairs in his four-wheel walker. His explorations earned him matching shiners under each of his eyes. Like the comically confused day of his birth, "It sure wasn't funny at the time," his father said.

From there, things got easier for the little boy with the two enormous black eyes.

At the only elementary school in Mohawk, N.Y., Greg signed up for the Kiwanis Little League team. Later, at Mohawk Central High School, he spent his days laboring to bring home the high grades his parents had come to expect.

He spent his afternoons practicing drills with the varsity football team, playing the saxophone in the school band and attending meetings of the National Honor Society and the Math Club.

Eager for spending money, Greg spent all of his high school summers at Cedar Lake Country Club watering the expansive greens and tending to any fix-up job the boss had in mind.

"One day, we were getting ready for a member-guest tournament. The greens were brown, so Greg was sent to spray them," Bruce recalled. "I don't know what they sprayed them with, but when Greg walked in the door, he was green. I mean all of him."

"Whatever it was, it washed off," the elder Jarvis said.

Back to his normal color, Greg headed off to Buffalo to study pharmacy at the State University of New York. He came home with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering and a bride, the former Ellen Jarboe.

Never suspecting that his son would one day become an astronaut, Bruce remembers the shock his son once gave him in the skies over New York.

"I had my own plane, a Cessna 172. I flew to Buffalo one day to pick him up at school. As we were flying home, I said, 'Do you want to fly it?' He asked, 'What do I do?' I said, 'Watch me and do what I do.' He did, and then he took over the controls.

"We weren't talking. I didn't want to distract him. Suddenly, I looked at him and realized he wasn't looking out the window. He was flying on instruments. That's something you

don't usually do until long after you've soloed. I was shocked."

From State University, the newlyweds moved on to Northeastern University in Boston. There, Greg studied for a master's degree and helped design circuits for the SAM-D missile at Raytheon's Bedford facility.

A new graduate, Greg joined the Air Force. During his four years in uniform, he worked on advanced tactical communications satellites at the Air Force's Space Division in El Segundo, Calif. His lieutenant's bars were replaced by the double bars of a captain.

Greg left the military at the end of his four-year tour and went to work for Hughes Aircraft Co.'s Space and Communications group in California.

For the next 11 years, he would work on the design of four communications satellites, both military and commercial.

One, called MARISAT, was the first satellite dedicated to maritime communications for private shipping companies. The remaining three satellites, all called LEASAT, were built by Hughes and are leased to the Navy for ship-to-shore and ship-to-ship communications around the globe.

All of them continue to orbit the earth.

In July 1984, NASA called. The agency had many more satellites to launch, and Greg had become an expert.

Trained as a payload specialist, he twice was bumped from Shuttle missions by better-known passengers — first U.S. Sen. Jake Garn, R-Utah, and later U.S. Rep. Bill Nelson, D-Melbourne.

When his number finally came up again, it was for the last flight of the doomed Space Shuttle Challenger.

"He pushed himself," Bruce said of the young boy who once yearned to follow his dad into the drugstore business. "He wanted to succeed. Everything was a challenge."

**AIRBORNE:**  
Payload Specialist  
Greg Jarvis  
experiences  
weightlessness  
aboard a 'zero  
gravity' aircraft  
Jan. 30, 1985.

NASA



NASA

**TIME TO RELAX:** Jarvis and William Butterworth, Jarvis' backup as Hughes Aircraft Co.'s payload specialist, await their turn in a Shuttle simulator March 1, 1985, at Johnson Space Center.