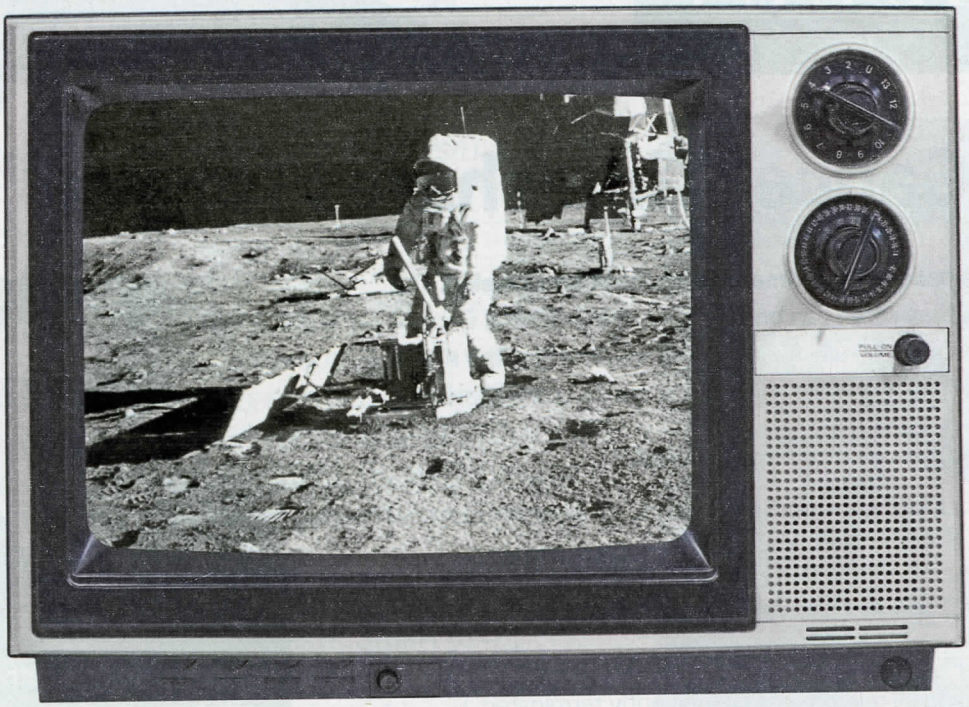
July 20, 1969



The Day the World Stopped

Recalling the searing moment 50 years ago when Apollo 11 astronauts became the first men to walk on the moon

AS TOLD TO DAVID HOCHMAN

IT'S BEEN HALF a century since humans first landed on the moon. An estimated 530 million people around the world watched and listened on July 20, 1969, as Apollo 11's lunar module touched down at 4:17 p.m. EDT. About six hours later, Neil Armstrong took "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind"—as Buzz Aldrin prepared to join him and Michael Collins waited alone in the skies above for their return. For some famous (and later-to-be-famous) observers, the moment changed everything. Only 12 astronauts walked on the moon, but the inspiration spurs us 50 years on to shoot for Mars, while never tiring of sentences that begin, "They can put a man on the moon, but ..."

WILLIAM SHATNER, 88
Actor, recording artist, Trekkie in chief

TO ME IT WAS the most magnificent moment in human history and also a moment, personally, of complete misery. *Star Trek* had recently been canceled. I was freshly divorced. I was broke and doing summer stock because I needed the money. The play I was doing ran from Tuesday through Saturday night, and on that night of the landing, I was in a pasture on Long Island, stretched out on my little bed in the camper top on my pickup truck. I was there with my Doberman, gazing up at the moon through a tiny window and at the same time watching the live broadcast on a four-inch black-and-white television.

Many months earlier, because of the popularity of *Star Trek,* I had visited Cape Canaveral and actually got into the lunar module and lay in one of the hammocks where the astronauts would sleep. When I stepped out, all the engineers and astronauts were laughing because they'd assembled a model of the Starship *Enterprise* and projected it on a screen where they normally put the star systems. Someone said they put the model together with great difficulty, and I said, "Why? It's not rocket science." Nobody laughed.

TV: SHUTTERSTOCK (INSET NASA); SHATNER: GETTY IMAGES

Someone at NASA told me that the more *Star Trek*'s ratings were up, the more money Congress would put into the space program. So, in some minute way, I felt I contributed to this Apollo 11 venture. But by that summer, I was at my nadir, yearning somehow to be in the apogee of all that the moon shot represented.

CAPTAIN CHESLEY 'SULLY' SULLENBERGER, 68

Pilot of US Airways Flight 1549 who safely made an emergency landing in the Hudson River on January 15, 2009

I'M PROBABLY one of the few people alive from that time who didn't watch the moon landing live on TV. I graduated from high school in 1969 and a few weeks later headed off to the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. We started with summer basic training, and our superiors would not break protocol to allow us to watch the event. We were told the next day that it was a success, but it was many months before I got to see the replay. It didn't matter. I was already under the spell of Apollo 11 and everything that had led up to it.

My dad was cool enough to let me stay home from school in the early '60s in central Texas so I could see the first manned space launches from Cape Canaveral in Florida. Once I witnessed those, I knew I wanted to fly. There was never even a plan B. Neil Armstrong was an early role model, long before the moon landing. As a test pilot, he flew the X-15—the hypersonic rocket-powered research aircraft—and remained the master of his craft, and the master of himself, no matter what challenges he faced. It's what allowed him to manually fly the Apollo 11 lunar lander in those final moments, with fuel dwindling and boulders beneath him and the whole world watching, and still land it and land it well. That sense of calm under pressure and the responsibility of flight, it certainly stuck with me and guided me.

After the Hudson landing 10 years ago, I had a chance to meet Neil when he presented me with the Neil Armstrong Medal of Excellence at Purdue, where we're both alums. I treasure that experience. Although he was a very private person, as I am, I think he came to terms with the idea that people need to feel a certain way about an event and those directly involved with it, and he graciously received the public's gratitude.

I think, above all, what I took from Neil and Apollo 11 and my career was the value of doing something for a purpose. At any age—as a kid, in your career, in retirement, even as a society—there are huge advantages not just to loving what you do every day but to committing deeply to your passion, to being thoughtful and constantly striving for excellence.

BRIAN MAY, 71

Lead guitarist for Queen, astrophysicist, designer of Owl stereoscopic viewer

THERE ARE PLENTY of things I don't remember, but I remember the moon landing vividly. I turned 22 on July 19 and was down in Cornwall, England, at the house of Roger Taylor's—our drummer's—mum. We were still amateur musicians in those days, trying to get people to pay us 20 pounds a gig. That night, we watched this tiny little screen on the Taylors' TV and we were all clustered around. What I remember most was that my dad was wrong. He was a pretty talented electronics engineer during and after World War II. Three years before Apollo 11, he said, "Oh, we'll never get to the moon in our lifetime. It's technically too difficult." So to see this incredible event happening on television, something that Dad said was impossible—it somehow made it all the more awe inspiring.

I knew I wanted to be a rock musician, but the moon landing further confirmed that I needed to pursue astronomy as well. I'd been hooked since I was 9 or 10 and would beg to stay up past my bedtime to watch a program on the BBC called *The Sky at Night*, about the cosmos. The year after the moon landing, I began the long course of study for my Ph.D. in astrophysics at Imperial College. Through everything that happened with Queen, my interest in "what's out there" never faded. Some people say the space race, the moon landing—oh, that stuff doesn't matter. But it mattered to me.

CADY COLEMAN, 58

Retired astronaut (two shuttle missions; former crew member on the International Space Station)

I KNOW THE MOON landing was a huge big deal, but it seemed really normal to me as an 8-year-old. My kid brain went, *Of course we're on the moon!* In those days, my father worked on the Navy's Sealab program, where people lived at the bottom of the ocean for long periods. So I grew up knowing people who went to extreme places. Some of them were aquanauts and astronauts, like Scott Carpenter, from Project Mercury, who would come to our house for tuna casserole.

The teams that made the Apollo missions happen were some of the most wonderful people from all ends of the earth, but they were just people. And I loved that. It made me want to be an astronaut. When I flew on the space shuttle and later on the space station, I would sometimes look out at the moon and feel the opposite of what I guess you'd call FOMO [fear of missing out]. I didn't feel like I missed something by not going there. Just knowing that people got there—regular people, albeit very brave ones—it makes it so that I'm there a little bit. Humans pulled this off. We can do incredible things. Impossible things!

ALI MacGRAW, 80

Actress, model, animal rights activist, yoga enthusiast

I HAD JUST DONE *Goodbye, Columbus.* I had never been in a big movie, and the

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: FILMMAGIC; GETTY IMAGES; PATRICK McMULLAN VIA GETTY IMAGES; FILMMAGIC

head of the studio invited me to lunch at La Grenouille, the fanciest restaurant in New York City. I lived on the Upper West Side, and after this business meeting I walked home. About two blocks from where I lived, on the sidewalk, was a big old fat-bellied TV that someone had pulled outside of a brownstone so everybody passing by could watch. It was a rough year, with the Manson murders, equality marches, poverty, war. But whatever state we were in, there on that stoop that afternoon and evening as we stood together as strangers and neighbors—it was, *Oh, my God, we're going to fix these problems because of the bravery and promise of what these men are doing!* The energy was so hopeful.

BOB KERREY, 75
Former governor and senator from Nebraska, Medal of Honor recipient

THERE'S A SAYING you always hear: If they can put a man on the moon, they can do this or that. Well, those weren't just words for me that day. I had just come back from Vietnam and was in the solarium of the Philadelphia Naval Hospital at the beginning of my recovery from having had part of my leg amputated. They hadn't even started the process of fitting the prosthetic, but watching Armstrong and Aldrin that night gave me hope. Anything that takes your mind out of despair is a good thing, and Apollo 11 certainly did that. Seeing men on the moon reminded all of us of how unimaginably large the universe is and what a tiny part in it we play. That concept still gives me perspective. It's this idea of, "Look beyond yourself; there's bigger stuff out there."

HARRY HAMLIN, 67
Actor (L.A. Law, Mad Men)*, fusion-power entrepreneur*

I WAS 17 AND camping in Canada at the time and got myself to the only television within 50 miles of where I was. It was at a store, and I stood there with random strangers looking up at the black-and-white TV. There was a personal element for me, though. My father helped build the rocket. He worked closely with Wernher von Braun, and I grew up with the space program. I was thinking how proud my dad must be, watching his rocket take these guys up to the moon. I was certainly proud of my dad. Today I'm on the board of governors of the National Space Society, and this summer I'm hosting a huge bash in Los Angeles with Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins in attendance. It's going to be epic!

KATE CRONKITE, 68
Author, daughter of longtime CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite

DAD WAS DOING the CBS broadcast that night. I was up at boarding school in Vermont, but the space program had been very much part of my life. One of my earliest memories was sitting on wet sand at Cape Canaveral, watching those first tiny NASA rockets go up like firecrackers, do a little loop and come right back down. It was the beginning of all that, and my siblings and I would chase up and down the halls of the Holiday Inn, where the CBS crew and all the astronauts would stay. There was a sense, because of who my dad was, that this was all extremely important, but I was just a kid. I probably bumped right into Neil Armstrong and didn't even know it. The night of the moon landing, we got permission to watch in the dean's office. It was just mind-boggling. A few weeks later, we got permission from the same dean to take a field trip to the Woodstock festival. That was mind-boggling, too, but in a different way.

AL ROKER, 64
Today *show weather anchor, journalist, author*

I WAS IN our living room in Queens, New York, with my mom and dad and brother and two sisters. And we could actually see this happening live right there on our Sears color television. It really ushered in a whole new era of media that sort of launched me on my way. Later, over the years, I got to meet Buzz Aldrin, Neil Armstrong, John Glenn, Sally Ride—all my heroes. That was being in the presence of true pioneer spirit.

HENRY WINKLER, 73
Emmy-winning actor, producer, writer, now in the hit HBO series Barry

I WAS AT the Yale School of Drama in a fellow student's apartment. We were playing Monopoly and watching his small color TV, and were eating Ebinger's blackout cake, from Brooklyn—the most incredible chocolate cake. And as that guy was leaping out of his spaceship, I felt very proud of America. What an experience for that guy, what an experience for America that they figured this out, because I have trouble counting change. And that these men and women could accomplish this in the first place was just incomprehensible. And here I was, alive to watch this miracle happen, enjoying this great piece of cake. We were silent. No one was buying Baltic Avenue. We were just watching in awe. ■

PORTRAITS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: GETTY IMAGES (2); STEVE SCHOFIELD/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES; RICHARD HOWARD/THE *LIFE* IMAGES COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES; GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM LEFT: NASA

Apollo 11 by the Numbers

238,855
Distance in miles from the Earth to the moon

8 days, 3 hours, 18 minutes, 35 seconds
Duration of the mission to the moon and back

24,200
Ship's top speed reached, in miles per hour

3.5
Length in feet from the ladder for Armstrong's "small step" onto the moon