

Jessica Meir – Swedish American of the Year 2020

Highly topical NASA astronaut.

Summary

Jessica Ulrika Meir is to her profession a NASA astronaut and Physiologist. She is born on July 1 1977 in Caribou, Maine, USA. Her father comes from Israel and her mother from Sweden. Two older siblings are born in Sweden. As only a five-year-old child, she fantasized of the moon in a pencil drawing with herself standing on the moon by an American flag. Jessica's choice of education and high ambitions is coherent with her childhood dream. She was selected in June 2013 as one of eight members, among 6000 candidates, of the 21st NASA astronaut class. 2015 Meir was a fully trained NASA astronaut.

Education

Graduation from Caribou High School in Caribou, Maine, was followed by a Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology from Brown University in 1999. Earned a Master of Science degree in Space Studies from International Space University in France in 2000. Earned a Doctorate in Marine Biology (diving physiology) from Scripps Institution of Oceanography (UCSD) in 2009. For her Ph.D. research, Dr. Meir studied the diving physiology of marine mammals and birds. In 2012, Dr. Meir accepted a position as Assistant Professor at the Harvard Medical School/Massachusetts General Hospital, where she continued her research on the physiology of animals in extreme environments.

Directly NASA-related is the work of Dr. Meir from 2000-2003 for Lockheed Martin's Human Research Facility (NASA Johnson Space Center), supporting human physiology research on the space shuttle and International Space Station. During this time, she also participated in research flights on NASA's reduced gravity aircraft.

Her Astronaut Candidate Training included scientific and technical briefings, intensive instruction in International Space Station systems, spacewalks, robotics, physiological training, T-38 flight training, and water and wilderness survival training.

In 2016, Meir served as a crew member on the European Space Agency (ESA) CAVES space analog caving mission in Sardinia, Italy.

Spaceflight Experience

Expedition 61 and 62 (September 25, 2019 through April 17, 2020). The crew launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome aboard the Soyuz spacecraft. Meir, who served as Flight Engineer, was also joined by Soyuz Commander Oleg Skripochka of the Russian space agency Roscosmos.

During her very first spaceflight, Meir conducted the first three all-woman spacewalks with crewmate Christina Koch of NASA, totaling 21 hours and 44 minutes.

Jessica has described the strong feeling of taking a step into the atmosphere: “I looked down on my feet and there was absolutely nothing between me and earth. It was a moment of wonderment”.

The crew contributed to hundreds of experiments in biology, Earth science, human research, physical sciences and technology development. Among the investigations to which she contributed is a study co-led by a former colleague of hers, examining how human heart tissue functions in space. She spent 205 days in space, 3,280 orbits of Earth and a trip of 86.9 million miles.

Relation to Sweden

Through her Swedish mother, Nurse Ulla-Britt, Jessica has close bond to Sweden. She speaks Swedish and for one semester she was studying at University of Stockholm. Jessica has a Swedish citizenship along with her American one. So, we are proud to address Jessica as the first Swedish woman in space and the second Swedish citizen after the astronaut Christer Fuglesang.

More about Jessica

As young Jessica Meir learned to play different instruments: flute, piccolo and saxophone. Classical literature is her favorite reading. Among her leisure-time activities she enjoys physical sports like cycling, hiking, running, skiing, soccer and scuba diving. She also holds a private pilot's license. Photography is another big interest.

When asked by a Swedish journalist: What do you do on your spare time at the space station? She said:

“Looking at movies, reading books – I did bring Pippi Longstocking - calling home, playing music with my companions. But most of all I enjoyed looking through the window and taking photos.”

Catherine Bringselius Nilsson

Chairman Swedish American of the Year Committee