

Sharon Christa McAuliffe

NH Teacher Becomes Astronaut

Sharon Christa McAuliffe (1948-1986), the first teacher to fly in space. She was selected from among more than 11,000 applicants from the education profession for entrance into the astronaut ranks. As a youth she was excited about the Apollo moon landing program, and wrote years later on her astronaut application form that "I watched the Space Age being born and I would like to participate."

McAuliffe attended Framingham State College in her hometown, graduating in 1970. A few weeks later she married her

long-standing boyfriend, Steven McAuliffe, and they moved to the Washington, DC, metropolitan area so Steven could attend Georgetown Law School. She took a job teaching in the secondary schools, specializing in American history and social studies. They stayed in the Washington area for the next eight years, where she taught while completing an M.A. from Bowie State University, in Maryland. They



"I touch the future. I teach."

-Christa McAuliffe

moved to Concord, New Hampshire, in 1978 when Steven accepted a job as an assistant to the state attorney general. Christa took a teaching post at Concord High School in 1982, and in 1984 learned about NASA's efforts to locate an educator to fly on the Shuttle. The intent was to find a gifted teacher who could communicate with students from space.

NASA selected McAuliffe for this position in the summer of 1984 and in the fall she took a year-long leave of absence

from teaching, during which time NASA would pay her salary, and trained for an early 1986 Shuttle mission. She had an immediate rapport with the media, and the teacher in space program received tremendous popular attention as a result. It is in part because of the excitement over McAuliffe's presence on the Challenger that the accident had such a significant impact on the nation.