

Interview with Buzz Aldrin Astronaut

Topic: Dr. Buzz Aldrin, 75, Former Astronaut, Space Entrepreneur and Hearing Health Advocate

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On July 20, 1969, Dr. Aldrin and fellow Apollo 11 astronaut, Neil Armstrong, became the first humans to walk the surface of the moon. A leading advocate of space tourism to the moon, Mars and asteroids, Dr. Aldrin has founded ShareSpace and Starcraft Boosters, two enterprises devoted to making space travel available for all. He has also recently added a second mission to his busy life: Educating the public about hearing health and encouraging the more than 500 million hearing impaired people worldwide to seek treatment.

How did it feel to be one of the first two people to ever walk on the moon? Can you describe the experience for us?

I was full of goose bumps when I stepped down onto the surface. The horizon was so close it made me feel a bit disoriented. On earth when you look at the horizon it appears flat, but on the moon, so much smaller and without hills, the horizon curves visibly down away from you. I could see the earth, which seemed small, and the amount of light reflected off the lunar surface was so high that it was as if we were standing in brilliantly lit snow. The sky was black. I could see no planets or stars.

How does someone prepare for a mission to the moon, mentally

and physically? Weren't you afraid at some point?

We weren't afraid. True fear is the fear of the unknown, and all our training had been geared towards eliminating the unknown as much as possible. For a month before the flight we'd worked twelve hours a day, at times on a simulated lunar surface, tromping around in a 50 by 50 foot litter box filled with sand, with heavy equipment on our backs. However, I did feel a tinge of stage fright. Perhaps the worst moment was when Houston announced that the President wanted to talk to us. My heart rate, which had been low during the entire flight, suddenly jumped. One quarter of the earth's people were listening on radio or watching on TV.

How have you spent your time since the famous moon landing?

I'm actually quite busy. I am still designing rockets, I go deep sea exploring, and I spend a lot of time travelling the world speaking on two topics close to my heart: privatizing space and hearing health.

Privatizing space? Do you mean space tourism?

Yes, I am a big proponent of space tourism. That's why I have founded ShareSpace and Starcraft Boosters, two enterprises devoted to making space travel affordable for all. I am also working with a team of researchers, including professors and engineering graduate students at US-based universities Purdue, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Texas, to design a new class of spacecraft that would serve as orbiting hotels perpetually cruising between Earth and Mars. It is called the "cyclor" spacecraft, and it would constantly ferry people and materials between the two planets, enabling us to explore, commercially develop and eventually colonize the Red Planet. I am convinced that some day, people will be going to Mars on a regular basis. The only question is when.

You mentioned another topic that is important to you, hearing health. What motivated you to get involved in educating the public about this topic?

Until I started having hearing problems of my own, I never realized that there were more than 500 million people around the world who also have hearing problems. When I started wearing hearing instruments myself, it greatly improved my quality of life. It's unfortunate because I think there are a lot of misconceptions around

hearing loss that prevent people from seeking treatment. As a public figure who has personally experienced this problem, I feel quite passionately about lending my voice to help educate others. The truth is that hearing loss is something that affects most of us as we get older, but the great news is that it can almost always be treated. That's why I've partnered with Phonak, a Swiss-based provider of hearing solutions, to be a "hearing enabled" ambassador.

You're now 75 years old and yet you seem to have more projects and activities underway than most people half your age. What drives you? What keeps you going to your next achievement?

I've always been a person who sets high goals and tries hard to meet them. Fortunately or unfortunately, this hasn't changed as I've gotten older. I'm always motivated by the kinds of challenges that most people think are impossible, such as landing on the moon or enabling people other than astronauts to experience space travel. Each achievement spurs me on to try something even more challenging.

What kind of advice would you give to people who are looking to retire or semi-retire in the next 10 years?

I think the most important advice I can offer is to maintain a healthy lifestyle. This is what will let you keep pursuing all the achievements and activities that you find most interesting. Eat right, get some exercise, stay active mentally and physically and visit your doctor regularly for check ups. If you think you may have a health problem, like my hearing problem, go to the doctor and get him or her to run some tests. Actually, don't even wait until you think you have a problem—you should get routine tests like hearing tests conducted regularly anyway.

How have you managed to maintain your health and keep your energy up as you've gotten older?

I've always been proactive about my health. As soon as I realized I had a hearing problem, I went in and had my hearing checked. And when my doctor recommended that I get hearing instruments, I did. I know that some people think it's unattractive to wear hearing instruments, but they're such little high-tech devices now, you can hardly see them, and they make a difference. At first, I didn't find hearing devices that immediately worked for me, but the ones I have now from Phonak are great and have helped me maintain my active

lifestyle.

How has your life changed since you started wearing hearing instruments?

Well, first of all, my wife Lois is certainly very happy that I no longer turn up the volume on our TV, and she is even happier when I take her out to restaurants and parties, where it is now easy for me to communicate despite lots of background noise. Of course, my entire family is happy that they no longer have to repeat words they say to me. As for myself, I am able to separate words from noises again, which makes my life easier regardless of whether I'm lecturing on space travel, attending a conference or visiting with family and friends. I have become a very social person again, and I enjoy life even more now than I did before.

What do you consider your greatest accomplishment in life so far? Is it the moon landing or something else?

The moon landing was certainly an incredible achievement, and few things can top such an event. However, the fact that nearly 40 years later I am still leading an active and happy life with my wife makes me proud as well. There is a good time for everything in life. These days, I am devoted to my two main projects - space tourism and hearing health education. Both are very important to me. If I can make strides in each of these two areas, and I think I am, it will also be a great accomplishment.

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