

THE ASTRONAUT & THE OLYMPIAN

1996 Oklahoman

By Nancy Woodard & Jeanne M. Devlin



of the Year



S. LUCID
W. ЛЮЦИД



Jan. 14 1943	6 weeks	1944	1946	1948	1949	1950	1951	Grade School	Junior High
Born Matilda Shannon Wells in Shanghai, China.	Interned at Japanese prison camp with parents.	Released and returns to U.S. (New York, Michigan, and finally Fort Worth, Texas).	Returns to China.	Flies from Shanghai across Kuling Mountains in unpressurized plane—with nose pressed against window, decides to one day be a pilot.	Leaves China when Communists take over.	Moves to Bethany.	Begins 4th grade in Bethany Public School System.	Begins to read science fiction authors such as Robert Goddard—dreams of being a space explorer.	Writes essay on being a rocket scientist and flying in space.

The Astronaut

BETHANY'S DOWN-TO-EARTH SCIENTIST

SHE HAS LIKENED SPENDING TIME IN THE SPACE shuttle orbiter to being locked up in a camper in the rain with one's children. But even that comment coming from Shannon Lucid sounds more like an observation than a complaint. For though Lucid is many things—scientist, mother of three, record-setting space traveler—there is one thing she is not: a complainer.

Hardy, determined, self-effacing, she is not unlike the Oklahoma pioneers who built the state she still calls home. Like them, she heard the siren of the frontier, but in following her love for the new and unexplored, she has gone places only a special few have ever been. In 1996, she came—if only for six months—as close as any American has to experiencing what it might be like to live in space.

NASA only planned for Lucid to spend 140 days on the Russian space station *Mir*, but as any pioneer knows they call it wilderness for a reason. When mechanical difficulties and weather delays (including Hurricane Fran) prolonged the mission for an additional forty-eight days and five hours (188 in all), the ever stoic Lucid was only heard to briefly lament the lack of good books and candy aboard. Down on earth, NASA scientists had to chuckle.

And so did America. *Newsweek* declared Lucid had “the new right stuff,” and somehow through her candid comments we all felt a little more connected to the last frontier—how scary could the place be if M&Ms were still relevant? Her

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downplaying of the exotic aspects of space travel and emphasis on the more down-to-earth parts of the trip was no affectation. “I think a lot of times people just don’t realize that no matter where you are or what situation you’re in,” said Lucid, “life goes on pretty much the same. There’s no big changes. You eat the same, and you breathe the same.”

She found, in fact, that the difference between life on earth and life on a space station snuck up on a person. It wasn’t until the first Russian resupply vehicle (or progress in NASA lingo) arrived, that she realized just how isolated she was: “It showed up,” said Lucid, “and we had fresh fruit for the first time in three months, and you realized what wasn’t on the progress you had no way of getting.”

It is the way Lucid handled such realizations—that would have triggered a flash of panic in most humans and even some astronauts—that sets her apart: “That’s just the way it is,” she said matter-of-factly of the limits of a space life, “and you just live every day as that day...My parents often stressed the importance of whatever you’re going to do, do it right.” In this case, living in space was her job. And she was bound and determined to do it right. She chose to focus on

the chance to do good science, keeping fit for her eventual return to earth (she logged some 400 hours on the stationary bicycle and treadmill aboard *Mir*), and the opportunity to see every day a view that she says never got old: the earth spinning like a child’s toy in a black sea.

Never one to be impressed by records, Lucid has little appreciation for her record-setting stay in space; to her way of thinking, the duration of her mission was never something within her control—so how could it be a goal? The only designations that make her more uncomfortable? Ones having to do with her being a woman. If Lucid had her way, she would be thought of not as one of NASA’s first female astronauts (though she was one of NASA’s original six women) but

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—Shannon Lucid

High School	High School	High School	1960	early 1960s	1960-1962	1962	1963	1963-64	1964-66
Reads <i>Reader's Digest</i> article that suggests skin has inhibitory factor that might prevent cancer. Starts experimenting with mice and chemicals and does science project. (Local pharmacy phones teacher Mrs. Moon to approve chemical purchases.)	Wins local, regional, and finally national science fair award with science project. Receives Bausch & Lomb Science Award. Oklahoma Junior Academy of Science publishes her paper on cancer.	National Science Foundation accepts Shannon to study at its summer and weekend institutes.	Graduates from Bethany High School.	Receives pilot's license.	Attends freshman and sophomore years at Wheaton College in Illinois. (Because of tuition hike, Shannon decides to transfer.)	Transfers to O.U.	Graduates with B.S. in chemistry from O.U.	Teaching assistant at O.U.'s Department of Chemistry.	Senior lab technician at Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation.

1966-68	Dec. 1967	Sept. 19 1968	1969-1973	Jan. 13 1970	Jan. 14 1970	1970	1973	1974-78	Aug. 22 1975
Chemist at Kerr-McGee in OKC.	Marries Michael Lucid (former boss at Kerr-McGee).	First child is born—Kawal Dawn.	Graduate assistant at O.U. Health Science Center's Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology.	Second child is born—Shandara Michelle.	Takes biochemistry exam.	Receives M.S. in biochemistry at O.U.	Receives doctorate of philosophy in biochemistry at O.U.	Research associate with Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation in OKC.	Third child is born—Michael Kermit.

as an Oklahoma astronaut, one in a long line of risk-taking travelers. “Oklahoma,” said Lucid, “has sort of a stellar history of people being involved in aviation and now in space. For whatever reason, Oklahoma has really fostered that. You know, Wiley Post designed the first suits that they wore for high altitude flights—the forerunner to space suits. And, of course, there have been quite a few astronauts who have been educated or lived in Oklahoma, and Oklahomans should be quite proud of that.”

As for herself, Lucid says she was simply following a dream that began with a child’s fascination with flying airplanes. Is she special? “I think that people have to realize that I’m just very, very fortunate,” she said, “and I just happened to be in the right place at the right time.”

Her time in space in 1996 did not satisfy her wanderlust. She has said bluntly that if America were to launch a mission to Mars that she would like to be on it. One of her greatest hopes is that one day being an astronaut will not be an exception but a rule—that Americans will one day be a space-faring people. “What I’d personally like to see,” said Lucid, “is a program in which we made all-out efforts to do planetary exploration—head out to Mars and establish a colony and then go on from there.

“I think it’s important,” she added, “because human beings have always had this urge to explore, and I think if we stifle that urge, and if we don’t have outlets for people to go and explore, then we will lose a little part of our humanity.”

Shannon Lucid returned to earth with the eyes of humanity upon her. From the beginning of her flight, she had been determined to prove that long space flights needn’t leave one a temporary cripple, but NASA officials had prepared for what they saw as the inevitable decline of a body returning from an extended stay in space.

Newsweek reported in October that members of the rescue team that meets every space shuttle landing at Kennedy Space Center in Florida had obsessively run through their retrieval moves for days before she landed. Using their in-

terlocked arms as a seat, they practiced lifting what would soon be Lucid from the padded recliner in the shuttle Atlantis, carrying her to the hatch, easing her out, and then lifting her onto a gurney in the crew transporter for the short ride back to an operations building. Captain Dan Daly and Tony Romano practiced the drill on a dummy over and over again. “You don’t want to make any mistakes,” the 31-year-old Daly told *Newsweek*, particularly not a mistake that might drop an astronaut whose bones have been made brittle by her stay in gravity-free space.

The day of Lucid’s arrival, Daly and Romano took their places on the tarmac. After *Atlantis* touched down, a flight surgeon hurried on board to test Lucid’s vital signs. Two NASA technicians assigned to extract the astronaut from her space suit were right behind him. Lucid’s helmet was stuck, so the technicians spent fifteen long minutes working it off with pliers and a screwdriver. Then Daly and Romano were cued. “We were expecting to find her on the recliner,” Daly told *Newsweek*, but instead Bethany’s favorite daughter—defying every prediction of space biologists—was standing.

She walked the short distance to the hatch on the arms of the technicians, then with their help exited headfirst. Again, Daly and Romano prepared to link arms and carry her to the transport. But as Lucid prepared to take her first step on earth’s surface since March 22, she waved them off: “No, I can stand up,” she said.

The fifty-three-year-old astronaut—as always—did just what she said. “She walked the twenty-five feet to the transporter,” *Newsweek* wrote, “making up with pure grit what 188 days and 67,454,841 nautical miles had wrung out of her in muscle and bone strength.” In a phone call from the White House, President Clinton told her: “I couldn’t believe you walked off that shuttle.” And neither could we.

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1978	1979	Jun. 17-24 1985	Oct. 18-23 1989	Nov. 1989	Aug. 2-11 1991	Oct. 18-Nov. 1 1993	1995	Mar. 22-Sept. 26 1996	December 1996
NASA selects Shannon for the astronaut candidate training program (one of the first six women chosen).	Officially becomes an astronaut.	Mission Specialist on STS-51G.	Mission Specialist on STS-34. (During mission, <i>Galileo</i> spacecraft is deployed to explore Jupiter.)	The Oklahoma Aviation & Space Hall of Fame in OKC inducts Shannon as Oklahoma’s first female astronaut.	Mission Specialist on STS-43.	Mission Specialist on STS-58.	Trains in Star City, Russia, for <i>Mir</i> mission.	Board Engineer Two on Russia’s Space Station <i>Mir</i> .	Receives Congressional Space Medal of Honor (first woman to do so).





Mar. 10 1977	Mid-Aug. 1977	Late Aug. 1977	Feb. 1978	Fall 1979	Dec. 25 1981	Late Mar. 1982	May 1984	Aug. 1984	Aug. 1984
Shannon Lee Miller born at Phelps County Hospital in Rolla, Missouri.	Millers move to Edmond.	Shannon gets corrective shoes to straighten her legs.	Shannon's legs are growing properly; shoes are removed.	Receives a Jungle gym.	Santa brings the trampoline Shannon requested.	Shannon and Tessa enroll in local gymnastics club.	Shannon's coach has her take USAIGC gymnastics test in Waco, Texas.	Shannon, age 7, starts 2nd grade at Charles Haskell Elementary in Edmond.	Promised a Cabbage Patch doll if she masters pressed handstand USAIGC examiner requested; Shannon has doll within a week.

The Olympian

THE GIRL FROM EDMOND

IN THE END, THE SINGLE MOST AMAZING THING about Shannon Lee Miller may be that she was able to so completely dominate a sport in which the stars have so often been grinning pixies in tights. Quiet, studious, bordering on serious, the Edmond gymnast was never your typical gymnast nor even your typical world champion.

In a world of performers she was a worker. Her ability to focus was legendary as were her organizational skills (she's a religious list maker) and her love for her sport. "The best thing about it," Miller said, "is it was just something I loved to do, and I was able to take it so far. I love the gymnastics itself. I love everything about being in gymnastics, being with your teammates, traveling, meeting new people, and competing. I love the adrenaline flow you get when you're getting ready to go and compete."

Some people crack under pressure or bright lights, but Miller wasn't one of them. Competition brought out the best in her. She can remember once early on pulling back in fear from a tough move after making an error earlier in the routine, but she says she realized almost on the spot that fear and caution just made matters worse, and it certainly wasn't the way to get better.

She credits her coach, Steve Nunno, with channeling her

For seven consecutive years, Miller has been the national spokesperson for the Red Ribbon Campaign, an anti-drug program aimed at America's youth.

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—Shannon Miller

natural high-achieving tendencies toward a series of tangible goals. "Steve was the goal setter," said Miller. "I remember he had us fill out goal cards at the beginning of each season on what we wanted to accomplish that year in the gym." And like everything else she did, Miller took the list serious. She was only nine years old when she filled out her first card for Nunno, and she filled out many more over the next ten years. And, yes, she reached every single one she set for herself.

Ironically, the one goal Miller never actually put in writing was the Olympics. "Long term, maybe, I thought one day I'd be in the Olympics," she said, "but it wasn't my main goal. My main goals were always more immediate, learning a different skill in the gym, doing as well or better in an international competition than I did last time...I don't think I ever thought that much about it. I was always just moving forward, and I never—not ever—looked back."

The only trouble with never looking over your shoulder is that sometimes you arrive and don't realize where you've been. Or in Miller's case what you've accomplished. She is the most decorated American gymnast in history. Period. She has won more Olympic and world championship medals than any American man or woman, an astonishing fifty-eight in international competition and another forty-nine in national meets (more than half of both are gold). In 1996, she was the cornerstone of the first American gymnastics team to ever win a team gold at the Olympics, and she managed to bring home the USA's first individual gold on beam as well. Yet she is not being coy when she says that not a whole lot of what she's accomplished in the past year—much less the past decade—has sunk in. "I think I'll realize a lot more about what it all means ten years from now," she said.

Always obliging to autograph seekers and fans, Miller none-

Fall 1985	Summer 1986	Nov. 29 1986	Mar. 1987	Apr. 1987	Spring 1987	1988	Jul. 1989	Jun. 1990	Sept. 1991
Passes USAIGC test and qualifies as a USAIGC elite gymnast.	On a two-week trip to USSR, Shannon impresses both Soviet coaches and visiting Coach Steve Nunno of Oklahoma City.	Scores a respectable 30.45 in optionals only at a level 2 meet—her first competition.	Wins first tournament in Ardmore.	In her first state championship, barely 10, places 1st in All-Around competition.	The 4th grader's gymnastic routine fails to make P.E. teacher June Coleman's annual talent show for the first time.	Almost 11, wins 2nd at first national meet, the American Classic Junior B in Phoenix, Arizona. Finishes 2nd at Alamo Classic in San Antonio behind Wendy Bruce; signs first autographs. Wins U.S. Classic in Athens, Georgia. Qualifies for Junior Pan-American Games in Puerto Rico; wins silver All-Around and bronze uneven bars; U.S. team wins gold.	Makes "Okies to Watch" list in <i>Oklahoma Today</i> ; wins gold in bars, bronze in All-Around at Olympic Festival in OKC, denies Bela Karolyi's team attempt to take all six golds.	At age 13, becomes youngest member in history of U.S. senior national team.	At World Championships in Indianapolis, scores more points than anyone, leads U.S. team to a silver, becomes first American to qualify for all four apparatus finals, and wins silver on uneven bars.

Dec. 1991	Apr. 1 1992	Jun. 1992	Late Jul. 1992	Aug. 1982	Fall 1992	Mar. 1993	Apr. 1993	Jul. 31-Aug. 1 1993	Aug. 1993
At Swiss Cup in St. Gallen, Switzerland, earns a perfect 10.00 on balance beam; at Arthur Gaudes Memorial in Montreux, makes first gold sweep, earns a perfect 10.00 on beam, and her combined score sets a meet record; in Stuttgart, Germany, comes in 3rd All-Around.	Surgery prevents Shannon from competing in optionals of USA Championships.	At Olympic trials in Baltimore, places first in compulsories and barely makes six-member U.S. Olympic team.	Captures silver All-Around and four other Olympic medals in Barcelona; meets Dream Team; stands 4'7", weighs 77 pounds.	Shannon and fellow Olympians go to White House to meet President Bush; on August 5, returns to huge crowds at Wiley Post Airport in OKC; attends parade in her honor in Edmond; receives 1,000-plus letters in first week home; makes cover of USA Gymnastics and appears on ABC's "Good Morning America."	Tours 23 cities with a team of Olympic and world-champion gymnasts; in 1992 becomes first female recipient of Steve Reeves Award from N.Y. Downtown Athletic Club.	Makes second sweep of an international competition and wins All-Around in McDonald's America Cup in Orlando; B.C. Clark hosts a "Sweet 16 Birthday Party"—her first party since she began competing.	In Birmingham, England, becomes first American gymnast to ever win three gold medals in a World Championship; Gov. David Walters declares April 23 "Shannon Miller Appreciation Day" in Oklahoma; gets her own line of Elite Sportswear.	Receives two standing ovations, three golds, and a silver at U.S. Olympic Festival in San Antonio. Afterwards, visits Sea World with family and friends.	Takes first in every compulsory event and scores highest score (9.825 on beam), repeats performance in optionals (9.90 on bars), at USA National Championship in Salt Lake City; introduces the "Miller," a back handspring, quarter turn, with a half hop.

theless borders on shy. Indeed, friends say Miller was actually a little appalled after her first Olympics in 1992, when she realized her hometown was staging a parade just for her. "She kept asking who else was going to be there," one recalled. She couldn't believe she was the only guest of honor.

Four years later, Miller has been on Letterman, worked the Rose Bowl Parade with Carl Lewis ("that's the best thing that's happened since the Olympics," she says), and made the cover of the Wheaties cereal box. But you get the feeling she doesn't consider these accomplishments so much as perks. In fact, it is probably telling that her voice gets much more animated when she talks about the first time she got to train with Russian gymnasts than when discussing her latest celebrity appearance. "The first best thing that ever happened in my career," said Miller, "was going to the Soviet Union."

It was 1986, and her Edmond gymnastics club was on a two-week trip of Soviet training facilities. Miller hadn't met Nunno at the time, but as fate would have it he too was in the USSR to study Soviet coaching techniques. The eager little gymnast from Edmond caught his eye, he would later say, because she kept trying to do the highly technical moves requested by the Soviet coaches. "After seeing them train, I got so excited about gymnastics," said Miller. "You hear so much about them, and the picture that's painted is that they never talk, never have fun, just do gymnastics. But I saw them laughing in the gym and having fun, and their coaches were great and a lot of fun. I got to see that it didn't matter at what level you were, you could still have fun in gymnastics."

That said, she cautions young gymnasts about setting their sights too far in the future. Becoming the best is done not with leaps but small steps. "Only seven girls in the whole country make that team out of the millions who do gymnastics," said Miller. "It's just thinking too far ahead. The best

reasons to do gymnastics are to have fun, gain coordination for other sports, and to be active and healthy. Gymnastics taught me how to balance my time, and it taught me the discipline that's helped me get good grades and into a good college."

Was it her parents then that saw an Olympic medal in their daughter's future? "No," laughed Miller, "not at all. They thought they were just sending their daughter to something she'd get tired of in a month or so.

"It didn't happen."

So the Millers did what parents do: they shuttled her to practice twice a day, they sat in the stands, and they took off work so they could watch her compete. "They never told me, 'Well, we don't think we can do it' or 'We think it'll be too hard on the rest of the family,'" said Miller. "It was always, 'What else can we do for you.'"

Nunno gave more of the same. "He's absolutely, always had my best interest in mind," said Miller, "and he's always tried to help at everything—mostly inside the gym but also every and anything outside the gym. We know each other so well that even in competitions if something goes wrong, a look can say that. I can't imagine switching around coaches. That would be hard."

Indeed when Shannon Miller, former amateur gymnast, went looking for colleges one of the best things the University of Oklahoma had going for it was that it was located just a half hour south of Oklahoma City where Nunno has a gym. "I picked O.U. at first," said Miller, "because it's a good school, but also because I could go to college and keep training."

There will not be another Olympics for Miller, but for a good while yet there will be gymnastics. □



Apr. 19-24 1994	Jan. 1994	Apr. 1995	Aug. 16-19 1995	Fall 1995	Oct. 1995	Dec. 1995	Jun. 1996	Jul. 1996	Aug. 6 1996
At World Championships in Brisbane, Australia, becomes first gymnast since 1970s to retain world title; wins All-Around and beam.	Receives Dial Award for national high school athlete/scholar.	Sets records at Pan-American games in Argentina, winning team, All-Around, bars, and floor golds and silver in vault.	Wins 2nd in All-Around, 1st in vault, 3rd in floor at U.S. Nationals in New Orleans.	Enters O.U. as an undeclared major.	At World Championships in Japan, wins 5th despite injured foot; helps team win bronze, stands 5' and weighs 94 pounds.	Injures wrist; unable to train or compete for several months.	Despite a fall on optional beam, wins U.S. Championship, allowing her to make U.S. Olympic team despite injury that keeps her out of trials.	Leads U.S. Olympic team to a team gold—first in history; becomes first American to win gold on balance beam.	Gov. Frank Keating declares "Shannon Lee Miller Day" in Oklahoma.

