

FIRST-PERSON ESSAY

My Lifelong Friend, the Moon

An essay by Lunar Pioneers author Robert A. Black. This essay may be reprinted as a whole or in part. For digital copy, contact us at legal@windstormcreative.com

It's one of my earliest memories, the time when my parents woke me up late one night in July 1969 and took me to watch something incredible on TV – a fuzzy black-and-white image from another world. Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong and "Buzz" Aldrin were climbing out of their Lunar Module, *Eagle*, and were walking on the surface of the Moon. I may have been only four years old at the time, but I understood the significance of what was happening – and I was mesmerized by it.

After that, I was absolutely hooked. Even before I knew how to read, I looked at the pictures in spaceflight books over and over, asking my parents what they were showing me. Even before I knew how to write, I drew picture stories full of astronauts and Saturn V rockets and Lunar Modules. When Bob Keeshan broadcast *Captain Kangaroo* from the CBS News lunar mockup studio during Apollo 12, I imagined the rest of the Captain's voyage, complete with Mr. Green Jeans orbiting above the Moon in the Command Module. Furniture in our house became a Command Module, a Lunar Module or a Lunar Rover, and during the Apollo 15 mission, my (infinitely patient) grandmother played Al Worden to my Dave Scott and my brother's Jim Irwin.

(Okay, so I was a weird kid. Are you really all that surprised?)

I suppose it was inevitable that once I became a writer, my imagination would venture into space again. We didn't go to the Moon on *You Can't Do That On Television*, but I did write the "Outer Space and Space Travel" episode, for which the crew built me a set that looked like a space shuttle cockpit. My return to the Moon has finally come with my book, *Lunar Pioneers*, a story about a colonist family in the 22nd century. In some ways, writing it was like retracing all those imaginary trips I took to the Moon all those years ago – only now, I have the research material and the technical understanding to give the journey a big dose of realism.

If I had to pick a favorite scene from the book, it would be the characters' visit to the Apollo 17 landing site, in the Taurus-Littrow valley. Writing it was like going back to an old childhood playground, as I went over the old mission photos and records to capture as much of the atmosphere (so to speak) as I could. In my version of the future, Taurus-Littrow has become

the Moon's "hands-on" tourist attraction, where visitors can get an up-close look at the old Apollo equipment, so I had to make sure I got it right. Taurus-Littrow is also where astronaut Gene Cernan wrote his nine-year-old daughter's initials in the lunar dust as he was parking the Rover for the last time. I thought that would be a good way to connect my readers to the scene, and I made the most of it.

People have largely overlooked the Moon in the years since Apollo. It's had something of a "been there, done that" feel to it, as most people have gone back to their pursuits here on Earth, looking toward space only for some more distant spectacle like the *Spirit* and *Opportunity* rovers on Mars. But now that's starting to change. NASA is going back to the Moon, beginning later this year with two robotic missions. Astronauts are expected to follow by 2020. And other countries have started their own lunar programs, too. A European probe circled the Moon in 2006, Chinese and Japanese probes are there now, and an Indian probe is almost ready to launch. Who knows? The next flag planted on the lunar surface might not be an American one.

Whoever reaches the Moon next, you can be sure I'll be watching them eagerly. After all, they'll be going to visit an old friend of mine, and you can be sure my imagination will be going out there with them.

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