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In this image provided by NASA, Buzz Aldrin poses for a photograph with the U.S. flag deployed on the moon during the Apollo 11 mission on July 20, 1969. (Neil A. Armstrong/NASA via AP)

One giant leap

By: LIBN Staff July 19, 2019

If you're of a certain age, approaching 60 or beyond, it's one of those events that are seared in memory.

But unlike the others – tragedies on the scale of Pearl Harbor, the JFK assassination, 9/11 – the moon landing stood out as an American triumph.

It also came to mean to a generation that we were capable of doing anything. If we could land men on the moon we could develop technology that could cure illness and change the world for the better.

To some extent, the victory over space travel inspired Americans to go forward without fear of failure. Humans have been staring up at the moon through the millennia in wonder and this generation had landed there to unravel its ancient secrets. It was a remarkable time to be alive.

Long Islanders played an outsized role in landing Grumman's lunar module, or the LM, on our nearest celestial neighbor. We asked a cross section of Long Island's leaders for their memories of that day and what it did to change their perceptions of our home here on Earth.

Their memories are vivid and colorful: This is what they said:



Former U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato

Mamma D'Amato had worked in a defense plant during WW II and just based on her limited experience during that era she knew just how hard it would be to build something that would bring Americans to the moon and back – how unforgiving the tolerances were... but she kept those thoughts to herself.

For me, I remember the Apollo 11 landing to be almost a spiritual moment, an event that reminded all of us that we are fellow travelers on this planet. From a young man's perspective of 1969, it didn't matter whether you went to church or temple, rooted for the Mets or Yankees – lived across town or across the street in Island Park – we were

Sen. Al D'Amato

all Earthlings and these three astronauts were going to remind us of that common thread – a shared sense of humanity.



Steven Schlesinger

Steven Schlesinger, managing partner, Jaspan Schlesinger

To earn money to put myself through law school, I was driving a horse and buggy that carried tourists around Central Park. As I turned around the Plaza, someone came out of the hotel, screaming, "We have a man on the moon." I remember thinking, "Here I am back in the horse and buggy days, and a man is on the moon."

Andrew Parton, president, Cradle  of Aviation Museum

I was 11 years old and I watched the landing with my family in our house in Brooklyn. It was one of the most exciting days I can remember.

The whole experience basically told me ... that anything was possible. At that time we were dealing with an awful lot of bad news between the Vietnam War, recent assassinations and the economy so this was the best news you could possibly hope for.



Katherine Heaviside

Katherine Heaviside, president, Epoch 5 public relations:

1969 was an unsettling time, and I was overwhelmed by all the negative things happening in the world – 30,000 had already died in the Vietnam War, student protests were happening on college campuses, the USSR had a nuclear test, and we were still reeling from Robert Kennedy's assassination the year before.

Racing a small sailboat on Long Island Sound and stranded in the windless July doldrums, I feared that we would miss seeing Apollo 11 land. Finally, we caught enough wind to make it back to shore and race home in time to watch. The moon landing was the first good news in a very long time – an almost impossible goal had been set and achieved. The moon landing energized and inspired me. It showed that success begins once you set lofty goals. I carried this motivation with me as I set goals to run marathons and even start a business.



Michael Blaymore

Michael Blaymore, co-president of the Long Island Real Estate Group, partner at Salamon, Gruber, Blaymore & Strenger

I was turning 17 and was working as a junior counselor at a sleep away camp in Maine. The senior counselor had brought a television to camp and we were one of the bunks fortunate to have one. I recall the country being consumed with the Apollo 11 mission. It seemed that was all people were talking about. There was tremendous excitement and also some apprehension about the safety of the astronauts. I vividly recall watching Neal Armstrong descending down the ladder, stepping on the moon's surface, and hearing his immortal words.



Joseph Tucciarone

Joseph Tucciarone, founder of National Network of Accountants and former assistant spacecraft test manager at Kennedy Space Center

Like many Americans I watched the first moon landing glued to the television screen. However, unlike many other Americans, the moon landing on July 20, 1969 represented the end of a long journey for me. I graduated from Manhattan College in 1965 and immediately went to work with Grumman Aircraft of Bethpage.

Not long after, I was reassigned to Kennedy Space Center. During my days (there) I witnessed the launch of the Saturn 5 rocket, the first non-manned launch of the lunar module as well as the death of three astronauts during testing at the Cape. The landing on the moon represented the end of a long journey and the beginning of a new era for both me and America. The day was tense and I was very anxious. However, by night time I was beaming with joy and filled with pride and excitement. This was the day we as Americans changed the course of history and I was part of that change. It was exhilarating.

I personally grew from this experience into a proud American and a fulfilled engineer. This was a great moment in history. I believed at that time and until today, that this event was similar to Christopher Columbus landing on the

shores of the new world.



Marie Zere

Marie Zere, principal of Zere Real Estate Associates

I remember putting my two children, Michael and Michelle who were 4 and 2 at the time, in front of our black and white TV in their pajamas to watch the moon landing. I was pregnant with my third child, David. I also took my two children by their hands outside to look up at the sky to see the moon and telling them what a special day this was for mankind.

The experience was exhilarating for everyone in our country. America beat the Soviets in the space race during the Cold War. The moon landing united us as proud Americans during the turbulent times of the late sixties and Vietnam protests.



John Nader

John S. Nader, president, Farmingdale State College

I vividly recall sitting on the floor of our living room watching Neil Armstrong descend the ladder and step on the moon. The entire family was together and was nearly silent during that portion of the broadcast. We turned off all the lights and watched intently.

I was only 13 at the time, but it was clear that Apollo 11 had achieved something that created a great deal of collective pride. It's amazing that NASA fulfilled President Kennedy's vision of a safe moon landing in less than a decade. That was a remarkable achievement for science and for the nation.

William Corbett, attorney

The day of the moon landing I had just landed in Omaha, Nebraska enroute to Lincoln, the state capital, where I was representing Avon Products...to meet with legislators to discuss regulation of door-to-door salespeople. As the landing proceeded, I listened to the radio as I sped from Omaha to Lincoln at a very high speed. There was not a single car on the road. I guess all the state troopers were indoors also watching the landing.

Ann Corbett, senior public relations consultant with Corbett Public Relations

I was staying with my then two-year-old son, Billy (Bill Corbett, Jr., president of Corbett Public Relations), in a relative's rustic cabin in Olive Bridge, N.Y. I took Billy with me to the main house to watch the astronauts walk on the moon via TV with relatives and others vacationing in the quarry-side cabins. The TV screen was small and the reception was very, very poor; the picture was in black and white. We crowded around the little TV, watching intently and were thrilled and proud at the sight of the movements and words of the American astronauts and the commentator. It would be a moment in history that I witnessed from afar, but still remember clearly today.

Alan Vitters, assistant professor for business administration and marketing, St. Joseph's College

I was in Vietnam as a platoon leader. I didn't find out about the moon landing until I read it in Stars and Stripes. While I was serving as an aide to a general in Chu Lai, Neil Armstrong came with Bob Hope's U.S.O. show in December 1969 and he talked about the moon landing with the troops.



Regina Gil

Regina Gil, founder/executive director of the Gold Coast Arts Center and Gold Coast International Film Festival

It was the summer I graduated from college and I was upstate on my way to visit my parents, who were on vacation. There were issues getting there and we got stuck in traffic, realizing that we would miss the landing if we didn't find a place with a TV. So, we pulled off the road, found an old café, which had one black-and-white television mounted above the bar and we joined a group of locals as Neil Armstrong got out, came down the steps and made his historic statement. There were cheers and tears. Strangers hugged. We were all just Earthlings now.





Greg Demetriou

Greg Demetriou, president, Lorraine Gregory Communications

I recall wondering how the hell they were they going to get home. Also that first step was of concern just because it was the first. Would the surface be stable and supportive? Never mind that it was already supporting the LEM. That of course was a very heady day. The lasting impression is that we (America) could do anything we set our collective will to do.



Pat Galteri

Patricia Galteri, managing attorney of Meyer, Suozzi, English & Klein

Three years prior to that day my father instilled the wonder of the heavens and their possibilities one warm August night in 1966 when he opened my eyes to the Big Dipper, the North Star, and Draco the Dragon. It was also his way of teaching me that as a female I could aspire to be anything I wanted.... I will never forget that July night of 1969.... My family had taken us to the cabin in Bolton Landing ...on Lake George... Dad's idea of being on vacation was to be cut off from the city, meaning no TV or radio. This year was different. We packed a 13-inch TV...There on the deck of Cabin F we set up the TV complete with tin foil certain to assure we would see the landing

without a hitch.

When Neil actually made that step, my 12-year-old soul was transformed into that person who would later seek to aspire to heights imagined by father back in that 1966 summer night. Elation and pride at being an American filled my thoughts. Our country had actually made this event occur. Staring up at the moon would never be the same.



Gary Lewi

Gary Lewi, managing director, Rubenstein Associates

I was a self-acknowledged space nerd from the beginning. When other boys had posters of Farrah Fawcett Majors on their walls I had a NASA chart detailing space boosters, manned spacecraft and mission milestones.

My father was a second-generation mechanical engineer who learned his trade in Vienna. He was probably more than a little disappointed when he realized his son's math skills would not let me be a security guard at Grumman's main gate much less an aerospace engineer. But I did know how to clean his Melville machine shop floor on Saturdays so one weekend he asked if I could make the initial cut on aluminum bar stock, keep the blade lubricated and hand it to his chief machinist, Eddie Kleven. Well. Yes. I could do that.

He said (to me) in his accented English, "From now on, whenever you look up at the moon, you will be able to say you were part of the Apollo project..." My father had allowed me to make the first cut on what would become Grumman Lunar Module descent struts.



Ernie Fazio

Ernie Fazio, chairman, Long Island Metro Business Action

That day was one of celebration and patriotism with everyone passing out wine and mixed drinks and snacks. It was a day that was meant to live in your memory no matter where you experienced it. The mission was the melding of hard work, dedication, intellectual resources and a fair amount of luck.

Jim McCann, founder and chairman, 1-800-FLOWERS.COM

It was the summer of my freshman year of college and I had stopped home quickly in between my two jobs. I caught a brief glimpse of the TV and saw that unbelievable, momentous occasion. I remember it well because later that night at my second job, I was asked to drive an 18-wheeler back to a bakery in Jamaica, Queens. I didn't know how to drive an 18-wheeler, so it was an anxiety-provoking evening and I thought, "These guys can land on the



Jim McCann

moon and I can't even get a tractor-trailer down Atlantic Avenue!"



David Sterling

David Sterling, chief executive officer, SterlingRisk Insurance

I was 12 years old away at camp in Vermont. We all crowded around an old TV and watched. I can still remember the feeling of pride, not just that humankind was on the moon but that it was my country. We had done it!



Julia Lauria-Blum

Julia Lauria-Blum, curatorial assistant and archivist, Cradle of Aviation Museum

I was three months shy of 10 years old, a very active tomboy who enjoyed hanging out with my older brother's friends shooting off Estes rockets...I was fully captivated by the space program...Growing up on Long Island, the majority of my circle of friends and neighbors had fathers who worked in the aviation and aerospace industry...After the LM touched down, my family and a few neighbors came over to our house. I specifically remember Armstrong saying, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Of course the room erupted into applause and exuberance at the historic, almost surreal event.



Jeffrey Bass

Jeffrey L. Bass, Executive Strategies Group

I was 18... It was a difficult time for me because I had been suffering from a very debilitating congenital heart defect. ...When Neil Armstrong set his foot on the moon's surface...I was struck by the courage, the tenacity, the strength, determination and humility of it all. That bolstered my own determination to attempt to overcome my health issues. I succeeded despite other obstacles along the way. Today – 50 years on – I am healthy.

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