

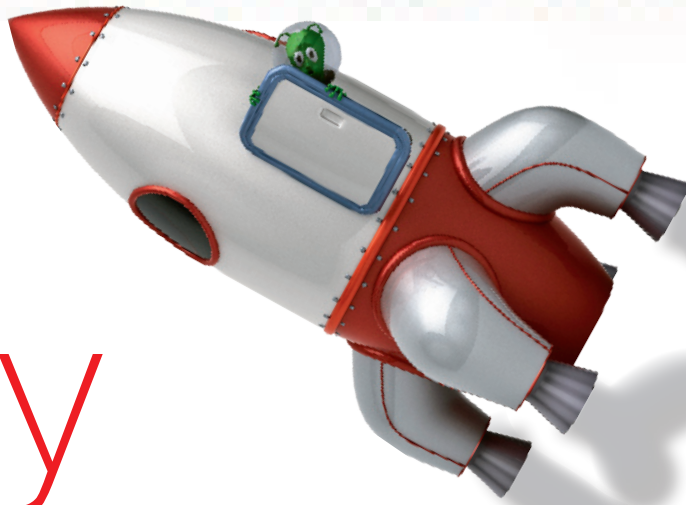
In our new series, you'll meet teens just like you who are doing amazing things. Read their stories and be inspired to change the world—and achieve your dreams!



Going into space is a risk, but it's definitely one worth taking, because we might discover something new. My motto is "Mars 2030 or bust!"

ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (GRASS, BOOK); DIETER SPEARS/E+/GETTY IMAGES (ASTRONAUT); COURTESY OF ABBY HARRISON (ABBY); PAGE 21 ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (SPACESHIP); COURTESY OF ABBY HARRISON (ABBY)

Inspired
Like You



Abby

is headed to space!

Abby, 16, is determined to be an astronaut someday. And she's proof that you're never too young to start working toward your goals!

**BY ABBY HARRISON,
AS TOLD TO JANE BIANCHI**

When I was little, my mom read me a book about kids who go to space—I thought it was so cool. I was a nature-lover who looked for bugs and often stared at the sky. I'd wonder: *Where does the moon come from? How many stars are there?* I didn't understand the world around me, but I wanted to.

In seventh grade, I signed up for a program called "Reach for the Stars." About 50 students from all across my Minneapolis school district took part in it. Once a week, I'd build model rockets and learn space history. Then, on spring

break, we went to a weeklong space camp in Huntsville, Alabama. My passion just continued to grow! Even my eighth-grade history project was about space. I bought a flight suit online to wear during my presentation.

At the time, I was having trouble finding sources to interview for the project, and my mom said, "Try Twitter." So I followed NASA and noticed that NASA was tweeting with a woman who had worked on the International Space Station. I tweeted to her, she replied in minutes—and agreed to let me interview her!

On Twitter, I also met



Here I am
at space
camp!

dozens of other kids who are into space. Around this time, I also launched a site (AstronautAbby.com) to share what I learned. I decided from that point on that I would



do whatever it takes to be an astronaut. My motto: Mars 2030 or bust!

THE FIRST LAUNCH

At the end of eighth grade, I asked my mom if we could go to the *Endeavour* launch—and she said yes! We flew to Florida to visit the Kennedy Space Center. It was amazing! But the real thrill came later.

At the airport on the way home, I looked behind me and spotted a famous Italian astronaut named Luca Parmitano. I said hi, and he spoke to me for a whole hour, giving me advice about how to become an astronaut. He said, “NASA wants people

who are passionate—so don’t study something just because you think that’s what NASA is looking for.” Then he handed me his e-mail address.

I started e-mailing with Luca—I felt special to have a real astronaut as a **mentor**. I’d tell him what I was learning at school, and he’d tell me about how he was training for a May 2013 rocket launch all the way in Kazakhstan (just below southwestern Russia). Then one day, he said he had snagged tickets to the launch for my mom and me. I freaked out!

To pay for travel, I launched a fund-raising campaign on a site called

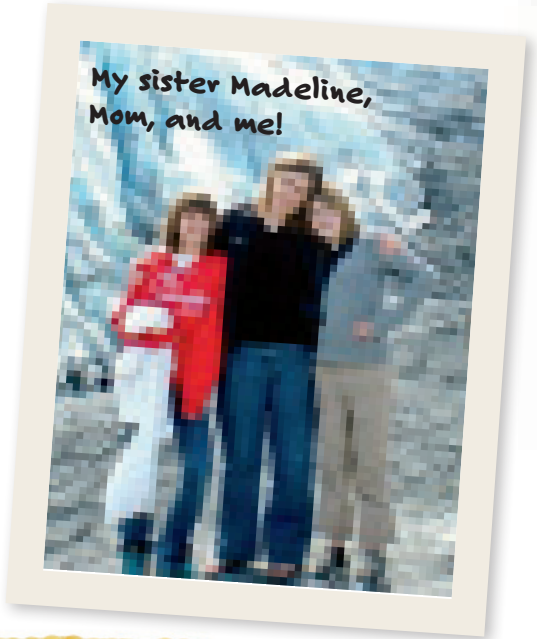
RocketHub.com. First, it was mostly family and friends who donated. Then my followers on social media started to chip in. Even total strangers gave me money, which blew my mind. My mother, who is a single mom, would have gone into debt to make sure I could go. But I was *determined* to help.

MY BIG ADVENTURE

Kazakhstan was unreal. It was crazy hearing a different language and seeing different clothing and foods. And the launch was thrilling—I felt vibrations in my chest and heat on my face! I kept thinking about how amazing



I have two dogs and two cats. This is Cupcake the Rodent Slayer!



My sister Madeline, Mom, and me!



My favorite food is corn on the cob—with butter and salt, obviously.



This is my mentor, Italian astronaut Luca Parmitano

After visiting Kazakhstan, my mom and I went to Moscow in Russia. This is me in front of the historic Kremlin!



it was that Luca was achieving his lifelong dream, and I could imagine myself in his spot someday. All of my study about space seemed more worthwhile than ever!

Once Luca was in space, I became his “Earth **liaison**” via my site. I reported what he was doing by chatting with him on Twitter, and I created a game called “Catch Luca,” which encourages followers to take and share photos as the International Space Station passes in orbit. I also set up an “Ask Luca” Q&A.

It’s funny to think about the first time I met Luca. I was so jittery! I could easily have shied away, but I seized the opportunity— and look at the

doors that opened for me! I’m so glad I introduced myself.

A BRIGHT FUTURE

I’m already thinking about college—I might study engineering or biological science. Right now, though, I’m just doing everything I can to teach people about space. I blog as much as I can, and I do video chats with classrooms across the country too.

I also love showing other kids—especially girls—that it’s OK to be interested in math and science. In fact, my 6-year-old sister Lily recently had a princess-themed birthday party, and I showed up in my flight suit. She got *such* a kick out of it!

3 Things Abby Wants You to Know

- 1 DREAM BIG.** Don’t sell yourself short. Think about who you’d like to be and what you’d like to do and then go for it.
- 2 DON’T WORRY ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE.** It doesn’t matter what friends, family members, or bullies say about your dream. It’s your dream, not theirs.
- 3 IT’S OK TO CHANGE YOUR MIND.** It’s fine to choose one passion and then decide that you’re much more interested in something else. Eventually, you will figure it out. It’s not the destination that matters—it’s the journey.