

MAE JEMISON

Engineer, doctor, astronaut, dancer, scientist... it's so hard to choose! Mae Jemison shows us that we don't have to limit our dreams. Isabel Thomas discovers how Mae grew up to be all these, and more!

As a child, Mae loved dancing, but she was also interested in human sciences and loved talking with her uncle about cosmology.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

I want to be a scientist!

Mae wanted to combine all her passions and study bioengineering – using engineering skills to understand and fix problems with the human body. She began by studying chemical engineering at university. She didn't give up her other passions – she kept on dancing and got a degree in African-American studies too. Mae thought about being a professional dancer next but decided to study medicine.

My mother said you can always dance if you're a doctor, but you can't necessarily doctor if you're a dancer.

As she studied, Mae spent time working as a medic in Thailand and West Africa. She began to use her experience to do medical research. Back in the USA, Mae saw that NASA was looking for people to train as astronauts. She went back to college to make sure her engineering skills were up to scratch. There were 2,000 applicants, but Mae was one of the 15 people to be accepted! She trained hard for two years then worked as an engineer for NASA, helping to get space shuttles ready for launch.

DR MAE JEMISON WAS BORN IN ALABAMA, USA, IN 1956.

The really wonderful thing that happened to me when I was in space was this feeling of belonging to the entire universe.

After her mission, Mae was ready for new challenges. She started her own company to find new ways to use the latest technology to help people. Her projects include using satellite communications to improve healthcare in West Africa and designing solar electricity systems for developing countries.

Don't let anyone rob you of your imagination, your creativity, or your curiosity. It's your place in the world; it's your life. Go on and do all you can with it, and make it the life you want to live.

Mae also spends lots of time teaching, and encouraging young people to become scientists, no matter what their background. She wants us all to reach for the stars, and she is still doing this herself by leading a project to develop the science and engineering needed to travel to a different solar system in the next 100 years. Mae doesn't want anyone to be left out.