

<p><a title="A copy of the San Francisco Chronicle from when the Apollo 11 mission made it to the moon on Flickr by zpeckler"

href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/22012086@N08/3161684240/" target="_blank">

Forty years ago today, Neil Armstrong took the legendary ♦one small step for man♦ onto the surface of the moon. It was July 20, 1969 ♦ and it would have a huge impact on our world and our thinking. </p>

<p>I have always been fascinated by the space program. Frankly, I think that the original pilots in the X-1 program (i.e. Chuck Yeager) were ♦the real deal♦. On October 14, 1947, he broke the sound barrier. Until then, everyone thought that you could approach it, but not break it. Yeager simply ♦went there♦ mentally in a very Wild West fashion and lo and behold, they broke the barrier ♦ physically and more importantly, mentally.</p> <p>We were entering into what will viewed as an incredible era in our civilization. This era is a phenomenal example of ingenuity, of technological advancement, of ♦pushing the envelope♦. The sound barrier was just a beginning ♦</p>

<p>The Mercury program ran from 1959 to 1963 with the goal of putting a human in orbit around the earth. It was documented in ♦The Right Stuff♦ by Tom Wolfe in 1979 (which popularized the mathematics phrase ♦pushing the envelope♦), and later became a phenomenal movie of the same name in 1983.</p>

<p>And this was just scratching the surface of what man could dream ♦ and accomplish.</p> <p>Then, on May 25, 1961, President John F. Kennedy made his ♦Special Message to the Congress on Urgent National Needs♦ (<a title="Kennedy's speech - May 25, 1961"

href="http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/03POF03NationalNeeds05251961.htm" target="_blank">text; audio can be found <a title="Kennedy's speech - May 25, 1961"

href="http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset+Tree/Asset+Viewers/Audio+Video+Asset+Viewer.htm?guid={573E950E-8353-499C-9321-4E2223C3A185}&type=Audio" target="_blank">here.

Within this landmark speech, he noted:</p> <blockquote> <p>♦I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth. No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind, or more important for the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.♦</p> </blockquote>

<p>Yes, the task at hand was daunting. Frankly, it was something that was barely comprehensible. </p> <p>Fast forward to July 16, 1969 ♦ when Apollo 11 was launched. And July 20 ♦ when Armstrong took the first steps on the moon. We can now reflect on that monumental day in 1969 and see the immense challenge that was faced ♦ and the huge accomplishment.</p> <p>But I think that the biggest achievement of July 20, 1969 ♦ better yet, the space program in general ♦ was that it was a beautiful example of setting a goal (crazy as it might sound), and challenging your perceptions to make it happen. It was about ♦pushing the envelope♦ of the collective comfort zone of scientists, pilots, politicians, and the whole nation. It caught everyone♦s imagination ♦ from the moment that Kennedy announced it was a goal. It was so totally ♦out there♦ that it didn♦t have a reference point.</p>

<p>Today I found the website <a title="We Choose The Moon"

<http://wechoosethemoon.org>> We Choose The Moon. It is a stunning summary of Apollo 11's mission, with original video, photos, and transmission audio. It is a great exploration of the mission.</p><p>As I wandered through the video, I kept thinking to myself</p><blockquote><p>Holy crap. Now that's a lot of balls. First of all, you do all this preparation to exist in space and on the moon & yet you're re-creating the conditions on earth. You really don't have much to work with & other than a trust in science, a trust in data, a faith in the power of the scientific method. You train and train and train and then & you strap yourself onto the top of this rocket that is going to blast you into space. So then you're in orbit & whew & and you're now in the Eagle & descending to land on the freakin' moon! Who knows what the surface is really going to look like as you descend. Time to land this sucker & hell, we've never done this before either, this is totally new territory, 20 seconds of fuel left and & a little sigh of relief when, holy Apollo, you're now on the surface of the moon. So now if that isn't enough to completely blow your perceptions of the universe, you're now putting on a suit to step out of the Eagle and put your foot onto the moon and then & and then &</p></blockquote><p>& yes, that's incomprehensible. Simply incomprehensible. And enough to alter your perceptions of what CAN be done & if you simply set your goals high enough, your thoughts deep enough, your aspirations without boundaries.</p><p>That's what it is. It's about boundaries. We are all bound by our own self-imposed limitations. If you can dream it & it can happen. And we all got to see that play out on national television on July 20, 1969.</p><p>Which brings me to an irony to all of this. Walter Cronkite died on July 17. If there is anything that I think about when I ponder the space program, it's Cronkite's reporting of the daily events. Cronkite was openly excited about the Apollo mission. It's sad to think that Cronkite wasn't able to witness the 40th anniversary of this memorable day. But I know for certain, the two are indelibly intertwined in my mind.</p><p></p><youtube>p7c-PbfnQuw</youtube><p></p><p>I was but three years old when it happened & on the verge of my fourth birthday. And I can't say that I was there watching it live on the TV & though I know my father was, and his photos of the black and white TV screen are mementos of that fleeting moment in history. It is an era that, to this day, remains incomprehensible & yet ever so real. And it reminds me of how much our limits are simply our own, and only our own.</p><p>&</p><p>Photo credits: zpeckler, Jonathan Caves</p>