

Woman's plane photos of space shuttle go viral

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This citizen journalism photo taken with a cell phone by Stefanie Gordon aboard a passenger flight from New York to Palm Beach, Fla. shows the space shuttle Endeavor as it streaks toward orbit shortly after liftoff Monday May 16, 2011. Gordon says she had just awakened from a nap on the flight when the pilot announced the shuttle might come into view. (AP Photo/Stefanie Gordon)
PREMIUM CONTENT - SPECIAL RATES APPLY ; NO SALES; MAGS OUT; TV OUT

(AP) -- Groggy from a late night watching the Yankees, frigid from a chilled airplane cabin, Stefanie Gordon stirred to action after the pilot's

announcement. Lifting her iPhone to the plane's window, she captured an otherworldly image that rocketed around the globe as fast as her subject: Space shuttle Endeavour soaring from a bank of clouds, its towering plume of white smoke lighting the azure sky.

She had never imagined the response her airborne image - capturing the last [launch](#) of Endeavour and the next-to-last space shuttle flight - would ignite. The images and video have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times on Twitter alone, landed on network newscasts and been published in newspapers worldwide.

In turn, they've made a photographic celebrity of sorts of the unemployed 33-year-old from Hoboken, N.J.

"It just blew up," she said of the attention.

Gordon caught an early Delta flight from New York to West Palm Beach on Monday to visit her parents and had a whole row to herself, never imagining the history she would record.

She stretched out and took a nap. Then she awoke shortly before the pilot announced the descent had begun and a sighting of the shuttle was possible. She had forgotten Endeavour was even taking off at 8:56 a.m. EDT, but readied her iPhone just in case.

Then, the pilot came on again, alerting passengers the shuttle was in sight.

"Everybody ran over to the east side of the plane," Gordon said Tuesday, "and all of a sudden there it was in the clouds."

All told, she shot 12 seconds of footage of the shuttle arcing on its simple stream of smoke into space. She also shot three still photographs.

The plane landed minutes later in West Palm Beach and while she was waiting at the luggage carousel, at 9:31 a.m., she began uploading to [Twitter](#). As she waited for her father to pick her up, she realized her work was making a splash.

"My phone just started going crazy," she said.

Among those who reached out to Gordon was Anne Farrar, a photo editor at The Washington Post, who saw the images after they were posted by a friend on Facebook. She said she'd never seen anything quite like this view of a shuttle launch before.

"It was just a really imaginative way to bring it to our readers," Farrar said. "It's almost like an underwater view."

Endeavour is on a 16-day trip - the second to last [space shuttle](#) flight. Its main mission is to attach to the space station a \$2 billion physics experiment.

As for Gordon, she lost her job at as a meeting planner at a nonprofit organization last month. If the exposure from her pictures helps land her dream job of working in the sports field on special events and promotions, she said, it would all be worth it. Or if someone thinks her photographic eye qualifies her for a permanent job shooting video or photos, she wouldn't turn that down either.

For now, she's basking in the afterglow of her launch shots and hoping for some rest once the media frenzy passes.

"Laying by the pool would be really nice," she said.

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