

Astronaut mementoes: Cowboy boots, prayer beads, lunch box

August 2 2015, by Marcia Dunn

The 14 display cases at Kennedy Space Center contain intensely personal mementoes and other items representing the astronauts who perished in the Challenger and Columbia accidents.

They are part of NASA's new "Forever Remembered" exhibit, which includes the first public display of pieces from each lost space shuttle.

NASA's Michael Ciannilli began contacting the astronauts' families in 2012, gently consulting with them and collecting belongings. Every encounter, he said, left him ever more humbled.

A few families were reluctant to donate personal items, including that of schoolteacher Christa McAuliffe, yet assured Ciannilli, "We trust you to represent our loved one the very best you can." He conferred with the astronauts' friends and former co-workers, and read up extensively on each one who died.

"We could have filled a case 10 times the size on each one of these folks and still used more room ... because they were so multidimensional," Ciannilli said, "and each conversation would lead to something else."

Included are flight jackets and suits, Cub and Boy Scout shirts and trophies, favorite books, snapshots. A sampling of other items shown:

Challenger astronauts:

- Francis "Dick" Scobee: Leather helmet from the Starduster biplane he and his wife used to fly
- Michael Smith: House remodeling plans dated 1982, four years before the launch accident
- Ellison Onizuka: Buddhist prayer beads
- Judith Resnik: Piano sheet music for "Valse" by Mischa Levitzki
- Ronald McNair: White karate gi, black belt and katana, or sword
- Gregory Jarvis: 1975 bicycling trophy
- Christa McAuliffe: NASA "Teacher in Space" patch and quote, "I Touch the Future. I Teach."

Columbia astronauts:

- Rick Husband: Scuffed cowboy boots and Bible opened to a favorite, underlined verse in Proverbs
- William McCool: Hiking boots and 35-mm camera
- David Brown: Airplane model as well as four NASA-supplied models of planes he liked to fly
- Kalpana Chawla: NASA-furnished bird feeder and binoculars to depict her love of nature
- Michael Anderson: Boyhood Star Trek-themed lunch box and Thermos
- Laurel Clark: White personalized coffee mug
- Ilan Ramon: Copies of the cover and a page from his recovered flight notebook, with his handwriting in Hebrew

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