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In June 1963, the Soviet spacecraft 'Vostok 6' is launched with the 26-year-old Valentina Vladimirovna Tereshkova on board, the first female sent into space.

TV and radio news announced that at 3:00 p.m. on June 14, 1963, the Soviet spacecraft Vostok 5, piloted by cosmonaut Valery F. Bykovsky, had entered Earth's orbit.

The first manned space flight had taken place two years earlier, in April 1961, when Soviet cosmonaut Yuri A. Gagarin had successfully orbited the earth aboard Vostok 1, so the launching of Vostok 5 in itself did not astonish the world. But with the news about Lieutenant Colonel Bykovsky also came word that the Soviets would soon send a woman into space for the first time. This stirred the world's interest.

Then, two days later, another news flash circled the globe: at 12:30 a.m. on June 16, the Soviet spacecraft Vostok 6 was launched with a female cosmonaut on board. Her name was Valentina Vladimirovna Ter-eshkova, and she was a 26-year-old second lieutenant.

"It is I, Seagull!" Her bright and cheerful voice reached earth from outer space. Moscow Television showed the interior of the cabin of Vostok 6, and conveyed the image of the young woman floating in zero gravity to people's television screens. Her face, with its lovely smile and determined expression, became known around the world.

"It is I, Seagull! I see the horizon. A light blue, a beautiful band. This is the Earth. How beautiful it is! All goes well!" "Seagull" was the call sign she used for contacting Earth. Lieutenant Colonel Bykovsky, who had begun his flight two days earlier aboard Vostok 5, used the call sign "Hawk." The purpose of these two flights was to compare the effects of long-term space flight on men and women.

Seagull and Hawk both held parallel orbits around our planet. Vostok 6 completed 48 orbits in 71 hours. It landed safely on June 19, at 11:20 a.m. Vostok 5 made a new record for time in orbit, completing 81 orbits in 119 hours and 6 minutes. It returned safely to earth on June 19 as well, at 2:06 in the afternoon.

The world applauded the achievement of Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, who had soared into the vast skies of freedom.

She had been an ordinary working woman. Her father, a skilled tractor driver, was killed in the Second World War when she was a child. Her mother worked hard in a textile mill, doing her best to raise three children. Growing up watching her mother work dauntlessly in spite of their many hardships, Valentina went to work at a tire factory in Yaroslavl on the banks of the Volga when she was seventeen. Later, she got a job in the same textile mill where her mother worked.

Her dream of becoming a cosmonaut was born when she heard the news of the successful first manned space flight of cosmonaut Yuri A. Gagarin in Vostok 1. The thought of flying into space herself excited her. It became her grand dream. It was a dream shared by many young people around the world in those days.

Every young person has a dream. Having dreams and ideals is one of the privileges of youth. Far too few, however, actually realize their dreams. Once the opposing winds of difficulty begin to buffet them, many sink as quickly as a leaky boat. Only by pursuing a dream in the face of such realities, by continuing to pursue it until the very end, will that

dream be realized.

At the time the Vostok 1 mission succeeded, Valentina was a member of the state aviation club and a skilled amateur parachutist. The young textile-mill worker was already beginning to weave her dream of flight. Her original reason for joining the aviation club was that she wanted to see her hometown from the sky. Her first jump took place during a rainstorm. No doubt she felt anxious and afraid. But she challenged herself and took flight, breaking through the dark clouds of fear that loomed in her heart.

From that time on, she grew more and more fascinated with the sky. It was then that she learned of Major Gagarin's space flight. Less than one year later, she had been selected for the Soviet space program.

The training for cosmonauts turned out to be far tougher than she had anticipated. Of course the physical training was hard; but she also had to study many specialized subjects, including rocket science. Each day she underwent continuous, intensive training that challenged the physical and mental limits of her being.

Daisaku Ikeda appears in the
novel as Shin'ichi Yamamoto.
The events take place in 1963.