

## Pass It On®...

### The Undeniable Spirit of Ed Dwight, America's Oldest Astronaut.

*At 90 years old, Ed Dwight saw the world from the window of Blue Origin in 2024. "If everybody could take a trip to space and look at it from that vantage point," Ed says, "we all would have a totally different view of this earth and not only treat it better but start treating each other a little bit better too."*

Ed Dwight was born in Kansas City, 1933. It wasn't wealth or privilege that earned him a shot at his dreams, but rather an anything-is-possible, never-give-up attitude called an undeniable spirit, and a mother who taught him that barriers were more like goals to push beyond.

Black Americans like Dwight were not given the same opportunities as other Americans. But Dwight didn't notice. During his early years, his gaze was on the single-engine private planes that took off and landed at the small regional airstrip near his family's farm. At night, he sat with his mother, gazing out at the stars and listening to her talk about the Milky Way, the planets and the lunar cycles. It instilled in him a curiosity and opened the door to possibilities.

At age 4, Dwight started walking over to that small airport. He watched as planes landed, returning from hunting trips. "I went into the mechanics' area where they're fixing the engine. They'd allow me to hang around, and I'd hand them the wrenches they needed, and I was getting this education about mechanical things."

Eventually, Dwight became a fixture in the hangar. By the time he was 8 years old, the mechanics were giving him nickels and dimes for helping out. Then, one day, he said, "'I don't want any more money. I want to fly.' So, I got my first flight. I could see the Missouri River, and I could see the farm that I grew up on. I was having an awareness of how parts and pieces of this world fit together and how I could fit into it."

As soon as he could, Dwight joined the Air Force. He passed the entrance exams at a genius level because his curiosity as a child had led him into the local library, where he read flight manuals and

completed tests at the end of each chapter – unknowingly preparing him for his bright future.

But there was one challenge. Dwight was a quarter-inch too short to pass the physical to become a fighter pilot. Members of his squad contrived a plan to put shims of cardboard in his socks. His squad instructed Dwight to tell the examining doctor that he had athlete's foot and needed to wear socks. The plan failed, but a commanding officer was so impressed by Dwight's determination that he passed him to join the USAF flight training program to become a pilot.

"I excelled in the Air Force. I studied harder than everybody. I stayed a little longer. I got to work a little earlier and stayed a little later. I was taking other people's missions, trying to build up flying time. I did everything with a lot of intensity."

By 1961, Dwight's excellence soon caught the attention of America's newly formed space agency, NASA. At the height of the space race, the program was rigorous and politically charged: America needed a win. President John F. Kennedy's administration chose Dwight to become an astronaut in training, the first Black pilot to reach such lofty heights. But in the end, Dwight was not chosen to be part of the team that was launched into space. It was disheartening. But as his mother taught him, barriers are simply goals not yet achieved, and anything is possible.

That "anything" came to pass in a full-circle moment in 2023, when Dwight got a very unexpected, life-changing phone call. That call resulted in Ed Dwight boarding a Blue Origin rocket ship on May 19, 2024, to break the bounds of Earth's gravity and become the world's oldest living astronaut – at 90 years old.

Another barrier was finally broken. Another dream fulfilled. Another spirit set free.

**Undeniable Spirit...[PassItOn.com](https://www.passiton.com)**

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