

DR. MAE JEMISON
Episode #1 Transcript
Written by Gabrielle Mirabella
Music by Ernie Bird

GABRIELLE: Hello! And welcome to our very first episode of “What *will* she do next?”

I’m your host Gabrielle Mirabella and together with composer Ernie Bird, (**ERNIE:** Hello!) we’ve created a podcast that celebrates some of our *favorite* historical women!

On today’s episode we will be exploring the power of determination, and how one brilliant woman forged her own path despite a lifetime of barriers.

This episode was written & narrated by myself with music & editing done by Ernie Bird (**ERNIE:** Hello!)

And playing today’s leading role we have ... (**GABRIELLE REID:** Gabrielle Reid!)

GABRIELLE & ERNIE: Enjoy!

GABRIELLE: Are you feeling...stuck? Does the challenge presented before you seem pretty “unsolvable”? Or, perhaps, like many of us right now, you feel confined; with no place to go, no room to grow? Well, don’t worry, you’re not alone.

Join us, as we investigate seemingly “impossible” situations from the lives of history’s most famous women, and ask ourselves...what *will* she do next?

THEME SONG PLAYS:

“What will she do next?

What will she do next?

Her aim is true but will she see it through?

Oh, what will she do... next?”

GABRIELLE: Today’s historical woman: Dr. Mae Jemison; American engineer, physician, NASA astronaut, and the first African-American woman and woman of color in the world to go into space.

Now, before she gets too “stuck”, let’s see where she’s coming from...

Dr. Mae Jemison was born on October 17th, 1956 in Decatur, Alabama to parents Dorothy and Charlie Jemison, and older siblings Ricky and Ada Sue. As a young child Mae adored her older siblings, and marvelled at the exciting work they did in grammar school, especially their *science lessons!* As her siblings returned home from school each day, Mae could hardly contain her excitement, ready to ask them the many questions she had cultivated over the course of her day.

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(YOUNG) MAE JEMISON: Ada Sue, what is our universe made of? *And*, how did it start? *And*, if it started from nothing, then how did it become ‘something’? *And*... Wait! Come back! I have more questions to ask!

GABRIELLE: Mae’s fascination with science was growing stronger every day. And, when her siblings needed a break from her enthusiasm, Mae would turn to a favorite science-fiction novel; like the story *A for Andromeda* by British Astronomer Fred Hoyle. Curled up in a cozy corner, Mae would imagine herself as the brave Captain of a space flight, leading her intrepid crew deep into an outer space adventure!

But, something about these stories seemed odd to Mae. Looking at the many characters onboard these space flights, she began to ask herself a *new* question...

(YOUNG) MAE: Where am I?

GABRIELLE: The beloved space heroes she had learned to admire never quite looked or sounded like Mae. The majority of these astronauts were adult White men, whereas Mae was a young Black woman.

(YOUNG) MAE: Well, that makes no sense.

GABRIELLE: No matter the confusion. Mae continued to read...

As Mae was growing and learning, so was the world around her, for Mae was born into a period of American history known as the American Civil Rights Movement; a time when brave African-American leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X, were calling for racial equality in America, a movement that continues today.

Mae’s family was proud of their Black history, and Mae herself modeled her own personal style after South-African singer Miriam Makeba who wore her hair in a short, “natural” style.

But, looking around her new classroom of Esmond Elementary, in Chicago, Illinois, Mae couldn’t help but notice that the other little girls in her class all had long, blond hair. Again, Mae found herself asking...

(YOUNG) MAE: Where am I?

GABRIELLE: But Mae, encouraged by her family and friends, and confident in her beauty, did not let this observation stop her from joining in the classroom fun.

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TEACHER: Alright students...

GABRIELLE: Mae's teacher asked the class.

TEACHER: What do you want to be when you grow up?

GABRIELLE: Mae didn't stop to hesitate. She had known the answer to this question since...well, since forever! Mae threw her hand into the air, eager to share her dream with the classroom!

(YOUNG) MAE: I am going to be a scientist!

GABRIELLE: Mae exclaimed.

TEACHER: A... scientist?

GABRIELLE: The teacher replied, her eyebrows growing long with surprise.

TEACHER: Um, perhaps you mean *a nurse*?

GABRIELLE: The other students attempted to hide their giggles behind their textbooks, but Mae could still hear them. She could also see the disbelieving look in her teacher's eyes. For, you see, in the 1960's, it was very rare for a woman to become a scientist, and even more rare were these opportunities given to women of color, like Mae. Nonetheless, Mae persisted.

(YOUNG) MAE: Nope! I don't want to be a nurse, or anything else. I am going to be a scientist. And one day, I will fly into outer space!

(Sounds of children giggling as a transition.)

GABRIELLE: Walking home from the library that night, a place where Mae spent most of her evenings, she looked up at the clear night's sky and did what she did best...she began to ask questions.

(YOUNG) MAE: Why did they all laugh when I said I wanted to be a scientist?

GABRIELLE: Mae pondered.

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(YOUNG) MAE: I've always known that's what I'll be. And, I still believe it, more now than ever! What makes them think any differently?

GABRIELLE: As Mae struggled for an answer, she tilted her head towards the sky. And there, high above her, appeared a blanket of stars. Mae felt an instant rush of comfort by their presence, and all at once the mysteries of the classroom were replaced with the deep, and wonderful darkness of outer space...

MAE SINGS.

"I CAN DETERMINE IT"

MAE

HYDROGEN IS MOVING
THERE BETWEEN THE STARS
THOUGH I CANNOT SEE IT,
HARD AS I PEER.

THERE'S MICROSCOPIC MOVEMENT
DUST AND GASSES RACING FAST!
GIVE IT TIME AND MOTION,
LIGHT WILL APPEAR.

FOR GRAVITY WITHIN OUR MASSIVE GALAXY
WILL TAKE ALL THOSE UNSEEN PARTICLES,
AND PRESS THEM TIGHT, ALL DAY AND EVERY NIGHT
AND KEEP COMBINING, TIL THEY'RE SHINING
LIKE THE SUN!

BUT, IN THE BEGINNING,
WHO TELLS THE STARDUST
THAT IF IT STARTS SPINNING
IT WILL TURN INTO A STAR?

AND IF I AM MADE OF
THAT VERY STARDUST
WHY BE AFRAID OF
KNOWING I WANT TO GO FAR?

WHO CAN TELL ME IF I'M MEANT TO FLY
THERE IN THE SKY?

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MAYBE I CAN DETERMINE IT!
I CAN DETERMINE IT!

GABRIELLE: Mae's thirst for knowledge set her on a swift path towards success. In fact, she moved so quickly through her studies that she started high school at the age of twelve-years-old, and began college at Stanford University at the age of sixteen-years-old! After graduating with a degree in Chemical Engineering, Mae then attended Medical School at Cornell University. There was no stopping Mae on her journey, and if she saw an opportunity, she was always ready to take it.

(ADULT) MAE

OXYGEN IS RUSHING
HERE WITHIN MY CHEST
NO, I AM NOT RUNNING
BUT, I'M NOT SITTING STILL.

THERE'S SUBATOMIC MOVEMENT
TIME AND SPACE ARE RACING FAST
GIVE ME A DIRECTION,
AND A DREAM TO FULFILL.

AND GRAVITY WILL TAKE AHOLD OF ME
THRUSTING ME TOWARDS SOME NEW AVENUE,
AND I WILL FIGHT, ALL DAY AND EVERY NIGHT
TO KEEP ON CLIMBING, TIL I'M SHINING
LIKE THE SUN!

'CAUSE, IN THE BEGINNING,
WHO TELLS THE STARDUST
IF IT STARTS SPINNING
IT WILL TURN INTO A STAR?

AND SINCE I AM MADE OF
THAT VERY STARDUST
WHY BE AFRAID OF
KNOWING I WANT TO GO FAR?

WHO CAN TELL ME IF I'M MEANT TO FLY
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MAYBE I CAN DETERMINE IT!
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GABRIELLE: In 1987, by the time she was only thirty-one years old, Mae had accomplished so very much; she had graduated from some of the country's most prestigious schools, she spoke fluently in both Russian and Swahili, she had used her skills as a medical doctor all over the world, and still she was ready for more!

Nothing seemed to slow this determined young woman as she climbed higher, and higher. That is until one rainy, winter evening...

MAE: What's this?

GABRIELLE: Mae had just finished working a shift as a doctor in Los Angeles, California, when she picked up her mail and found a truly "other-worldy" message...

MAE: *(she gasps!)* It's a letter from the NASA space program!

GABRIELLE: Mae gasped!

MAE: They're offering me the chance to become... *an astronaut!*

TRANSITIONAL MUSIC.

GABRIELLE: When you're offered the opportunity of a lifetime, sometimes jumping in head first is harder than it seems. Holding the letter from NASA in her hands, Mae's mind began to spin...

MAE: I finally have a chance to become an astronaut!

GABRIELLE: She rejoiced.

MAE: This is it! This is my childhood dream coming true!

GABRIELLE: Memories of Mae's childhood came rushing back to her... glorious hours spent staring up at the stars, knowing that one day she would eventually reach them.

But, suddenly, and without warning came *other* types of memories...

TEACHER: An astronaut, Mae? Perhaps you mean *a nurse?*

Sounds of children giggling.

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GABRIELLE: Feelings of doubt and fear Mae had pushed deep within herself so long ago were rising to the surface!

DOUBTFUL VOICE: *"This mathematics class is highly advanced, Mae. Don't you think you'd rather something easier?..."*

GABRIELLE: These were the voices of so many teachers and colleagues who had doubted Mae along her journey.

DOUBTFUL VOICE: *"Advanced Russian? There must be a mistake here..."*

DOUBTFUL VOICE: *"No African-American student has ever passed calculus the first time. Don't get your hopes up."*

DOUBTFUL VOICE: *"That's not really a profession traditionally suited for someone like yourself"*

DOUBTFUL VOICE: *"Ma'am, I just don't think you have what's needed for this job"...*

MAE: Stop! ...I want this, I know I do. But, am I really ready for it?

GABRIELLE: Mae asked herself...

MAE: What will I do?

UPBEAT MUSIC.

GABRIELLE: Good question, Mae. What *will* you do?
Before we find out, let's first take a look at her options....
Will Mae choose option 1?:

MAE: Okay, I've made my decision, I am going to politely decline and hope that the opportunity goes to someone else more suited! I've already accomplished so much anyways, I'm ready to take it easy.

GABRIELLE: Or, will she choose option 2?:

MAE: Space has always seemed like a long-shot. Perhaps it's time for some deep sea exploration!

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GABRIELLE: Or, will she choose option 3?:

MAE: This is my dream, and I'm the only one who can make this decision. I don't care what anyone else says, I can do this!

GABRIELLE: Now that we can clearly see Mae's options, which one do YOU think she will choose? Will she politely decline NASA'S offer, and take it easy? Will she ditch the spaceship for an underwater adventure? Or, will Mae take the leap and head into space? Take a moment to think it over...

THINKING MUSIC.

GABRIELLE: Alright, got your answer? Now, let's find out which option Mae will choose...

MAE: This is my dream, and I'm the only one who can make this decision. I know I have what it takes to become an astronaut! I've always known!

MAE SINGS.

“REPRISE”

MAE

IN THE BEGINNING,
WHO TELLS THE STARDUST
THAT IF IT STARTS SPINNING
IT WILL ONE DAY TURN INTO A STAR?

I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN I AM MADE OF
TURBULENT STARDUST
SO, I WON'T BE AFRAID OF
FINALLY GETTING THIS FAR!

WHO CAN TELL ME IF I'M MEANT TO FLY
THERE IN THE SKY?
ONLY I CAN DETERMINE IT!
I CAN DETERMINE IT!

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GABRIELLE: Dr. Mae Jemison was faced with a seemingly impossible decision. But, instead of letting others dictate her destiny, she drew from the strength within herself to forge a new path there amongst the stars.

So, the next time you find yourself feeling “stuck”, I wonder...what will *you* do next?

KIDS CORNER MUSIC.

GABRIELLE: At the end of every episode we will be featuring a very special guest star...*you!* Today we have Myra from New York!

GABRIELLE & ERNIE: Hi, Myra!

GABRIELLE: Tell us all about your favorite historical woman!

MYRA: Hello, my name is Myra and today I will be talking about Wangari Maathai. She was born April 1st, 1940 in Kenya. One day she called for a meeting with some other women from her village because lakes started to dry up, and streams started to disappear. She said that they should plant trees so it would be better for the village. So, they planted trees and they put them in backyards, and then it spread beyond Kenyan borders and it spread into the Green Belt Movement. Over 40 million trees were planted and Wangari Maathai was granted the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in 2004. She died on December 25th, 2011. Thank you for listening!

End of Episode.