

Introductory

Adelin Worrill Hammack was born as the only child of Judge Charles and Addy Worrill. Her mother was a teacher before she married the judge. Adeline married Jerome B. Hammack, who was one of the key NACA and NASA engineers. He helped invent and design the amazing vehicles that sent the men to the moon and back several times. She complimented him and was a great asset for her husband during his extraordinary career. She gave a hundred percent and more to her two sons and family. Only a few people know she was a talented writer and educator. She was absolutely professional and natural. I, the daughter-in-law, find her experiences interesting and astounding. It is the most precious and phenomenal of times. Bobbie Slayton called it “the first-hand history of the U.S. Space Program.” We are all proud to be part of it. I think my mother-in-law would like to share it with us and the next generation. I want to carry on the story to our children to tell their children.

About Me

I was born, raised and educated in Thailand. I inherited the heart of giving and fairness from my parents, Mr. Kambu and Mrs. Bussaba Sarasuk. My dad always took pride in naming all of his children. He named me “Swangjit” after a Miss Thailand a long time ago. Like the Moody Blues say: “I’m looking for someone to change my life. I’m looking for a miracle in my life....” Now, I have found it! I have found the love of my life, Chuck Hammack. “Isn’t life strange? (also the Moody Blues). I am using my other gift of connecting with people to reach out for the good cause. NASA and Space Center Houston help magnify my skill to do what I always believe. They are the tremendous ornaments that decorate my life. I wear them well, too.

Please note: I am just a story teller that tries to put things together the best I can.

Swangjit (Jit) S. Hammack

Adelin Hammack

Jerry, the Moon Men, and Me

Jerry Hammack has always been a very determined boy. He made up his mind at an early age. There was no turning back! He would be an aeronautical engineer, and he would marry me.

There is no doubt about it. Jerry's first love was and still is -- the magnificent flying machine. This affair started the day he sent in the Octogen Soap wrappers in exchange for a model airplane kit. In my case, I used my own wrapping, and it took me a little longer to trap him.

We grew up in the lovely, lazy, southern towns of Cuthbert and Coleman, Georgia. Eight miles of red clay roads, tall Georgia pines, and gently rolling fields separated our homes. Jerry traveled the distance often, sometimes unexpectedly, and always with "dash". I really think it was the "dash" that made me fall in love.

He made his first trip on horseback bringing a most precious gift for me -- his biggest and best model airplane.

I had just turned fourteen and didn't know much about men of the world, but it seemed to me that Jerry had plenty of suave (pronounced with the long A instead of suave). While my father, who was a dignified Judge, didn't completely share that opinion -- my mother wholeheartedly agreed!

Then came the day that Jerry breezed into our driveway in the old Model T. Seated beside his cousin in the rumble seat and smoking a big black cigar, Jerry leaned over to give his driver an order.

The driver was a fifteen year old colored boy who was also smoking a big, black cigar. He was wearing a much too large chauffeur's cap, and a very wide grin. He nodded "yes" to Jerry's order just as my father walked out of our house. All at once, there was an extremely loud explosion, an endlessly long "ah ooh ga!", and a strange noise that sounded vaguely like the mighty yell of Tarzan.

For a moment, the Judge looked astounded. Then, he took a long deep breath and smiled at the three embarrassed boys. Using my own incorrect pronunciation, he calmly said, "Daughter, there is some one here to see you. I believe its the one with the "suave". Indeed it was!

Just about the time that Mother and Dad had reached their limit and were up to their necks in teen-age antics, it was time for me to go away to college. I was never quite sure about Mother's tears when I left home. They seemed to have just the slightest glint of the crocodile, though she steadfastly denied it through the years.

The world was trembling with the threat of world war II when Jerry graduated from Georgia Tech. Already, the draft boards were working overtime.

We were married in a church wedding just six months after the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor.

"A Fellow Named Max"

The United States government wanted aeronautical engineers. Jerry was drafted and sent to Langley Field, Virginia to work for ~~NACA~~ National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics. He was not to be released until after the war. We stayed a whole lot longer than that -- two sons and eighteen years longer to be exact.

We had planned to live in Virginia always, until a Russian rocket by the name of Sputnik, left the earth one day and disturbed the cool of the whole U.S.A.

Jerry was on fire! "This is it," he said. Not knowing exactly what "it" was or why "it" was so important, I simply nodded in agreement that this, indeed, was certainly it!

Soon after the all important it, Jerry came home from work one day looking like smiling Sam, the laughing gas man.

"Hello smiling Sam", said the spider to the fly -- "been to the dentist or something?" It was the "something" I wanted to know about.

"No", he said, "I've been to a pow wow."

"That explains it" I said, "you really have to watch that joy juice."

"No, no, no", he said -- "it was a work pow wow, you know, a conference where decisions are made." He was still smiling.

"Hum", I said, "you look like they decided to make you an Indian Chief."

"Better than that" he said looking even more pleased than before, "I'm going to work on a new project with a fellow named Max Faget."

This project turned out to be the hottest thing in town! It was the invention of the first Mercury space-craft. Max and six other men including Jerry received an award for this. They also hold the patent for their invention.

NACA became NASA -- National Aeronautics and Space Administration -- by a legislative act in 1958. In October of that same year, thirty-five engineers headed by Bob Gilruth, formed the Space Task Group of NASA at Langley Field. Jerry was so happy to be a part of this group that he could have gone in orbit all by himself. At this point, even I could see that this was it!

The Space Task Group soon had word that the first seven astronauts would come to Langley. Every one was excited. I secretly expected them to arrive with antenna and back pack.

One friend of mine, an old, old lady with a beautiful spirit, became immensely interested in space travel. Talk of a possible moon voyage always brought a smile of delight to her lips. She was anxious to meet the astronauts -- only they were not astronauts as far as she was concerned. They were "Moon Men" and that's what she always called them. This was unresistable to me.

And so the Moon Men came, and the Moon Men conquered. We loved them. NASA looked on the astronauts and their families with a great deal of pride and pleasure. We felt that they belonged to us -- Betty and Gus Grissom, Louise and Al Shepard, Jo and Wally Schirra, Trudy and Gordon Cooper, Rene and Scott Carpenter, Annie and John Glenn, and Marge and Deke Slayton.

It was, of course, impossible to look into the future and see all the adventures -- both joyful and tragic -- that we would share with these fine people who were to become close friends.

"America's First!"

The men in the Space Task Group seemed to have one ruling passion -- the love of their work. This sometimes interfered with their wives' ruling passion -- which was, of course, the men in the Space Task Group. But it all worked out somehow, and progress was made.

The space flight of the two monkeys, Ham, ~~and~~ and ~~the~~ had been successful. America was not far behind Russia and the famous flight of their Yuri Gagarin.

The Redstone Mercury Program was in full swing and Jerry was the project engineer. He had to be on duty

at Cape Canaveral during each flight. I had never seen him work so hard or thrive so well. His old love with a new design -- but still the magnificent flying machine!

In May of 1961, Al Shepard was to make his flight into space. America's first! Great day! What a time to live!

My sons and I -- with the blessing of their school principal -- packed our bags. We joined another NASA wife, Pat Kleinknecht, and her three children aboard the Florida bound, night train from Portsmouth, Virginia. Pat's youngest son and my youngest son were active six year olds. They had inherited their engineer fathers' insatiable curiosity about the mechanical workings of almost EVERY THING! Their intense interest in the train "john" saved the nervous systems of everyone in the entire car. At least that kept them in one spot.

Ken Kleinknecht and Jerry met us at the Cocoa, Florida train station about noon the next day. We fell into our husbands' arms, telling them how our ride was at least equal to that of the Redstone rocket. The children were dancing about in the warm Florida sun, and tugging at their fathers' hands. All at once we forgot about the long train ride, and everything came up roses.

To be continued