

# Richard Garriott, Environmentalist



On October 12, 2008, I embarked on a life-changing journey. I traveled on the Soyuz TMA-13 rocket to the International Space Station (ISS). I spent 10 days on the ISS, and during that time I lived the life of an astronaut. In fact I became the first second generation American astronaut to travel into space. My father, Owen Garriott, was a NASA astronaut on Skylab II and Shuttle STS 9.

I spent much of my time in space conducting experiments and running tests. Some of the tests involved protein crystallization research which could soon lead to major advances in medicine. Since I was the first person in space with laser eye surgery, I conducted exams on my own eyes and provided important research for future space travelers.

My father and his crew mates aboard Skylab took the very first ever photographic survey of the surface of the earth as seen by humans in orbit. 35 years later, as the first second generation astronaut, I would be able to retake some of those same shots and show how the earth has changed in one generation of space travel. I worked very closely with the Association of Space Explorers and The Nature Conservancy to data mine the Skylab photo archive and develop tools to help me accurately shoot hundreds of targets across the earth. Those photos are being analyzed now.

The trip altered my life in so many ways. Seeing the Earth from 62 miles up gives you a perspective that only a few lucky people have ever experienced. I learned how fragile the Earth and the atmosphere surrounding it really are. I was inspired to come back home to Austin, Texas, and make a difference; to become involved in community and personal environmental activities.



## Personal Lifestyle Changes

I began by making personal lifestyle changes. For starters I reinsulated my house with spray on insulation to the underside of my attic roof which cuts down on the amount of energy needed to cool and heat my house. I am installing photovoltaic solar panels on my roof and on other parts of my property. I've installed new energy efficient windows and exterior doors. I installed LED lights in all fixtures. The idea is to create my own sustainable energy and to save enough energy to be a net zero user of power.

Additionally, I'm investing in a company which ultimately plans to collect solar power in space and beam it down to Earth. I will soon be installing a prototype for the system on my property in Austin.



I have sold my gas guzzling sports cars and SUVs, and switched to more fuel efficient cars. I'm even building my own plug-in electric car.

Another of my environmental interests involves spearheading an investigation into the feasibility of a new form of mass transit for Austin. Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) is a new concept for travel in the 21st century. It is quiet, private and it uses green, sustainable energy.

### **One Green Step**

As I began publicly talking about my new green initiatives, the City of Austin contacted me last fall to gauge my interest in partnering with what would become the city's new One Green Step environmental campaign. I gladly accepted. One Green Step is a zero-waste program with a goal to reduce the amount of waste Austinites send to the landfill by 90% by the year 2040.

One Green Step was highlighted by a special event in Austin on May 1 where citizens pledged to and wrote down their own green steps on a giant banner currently on display in downtown Austin. I provided a show-and-tell speech about my trip to space and its impact on my environmental conscious. Then I wrote down my own green steps, which I will be pursuing in the coming year. My previous steps while important were problems I could buy solutions to. The harder steps I now face require more personal commitment. My next green step is to try and radically cut back on the waste I generate here at home.



I encourage everyone to take their own One Green Step to help save our precious Earth. If everyone promises to take just one step in this cause, it can make one giant difference for generations to come. It could be as simple as purchasing a product with less packaging, no packaging or in a refillable container. It could be using recyclable batteries and disposing of old batteries properly — not in our landfills. These are easy steps that can make a difference, which from my unique perspective, can't happen soon enough.