



Taking Off

Jenny Moss

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Reimagining the days surrounding this unforgettable event in history, readers are brought back to 1986 as the astronauts prepare for the Challenger mission, and Christa McAuliffe trains to be the first teacher in space. When a teen named Annie meets Christa, she is fascinated by Christa's courage. Truly inspired, Annie is determined to make it to Florida to see the Challenger launch, a trip that will forever change how she thinks about herself and her secret desire for her own future. Although she is devastated when tragedy strikes, Annie honors Christa by following her own dream, despite the obstacles. Bringing in her experience as a NASA engineer, Jenny Moss weaves a moving story that recaptures the inspiration teens must have felt years ago as they watched Christa McAuliffe reach for the sky.

Taking Off Details

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Kate says

I remember sitting in my dad's car that day in 1986, listening to the radio news of the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster and feeling like it was impossible, like it couldn't really have happened.

I knew what would happen to the shuttle before I even turned a page of TAKING OFF, but somehow, I ended up gasping when it happened all the same.

TAKING OFF is about a girl named Annie, a high school senior growing up in a community of NASA engineers but worshipping words instead of numbers, colors instead of computations. She wants to be a poet but sees that dream and college as completely out of reach until serendipity drops her at a dinner party in the seat next to Christa McAuliffe.

McAuliffe, the New Hampshire teacher chosen for NASA's teacher-in-space program, exudes an energy that Annie can almost touch, so different from her own guarded outlook on life. Inspired by McAuliffe's charisma, drive, and infectious zest for life, Annie vows she'll be there for the launch. She sets the wheels in motion for a road trip to Florida with her father and a handsome young friend of his, which doesn't sit well with Annie's long-time boyfriend, Mark.

What happens on that trip – in her father's broken-down art-car, at Epcot, on the beach, and ultimately on a cold morning at Cape Canaveral, will change everything Annie thought she knew.

This book made me laugh and cry. It made me sigh with some of the most beautifully written passages, and it made me think about the connections art and poetry share with math and science. As a writer married to a weather geek scientist, I particularly appreciated the bridges this book builds between the two.

But mostly, I was swept up in the emotion of this coming-of-age story.

I knew what was going to happen. I did.

But that didn't stop me from feeling everything Annie felt when the shuttle exploded. I might as well have been there with her, watching a teacher's dream of flying in space come true, then end in cloud of white smoke in a blue sky in a matter of minutes. It didn't matter that I knew. Not one bit.

That, my friends, is great writing.

TAKING OFF is due out from Walker/Bloombury in January 2011.

Angela says

Most readers will know going in, either because they've learned about it or they read the jacket copy, that one of the major events in this book will be the explosion of the Challenger shuttle. But even knowing that, Moss was able to get my heart to leap into my throat when it was actually described. I was barely a year old

when Challenger happened, but through *Taking Off* I felt like I was right there with Annie.

But remembering the Challenger and her crew (especially Christa McAuliffe) isn't the sole point of this book. The star is Annie, a senior in high school facing large, looming questions, like where is she going to college and what will she do with the rest of her life. Surrounded by engineers who work with NASA, and fellow students who know that college is the next step, Annie isn't even sure she wants to go to college. She loves poetry, and has tried her hand at writing a few times, but is pretty sure she's actually terrible and knows there's no money in the endeavor. She hides her passion from everyone - her divorced parents, her best friend, and her boyfriend of two years.

Meeting Christa, and roadtripping with her dad and his handsome young friend Tommy to see the Challenger launch, inspires Annie to start taking risks. Small ones first, but bit by bit Annie draws strength and inspiration from Christa's memory, and is finally able to take off for herself.

I also have to say, I really liked how Annie and Mark's relationship was handled. I've gotten burned out on the number of YA books that end with the teens finding their soul mates. Annie is content with Mark, but knows they're not soul mates. So refreshing to see a girl exploring her options!

This also feels like a very contemporary book. Some people are scared off by historical fiction, but aside from a few references to cassette tapes and President Reagan, and the historical fact of the Challenger disaster, this could have been set any time. Annie's problems are truly timeless.

Jessica says

Well, that was slightly disappointing and very anti-climatic.

I had this book on my shelf for awhile now, but for some reason decided to randomly pick it up. While it was a decently good read and was pretty quick to get through, there were just a few things that fell flat.

It's the late 1980s, and Annie is about to graduate high school with absolutely no idea what she wants for her future. She wants to be a poet, which is her *big huge scary* secret, but doesn't have confidence in herself and cares too much what other people think. She doesn't know if she wants to go to college, even though her mother's rich dentist boyfriend is more than willing to pay her way. **Must be nice.** I related very much to Annie's inner struggles about her future and her avoidance of the subject of college because I was exactly the same when I was a senior in high school. I had *absolutely no idea* what I wanted and felt pressured and depressed by my classmates who knew which path they were headed down.

After briefly meeting Christa McAuliffe, the teacher chosen to represent the Teacher in Space program, Annie's whole outlook on life changes. She convinces her mom to let her road trip to Florida to see the *Challenger* lift off into space, on the condition that she goes with her father. Her dad randomly brings some young guy he works with along, and Annie randomly falls in love with him (Tommy) within about five minutes and forgets all about her boyfriend back at home. Along the way, Annie's dad's "art car" breaks down and of course his suggestion is that he leaves his young teenager daughter alone in a hotel room with his young hormonal super good looking coworker. *Fictional parenting at its best.* I let that slide though. The instalove didn't even bother me that much. What bothered me is the event that this book is centered around.

On January 28, 1986 the Space Shuttle *Challenger* exploded in mid-air about 73 seconds after lift off, killing

all seven crew members, including Christa McAuliffe. I knew this event would be a big part of this book, which is why I was so interested in this book in the first place. Being only 23, I obviously wasn't around when the *Challenger* accident occurred, but I've always been interested in the story, the crew members, and the video clips on youtube. *This is not a spoiler, by the way. The Challenger was a real space shuttle, Christa McAuliffe was a real person, and tragically the explosion was a real event.* With that being said, I have respect for the author for portraying the *Challenger* accident accurately, and for her obvious admiration for Christa McAuliffe. Now with *that* being said, I felt like, in the book, this event was very anti-climatic. People cried and then went home and then Annie was in a deep depression for a long time as if she knew the crew members on a deep, personal level. It was without a doubt a devastating tragedy and I can relate to Annie's sadness, but her reaction just felt... *too much*.

TAKING OFF was a fun blast into the past. I love when authors incorporate real life events into a fictional world. Annie was one of the most real characters I've read about in awhile. She had flaws, which is what *makes* her so real. Jenny Moss did a great job at portraying a character who *didn't* have her entire future wrapped neatly in bows and pretty paper. I enjoyed seeing Annie's growth and her rise in self confidence. She was a character I really enjoyed. I **loved** this book; I just felt greatly disappointed by the event in which this book centered around, which is why I only rated it a three. However, my real rating is probably a 3.5 (:

Michele says

What a beautiful, excellent book. Set around the time of the Challenger disaster and encompassing the way the accident inspired one young woman to be her best self.

Kelly says

This one's not a solid 3 star for me, but it was close enough.

I liked TAKING OFF quite a bit. Annie reminds me a lot of who I was at 18 and a senior in high school, right down to debating whether or not I wanted to go to college because I wanted to read and write poetry instead. It was a little eerie, even. Maybe what's sort of funnier is that I think a lot of what Annie's struggling with here is stuff I still think about a lot.

However, I've a few things that didn't quite work for me, including the fact that I don't believe there was enough of a relationship between Annie and Christa to make everything Annie comes to believe/discover/be inspired feel authentic. She and Christa met at a dinner party hosted by Annie's friend, but that was her only real connection to her. There was opportunity to expand this a little more in the front of the story, and had it been, this would have been a little more of a knock out for me. I wanted more of Annie's internal thoughts on why she connected so much to Christa near immediately. Annie really became enamored with her and her story. I wish she'd told me a little more why.

The other thing I didn't find completely compelling was Annie's relationship with her boyfriend and then with Tommy. It was sort of a strange thing that her father would bring a boy who was older than her on their trip to Florida and kind of let them have their time together. It's all innocent but it was sort of strange. It didn't feel like something Annie would let happen, the developing of a romance between them. I guess this comes down to wanting more out of Annie as a character. I think this is a rare instance I could have done

with MORE of the romantic story line.

Annie's parental relationships a little odd. I'm fixated and fascinated by divorced parents, especially in ya lit, and this felt like a strangely calm relationship between her and her mother and her and her father, as well as with her parents between themselves. Even when mom becomes engaged again, there's little to it. I'm demanding, maybe, but I could have used a little more there.

My issues come down to tension and character. I wanted more of both. The story was there, and I found this slice of history to be completely engaging. When the shuttle launches, I held my breath because I knew what was coming and knew it was going to be devastating. The book worked because the historical event is a launch pad to a story, and it's here. I'd just have liked a little more.

But oh Annie. Man. I can't get over how similarly-minded I was to her at that age. It's always bizarre to read a book like that.

I may write an even longer review of this. Imagine!

Rebecca McNutt says

Taking Off is a great book. It drags on once or twice throughout but otherwise the way it evokes the "anything is possible" attitude of 1986 is powerful and very memorable.

Kimmi says

Taking off kind of revolved around the Challenger space shuttle disaster in 1986, so this book is a little bit of historical fiction. In *Taking off* it mostly focuses on Annie's life with her divorced parents, best friend Lea, her boyfriend Mark, and the new boy Tommy. While all her friends are focused on decisions after high school, Annie has had a bit more trouble on whether or not she should stay with her boyfriend in town or go to college and explore the world more. While she meets Christa McAuliffe the first teacher ever to go into space and how she followed her dreams it inspired Annie to also follow her dreams. Read more to find out what happens, will she stay in her comfortable town or go to college.

I would recommend this book to people who like realistic fiction and who would like to learn a little about the Challenger mission. This book was fascinating with many ups and downs. I would 100% recommend this book to people.

Stephanie A. says

I wasn't sure about the Challenger backdrop, as that's a historical event that doesn't particularly interest me. But it turned into a really good 80s coming-of-age story (that actually *felt* like it was written in the 80s, which is great for someone like me who loves older books) with rich, solid characters that slowly but surely wrapped me up in their world.

Stephanie says

Taking Off revolves around the Challenger space shuttle disaster in 1986 which carried the first civilian on board: teacher Christa McAuliffe. High schooler Annie lives in Clear Lake, TX, home of the NASA's training center, and meets Christa at a dinner hosted by one her friend's NASA-employed parents. Annie feels immediately inspired by the teacher's enthusiasm for life. Annie herself is shy and indecisive. She doesn't have plans for college but wants to be a poet, which for some reason terrifies her to admit to anyone, including her mother or her longtime boyfriend.

When the opportunity arises for Annie to see Christa's shuttle launch, she takes a road trip with her estranged father and his younger buddy (and potential new love interest -he's just over 20) to Cape Canaveral, FL to see the Challenger take off. What's most unsettling about this book is knowing the history going into it. Annie's adoration of Christa is believable, and it caused me to think of the all the students affected by Christa's death when the shuttle exploded - schools across the nation watched in horror as it happened. At times Annie's story felt a little incongruent with the severity of the event, and I wished it was told from the perspective of one of Christa's students (still fictional) for a more personal connection. The story is really Annie's self-discovery with the Challenger mission serving as a historical framework.

The book has a mix of strengths and weaknesses; Annie is 17 but she felt younger to me. Certainly girls can be shy and lacking self-awareness as an older teen, but it almost felt like she should've been 14 with a lot of years left to grow. Some of the dialogue didn't ring true, like the historical setting was pushed into the narrative a bit too much at times. This is worth checking out if the subject interests you.

Abby Johnson says

It's 1985 in Houston, Texas and high school senior Annie has a secret. She wants to be a poet. Only, she's having a hard time admitting that to anyone, even to herself. What kind of living can you make being a poet? It seems an impossible dream. So Annie's stuck. While her best friend is going off to college next year and her boyfriend Mark wants her to stay in town and marry him, Annie is frozen by indecision. And then she meets Christa McCauliffe, an ordinary high school teacher who was chosen from thousands of applicants to go into space on the Challenger. Suddenly, Annie has a glimmer of hope. If this ordinary teacher can reach for her dreams, why can't Annie?

This is a realistic portrayal of a teen facing her senior year of high school and the seemingly impossible future that stretches out beyond. Jenny Moss does a good job of capturing the time period with details and her author's note is a very nice addition. I only wish that there had been more showing of Annie's emotions and reactions, rather than telling.

More on the blog: <http://www.abbythelibrarian.com/2010/...>

Ruth says

It would have been a four-star book if only...

- 1) The event which this ENTIRE FREAKING STORY revolves around... falls flat. Flatter than flat. Flatter than the earth as people thought it would have been 700 years ago, when they thought the earth was flat. So flat that you are dumbstruck by how they could have made such an emotionally tragic event in American history sound so... flat.
- 2) The main character came straight out of a Mexican soap opera. Sobby characters who sob at every complicated turn in their life get on my nerves.
- 3) It wasn't really convincing, the relationship that Annie and Christa McAuliffe had. I'm supposed to be convinced that after a friendly volleyball tourney and after a small family dinner conversation will totally inspires someone to totally go off about "reaching for the stars"? That's a little bit bordering on obsessive. If i went on and on, droning about how that dinner experience and that volleyball experience with America's Favorite Teachernaut was so inspiring throughout the whole book, wouldn't that seem kinda a little weird that someone could get so close to someone else they've barely met? That's kinda the whole relationship Annie and Christa McAuliffe had throughout the entire book. I just can't get it into my thick skull that a two-time experience could be so "tragically inspiring".

It would have been a two-star book except...

The plot line was interesting enough. If you take out the annoying protagonist, annoying boyfriend, and annoying protagonist, then the story itself at least captured my attention. That's what matters, right? Hey, there were times when Annie from Texas wasn't so annoying. If you actually took out the crying sequences, those tragic moments could have been more tragic.

Also, the main event which the story was supposedly supposed to revolve around was what brought me to read this book in the first place. I kept hoping and hoping throughout the book that the event would finally happen, so that things would get more interesting. But if that was the climax, then it sure is a pretty... lame climax. I was so disappointed after the even happened. LIKE SERIOUSLY HOW COULD YOU WRITE SOMETHING SO EMOTIONLESS?!?!?

I don't know, maybe that was the part where the author wasn't exactly sure how to write out. But nevertheless, three-star book, amateur characters, and.. yeah.

Kristy says

First and foremost, I must thank my wonderful Secret Santa ARLENE for gifting me this beautiful book.

I would be lying if I said I didn't enjoy this at all. There were plenty of "awww" moments, a decent story and a hawt lead male :)

I would also be lying if I said I just absolutely loved this. There were plenty of cheese-tastic moments, a love triangle and an immaturity that was difficult to deal with at times. To a point it was hard to read a main character who was so undecided and committed to keeping secrets about herself.

Spoilers ahead:

Annie is a shy girl. She has been with Mark for 2 years now and doesn't really think she is in love with him. She has a deep dark secret.... she wants to write poetry!!! Yep, that's some pretty scary stuff there. She lives in Texas near the NASA headquarters. Her community is a space community. She gets to meet Christa McAuliffe, the teacher who is going into space and she inspires Annie to just be the best "you" she can be. Annie talks her dad into taking her to see the launch Christa is in. He just happens to bring along some eye-candy in Tommy. Their car breaks down and Annie and Tommy get a ride to a hotel while the dad stays behind to get the car fixed... yep, you read that right. Quality parenting. Book parents at their best. UGGGHHH.

Anywho, so there is definitely a connection between Tommy and Annie. The Launch keeps getting delayed to they get to spend tons of time together. They go to Disney World and the beach. They eat together, etc. There is a ton of "tension".

Ultimately, Annie gets to see the launch. It is not the joyous occasion she had been hoping for. A deep sadness fills her. She dumps boyfriend, gets over her grief, writes poems, gets a new boyfriend and decides to go to college. (and it really bothers me that said boyfriend is going to wind up going to college in Virginia and follow her)

Not sure who I would rec this to. It's not bad, maybe just a little young for me. I can see lots of high-school girls really swooning over this one. I think people who are interested in NASA/Space, who also want a love story that is light and fluffy, not bogged down with NASA details will like this.

3 stars

Penny says

I was a junior in high school when the space shuttle Challenger exploded, and I remember vividly the feeling of devastation I felt in that moment. Like so many others, I was fascinated by the space shuttle program and followed its every move. I was enraptured and inspired by Christa McAuliffe. In *Taking Off*, Jenny Moss has captured the essence of that period of my life with sincerity. The protagonist Annie Porter is engaging and authentic. Her story is specific to a particular time and place, yet her struggle as a young adult trying find her way is timeless, common, and wonderful. I love everything about this novel. It is a must-read for introspective young adults and for readers who were teenagers in the eighties.

Kate Hastings says

I look forward to reading this. I would say it was one of the most memorable events I had as a child. I loved space--wanted to go to space camp, subscribed to space magazines and lived at the planetarium when I was in 5th grade. Our class watched the shuttle-- Christa was the embodiment of every teacher and student in America. We were with her... and I still tear up thinking about it all these years later.

Preethi says

I really WANTED to love this book, but just...didn't.

Writing: I thought the writing and dialogue were super stilted. Very young, I thought, and the repartee just didn't seem natural.

History: Felt like the author was pushing it down my throat at times. It seemed awkward to put certain things into dialogue, like explaining NASA things to Annie that were clear to me and should've been to her, considering where she grew up.

Characters: I thought they were just blah. Annie, in particular, just annoyed me to no end. She just seemed so young and immature - definitely not like a senior in high school. I thought she was immature and irresponsible. I could not, for the life of me, figure out why not one, but TWO awesome guys were totally in love with her. Just did not seem believable. Tommy was nice enough, but was sort of full of himself (also, why did he decide to follow HER out to Virginia??). Mark came off as a possessive jerk, despite him supposedly being kind and loyal and athletic. Oh, and Annie turning from not-even-sure-about-college to sudden Ph.D-seeker seemed odd to me. Also, inconsistent: suddenly she was brave! And played tennis! And has all these other talents!

Plot: The Challenger was the only interesting and non-whiny part of the whole story, and even though so much of it was geared to that, I thought it just kind of fell off. I didn't buy why Annie was so smitten with Christa, nor did I really feel her emotion with the crash was authentic. The fact that her dad let her go off with Tommy with no money or supplies or transportation and then got mad at her for (innocently) sharing a room with him was weird.

Despite all this, it was actually a somewhat engaging read. Probably a 2.5 star book for me, but just not on par with my other 3-star books.
