

# June Scobee Rodgers

by Nancy Henderson

Just this week, June Scobee Rodgers attended a board meeting for the New York-based Guidepost Foundation, helped plan a fundraiser in which she and former astronaut and "Dancing With the Stars" celebrity Buzz Aldrin will perform together and addressed a group of NASA researchers alongside a panel of children firing questions about space travel to Mars. These days, such a packed, high-profile schedule is commonplace for the gracious, sought-after speaker and founder of the national Challenger Center for Space Science Education.

Growing up in rural Odenville, Ala., June says, "We were the poorest family among poor neighbors. My first year in high school, we had to give a speech in our class about what we wanted to be when we grew up. And I said I wanted to be a teacher. Some kids in the back teased that I was so poor I'd never see the inside of a college, much less be a teacher. You can imagine how that hurt."

Years after earning her doctorate degree in curriculum and instruction from Texas A&M University, teaching every grade level from kindergarten to college and consulting on space science programs at universities across the country, she was honored at the Alabama governor's mansion on June Scobee Day. She invited her high school classmates, who sheepishly told reporters, "She was nice then, just like she is now."

In 1986, her world crumbled as she watched the Challenger shuttle explode on liftoff, killing her husband, Commander Dick Scobee, and one of her best friends, teacher Christa McAuliffe. Despite her pain and grief, a few months later June and other survivors launched a nonprofit organization to educate children through simulated space missions and science programs. Today there are 48 Challenger Centers around the globe, and more are under construction. "We have reached 4 million students who send me notes regularly about their studies, about going to military academies, about knowing for the first time what a scientist or an engineer does and then becoming engineers or scientists," says June, author of "Silver Linings" and also the "Star Challengers" children's book trilogy. "We don't have to encourage them to want to learn about space. It's *their* future."

June is now happily married to Lt. Gen. Don Rodgers. "I was teased and bullied as I was growing up. Kids wouldn't sit next to me on the school bus," June recalls. "Having been blessed, I have had an opportunity to sit next to presidents and kings at dinner. The Queen of England invited me to afternoon tea. But my highlight is to sit down with my grandchildren at Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner. That's the greatest joy in my life."

.....{Need-to-Know Info}.....

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