

My family and I have only just begun our "lunch with an astronaut" session at NASA, Houston, and already our guest astronaut has my three children in stitches. Clearly, he knows his audience, which mostly consists of families, along with a few astronomy nerds, identifiable by their t-shirts emblazoned with slogans like "It's not rocket science... oh wait, yes, it is."

Over the next hour, we pick at lukewarm chicken and vegetables, and the kids mindlessly consume platefuls of reheated chicken nuggets and stodgy macaroni cheese, but let's face it, we're not here for the food. We're seated

at round tables in the NASA function room to listen to the personal insights and anecdotes of an astronaut who has completed four space missions, including two as commander and one that took him to the International Space Station.

Colonel Duffy, 66, the son of a mailman and stay-at-home mum, began his career as a fighter pilot in the US Airforce, before responding to a NASA call in 1985 for shuttle pilot applicants. It wasn't until 1992 that he was assigned his first mission.

"The 1992 mission was a nine-day science mission," he tells us. "In between the scientific data collection, I would have 45 minutes to just look out the window and I loved that. I got to know the earth really well."

This observation prompts my 13-year-old daughter to ask a question: "What does it feel like, looking down on the world and all its problems from such an elevation?"

Colonel Duffy pauses before answering. "You don't see a lot of things from up there — you don't see wars and you don't see famine and there's only a couple of borders that you can see. The earth is really beautiful, but you feel very detached from it," he says.

"We call it the astronaut's paradox — here we are in a position where we have the best view of planet earth, but we can experience none of it. You can't smell the grass that's been freshly cut, you can't feel the wind blowing through your hair... if you happen to have hair," he quips, running his fingers through his receding hairline.

Although we live in a world where you can google anything about space and where you can watch astronauts at work on NASA's YouTube channel, there's nothing quite like shaking hands with one in person, hearing the stories firsthand, and asking your burning questions of someone who has spent 40 days, 17 hours and 34 minutes in space, to be exact.

Plus, it makes a great photo for any social media account: #wemetanastronaut.

More info: www.spacecenter.org



在布萊恩·達飛上校擔任太空人暨飛行員的第二次太空飛行任務STS-57中，他和組員們在「奮進號」太空梭內一起享用飄浮晚餐。「我們試著每天聚餐一次。當我們正在用餐的時候，兩件髒內衣飄了過來，所有人都瞪著髒內衣，然後哄堂大笑，只聽到指揮官問：「誰要認領這些內衣？」」

我和家人正在NASA的「和太空人共進午餐」活動中，而我們的太空人貴賓一開始就讓大家捧腹大笑。達飛上校現年66歲，曾參與4次太空任務（包括兩次擔任指揮官及一次前往國際太空站）。他一開始是美國空軍戰鬥機飛行員，1985年響應NASA號召，申請擔任太空梭飛行員，但直到1992年，他才被指派第一次任務。

「1992年那次是一項為期9天的科學任務。」他說道：「在蒐集科學資料的空檔，我有45分鐘可以專心看窗外的景色，我很愛這段時光，因為可以好好地看地球。」聽到這裡，我的13歲女兒提出一個問題：「從那裡看地球，並觀看世界正發生的問題，是什麼感覺？」

達飛上校沉思了一會兒才回答：「在那上面看不到太多東西，看不到戰爭，也看不到饑荒，只能看出一兩個邊界。地球很美，但也非常疏遠。」他說：「我們將它稱為太空人的矛盾：我們處在觀賞地球的最佳位置，但卻無法體驗到地球；無法聞到剛剛割的草，感覺不到風吹過頭髮……，如果您碰巧有頭髮的話。」他用手指滑過已不斷後退的髮際線自嘲。

儘管現在能用Google搜尋所有太空知識，也能透過YouTube看到太空人工作的模樣，但親自接觸一位曾在太空待過40天17個小時又34分鐘的人，是一種無與倫比的體驗。而且，不管您用哪種社群媒體發布分享照片，都會大受歡迎：請搜尋關鍵字#wemetanastronaut。更多資訊，請參考www.spacecenter.org。©



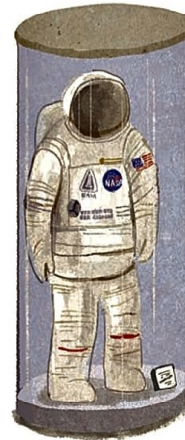
LUNCH WITH AN ASTRONAUT

和太空人共進午餐

BY CATH JOHNSEN / ILLUSTRATIONS BY LYNETTE LIND

It was Colonel Brian Duffy's second flight into space as an astronaut and pilot on the STS-57 *Endeavour* shuttle when he and the crew had just gathered to enjoy a floating dinner.

"We try and eat one meal together each day when we're on a mission," Colonel Duffy explains. "As we were eating, a pair of dirty underwear came floating by... we all stared at it and started laughing, before our commander asked, 'Anybody want to claim those?'"



Cath Johnsen is an Australian freelance journalist who regularly hauls her family around the world in pursuit of a story. Cath Johnsen 是一位澳洲自由記者，經常為了採訪新聞故事而帶著家人遨遊世界各地。