

No Frames, No Boundaries

Connecting with the whole planet - from space

In the following adapted piece, astronaut Russell "Rusty" Schweickart shares his experience of a particularly spectacular gift that came as part of orbiting the earth during March of 1969.

BUT UP THERE you go around every hour and a half, time after time after time. You wake up usually in the mornings, over the Middle East and over North Africa. As you eat breakfast you look out the window and there's the Mediterranean area, Greece and Rome and North Africa and the Sinai, that whole area. And you realize that in one glance what
5 you're seeing is what was the whole history of humankind for years - the cradle of civilization. And you go down across North Africa and out over the Indian Ocean and you look up at that great subcontinent of India pointed down toward you as you go past it, ¶ 1
Ceylon off to the side, then Burma, Southeast Asia, out over the Philippines and up across that monstrous Pacific Ocean, that vast body of water - you've never realized how big that is
10 before. And you finally come up across the coast of California, and you look for those friendly things, Los Angeles and Phoenix, and on across to El Paso. And there's Houston, there's home, you know, and you look out, and you identify with it.... And you go out across the Atlantic Ocean and back across Africa, and you do it again and again and again...
And it all becomes friendly to you.

15 And you identify with Houston and then you identify with Los Angeles and Phoenix and New Orleans. And the next thing you recognize in yourself is that you're identifying with North Africa. You look forward to it, you anticipate it, and there it is. And that whole ¶ 2
process of what it is you identify with begins to shift. When you go around the Earth in an hour and half, you begin to recognize that your identity is with the whole thing. And that
20 makes a change.

You look down there and you can't imagine how many borders and boundaries you cross, again and again and again, and you don't even see them. There you are - hundreds of people ... killing each other over some imaginary line that you're not even aware of, that you can't ¶ 3
see. And from where you see it, the thing is a whole, the earth is a whole, and it's so
25 beautiful. You wish you could take a person in each hand, one from each side in the various

conflicts, and say, "Look. Look at it from this perspective. Look at that. What's important?"

And a little later on, your friend goes out to the moon. And now he looks back and he sees the Earth not as something big, where he can see the beautiful details, but now he sees the Earth as a small thing out there. And the contrast between that bright blue and white Christmas tree ornament and the black sky, that infinite universe, really comes through, and the size of it, the significance of it. It is so small and so fragile and such a precious little spot in the universe that you can block it out with your thumb. And you realize that on that small spot, that little blue and white thing, is everything that means anything to you - all love, tears, joy, games, all of it on that little spot out there that you can cover with your thumb. And you realize from that perspective that you've changed, that there's something new there, that the relationship is no longer what it was.

... You look down and see the surface of that globe you've lived on all this time, and you know all those people down there and they are like you, they are you - and somehow you represent them. You are up there as the sensing element, that point out on the end, and that's a humbling feeling. It's a feeling that says you have a responsibility. ... And somehow you recognize that you're a piece of this total life. And you're out there on that forefront and you have to bring that back somehow. And that's a change. That's something new. And when you come back there's a difference in that world now. There's a difference in that relationship between you and that planet, and you and all those other forms of life on that planet, because you've had that kind of experience. It's a difference and it's so precious.

Archibald MacLeish somehow knew about this step that humanity has now taken. He writes that somehow things rather suddenly have changed, and we no longer see ourselves in the same way that we saw ourselves before. We see "the Earth now as it truly is, bright and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats," and men and women "as riders on the Earth together, on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold, brothers who know now that they are truly brothers."