



1  
00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:02,466  
[announcer] Zero and lift off of Space Shuttle

2  
00:00:02,466 --> 00:00:04,833  
Atlantis as Columbus sets sail on a

3  
00:00:04,840 --> 00:00:07,600  
voyage of science to the space station.

4  
00:00:07,600 --> 00:00:11,960  
[rumbling]

5  
00:00:11,960 --> 00:00:13,960  
[radio noise]

6  
00:00:13,960 --> 00:00:17,460  
[tone]

7  
00:00:18,540 --> 00:00:20,840  
My name is Compton Tucker.

8  
00:00:21,340 --> 00:00:23,540  
I'm a NASA Goddard Earth scientist.

9  
00:00:24,200 --> 00:00:25,880  
I had the privilege of working with

10  
00:00:25,880 --> 00:00:26,680  
Piers Sellers.

11  
00:00:27,860 --> 00:00:29,240  
[Piers, talking over radio] Okay, here goes.

12  
00:00:29,240 --> 00:00:32,120  
This is Piers Sellers onboard Space Shuttle Atlantis ...

13  
00:00:33,680 --> 00:00:36,680

[Compton] Piers was a very dear friend of mine over

14

00:00:38,160 --> 00:00:39,860

more than 35 years.

15

00:00:40,960 --> 00:00:43,322

Piers was an Earth scientist and an

16

00:00:43,322 --> 00:00:43,822

astronaut.

17

00:00:44,480 --> 00:00:47,146

He was also my coworker, my best friend,

18

00:00:47,146 --> 00:00:48,480

my roommate and my neighbor.

19

00:00:52,020 --> 00:00:53,760

We worked together on several things,

20

00:00:53,760 --> 00:00:55,500

published probably 10 or 15 papers

21

00:00:55,500 --> 00:00:57,530

together, because Piers was working on the

22

00:00:57,530 --> 00:00:58,760

theory of what

23

00:00:58,860 --> 00:01:01,037

I was doing using data from

24

00:01:01,040 --> 00:01:01,960

meteorological satellites.

25

00:01:07,360 --> 00:01:09,280

You can describe Piers to people who

26

00:01:09,660 --> 00:01:11,060

never had the pleasure of meeting him,

27

00:01:11,580 --> 00:01:12,880

I think by five words:

28

00:01:13,220 --> 00:01:13,820

kindness,

29

00:01:13,820 --> 00:01:15,120

wit,

30

00:01:15,120 --> 00:01:15,920

intelligence,

31

00:01:16,360 --> 00:01:17,460

and monkey business.

32

00:01:18,220 --> 00:01:20,620

He could always see the funny side of

33

00:01:20,620 --> 00:01:21,840

any situation.

34

00:01:26,280 --> 00:01:28,213

He took several mementos of mine into

35

00:01:28,213 --> 00:01:29,180

space for me.

36

00:01:29,720 --> 00:01:33,220

He took a CD called "Talking Timbuktu"

37

00:01:33,220 --> 00:01:34,220

into space.

38

00:01:34,900 --> 00:01:36,500

And then another time he took

39

00:01:37,100 --> 00:01:39,009

two of the medals I had won for

40

00:01:39,009 --> 00:01:40,100

scientific research into space.

41

00:01:41,420 --> 00:01:43,640

[Piers] Somewhere over the Pacific Ocean right now ...

42

00:01:43,640 --> 00:01:46,380

To all my friends at Goddard Space Flight Center,

43

00:01:48,540 --> 00:01:51,600

I wish I could have brought all of you up here with me.

44

00:01:52,340 --> 00:01:54,800

[Compton] I went to all of his launches and I

45

00:01:54,800 --> 00:01:56,441

would sit with his family, especially

46

00:01:56,441 --> 00:01:58,628

with his mother and sort of help her

47

00:01:58,628 --> 00:01:59,460

understand things.

48

00:01:59,800 --> 00:02:01,700

And I think that was one of the things

49

00:02:01,700 --> 00:02:02,755

which comforted Piers because he

50

00:02:02,755 --> 00:02:03,600

didn't want his mother to

51  
00:02:04,040 --> 00:02:05,540  
be nervous about his spaceflight.

52  
00:02:10,560 --> 00:02:12,536  
Both Piers and I and many other people

53  
00:02:12,536 --> 00:02:14,265  
who work for NASA are driven by

54  
00:02:14,265 --> 00:02:15,120  
scientific curiosity.

55  
00:02:15,520 --> 00:02:17,000  
[Piers] All those discussions we had

56  
00:02:17,000 --> 00:02:17,740  
Back at Goddard about how

57  
00:02:17,740 --> 00:02:18,720  
the planet really works ...

58  
00:02:19,500 --> 00:02:21,500  
It's extraordinary to see it from up here,

59  
00:02:21,500 --> 00:02:23,220  
working as a complete whole:

60  
00:02:23,220 --> 00:02:25,220  
all the atmosphere moving,

61  
00:02:25,220 --> 00:02:27,220  
twisting and turning,

62  
00:02:27,220 --> 00:02:28,040  
the oceans ...

63  
00:02:28,040 --> 00:02:29,460

It's just beautiful.

64

00:02:35,000 --> 00:02:36,240

[Compton] When he

65

00:02:37,220 --> 00:02:39,640

realized what his diagnosis was,

66

00:02:42,220 --> 00:02:44,576

he realized the odds were strongly

67

00:02:44,576 --> 00:02:46,614

against him, and he probably only had

68

00:02:46,620 --> 00:02:48,080

about a year to live.

69

00:02:48,600 --> 00:02:51,160

He said he was going to do all he could

70

00:02:51,164 --> 00:02:54,927

to contribute to climate science, to

71

00:02:54,927 --> 00:02:56,904

preserving the Earth, to satellite

72

00:02:56,904 --> 00:02:57,404

observation,

73

00:02:57,520 --> 00:02:58,020

things like this.

74

00:02:58,360 --> 00:03:00,360

[Piers] And it really brings it together

75

00:03:00,360 --> 00:03:01,460

in my mind.

76  
00:03:01,460 --> 00:03:03,060  
So we're going to come back from this

77  
00:03:03,060 --> 00:03:05,320  
experience with just a new take

78  
00:03:05,920 --> 00:03:07,820  
on the way the Earth system operates.

79  
00:03:07,820 --> 00:03:10,159  
[Compton] He wanted people to treat him as they

80  
00:03:10,159 --> 00:03:12,138  
always had and so, as hard as that was

81  
00:03:12,140 --> 00:03:14,640  
for us all, that's what we did. And then

82  
00:03:14,640 --> 00:03:16,300  
if we needed to cry we would just cry

83  
00:03:16,303 --> 00:03:17,980  
later when we weren't in his presence.

84  
00:03:23,300 --> 00:03:25,576  
All of us in Earth science at Goddard,

85  
00:03:25,576 --> 00:03:27,000  
we miss Piers Sellers deeply.

86  
00:03:27,700 --> 00:03:29,537  
I think Piers was an inspirational leader.

87  
00:03:29,537 --> 00:03:31,623  
He led from the front.

88  
00:03:31,623 --> 00:03:32,600

He led by doing.

89

00:03:36,680 --> 00:03:40,236

Whenever I think of Piers I'm very

90

00:03:40,236 --> 00:03:43,946

encouraged to do my best, also to be

91

00:03:43,946 --> 00:03:46,660

more tolerant, to practice kindness and wit.

92

00:03:51,180 --> 00:03:53,180

[Piers] ... and I hope to share that with you very soon,

93

00:03:53,920 --> 00:03:55,920

and in the meantime, greetings

94

00:03:55,920 --> 00:03:57,920

from 240 miles up,

95

00:03:57,920 --> 00:04:00,660

and I look forward to seeing you.

96

00:04:00,880 --> 00:04:01,680

Bye bye!

97

00:04:11,180 --> 00:04:13,300

[narrator] Piers Sellers passed away in 2016 after

98

00:04:13,306 --> 00:04:15,200

battling pancreatic cancer.

99

00:04:15,560 --> 00:04:16,560

He was an Earth scientist and

100

00:04:16,940 --> 00:04:18,680

his work continues to drive the

101  
00:04:18,680 --> 00:04:19,840  
conversation on climate change.

102  
00:04:20,700 --> 00:04:22,535  
Before Piers passed away, he had a

103  
00:04:22,535 --> 00:04:24,141  
lot to say about his best friend

104  
00:04:24,141 --> 00:04:24,641  
Compton too.

105  
00:04:24,960 --> 00:04:27,860  
Here he is an interview from 2016.

106  
00:04:29,460 --> 00:04:32,280  
[Piers recording] I've known Tucker, it seems like forever

107  
00:04:32,280 --> 00:04:33,900  
and we've worked together,

108  
00:04:33,900 --> 00:04:34,680  
and laughed together

109  
00:04:34,680 --> 00:04:35,180  
and drunk together

110  
00:04:35,180 --> 00:04:37,720  
for thirty something years now.

111  
00:04:38,340 --> 00:04:40,620  
It's been the most wonderful friendship

112  
00:04:40,620 --> 00:04:41,960  
and scientific collaboration

113  
00:04:41,960 --> 00:04:43,960

that I can imagine.

114

00:04:52,380 --> 00:04:53,900

[narrator] This story was produced at NASA's