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00:00:01,230 --> 00:00:02,890

>> Brandi Dean: This is Mission Control Houston.

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00:00:02,890 --> 00:00:06,770

Over the past week, we've been talking a little bit about how NASA's now accepting applications

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00:00:06,770 --> 00:00:11,130

for its next group of astronauts, and we have with us here today a special guest to talk

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00:00:11,130 --> 00:00:16,040

with us about the astronaut applications and what it's like to be an astronaut.

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00:00:16,040 --> 00:00:20,320

This is Jeanette Epps, who is a member of our most recent class of astronauts,

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00:00:20,320 --> 00:00:23,030

and I think officially an astronaut now, right.

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00:00:23,030 --> 00:00:24,320

>> Jeanette Epps: That's correct.

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00:00:24,320 --> 00:00:26,440

>> Brandi Dean: Well, thanks so much for, for joining with us.

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00:00:26,440 --> 00:00:27,310

We really appreciate it.

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00:00:27,310 --> 00:00:31,610

Tell us a little bit about your background, first of all.

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00:00:31,610 --> 00:00:34,780

>> Jeanette Epps: Well, I have a, a bachelor's degree in physics,

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00:00:34,780 --> 00:00:40,540
and then I went onto graduate school, and I
earned a, a master's and a Ph.D. in aerospace,

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00:00:40,540 --> 00:00:45,190
and I've worked for Ford Motor Company,
and I even worked for the government.

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00:00:45,190 --> 00:00:47,770
I worked for the CIA for about seven years.

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00:00:47,770 --> 00:00:50,670
>> Brandi Dean: You probably can't tell
us about that, or you'd have to kill us.

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00:00:50,670 --> 00:00:51,910
>> Jeanette Epps: Well,
I won't do that this time.

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00:00:51,910 --> 00:00:55,970
I've been cleared to tell
you, hey, I worked at the CIA.

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00:00:55,970 --> 00:00:57,430
So it's [laughter] OK.

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00:00:57,430 --> 00:00:58,090
>> Brandi Dean: Well, good.

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00:00:58,090 --> 00:01:02,130
So at any point in that time, had
you always wanted to be an astronaut,

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00:01:02,130 --> 00:01:04,160
or had that crossed your mind at all?

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00:01:04,160 --> 00:01:08,150
>> Jeanette Epps: Well, I think every kid wants

to be an astronaut, and in some way, shape,

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00:01:08,150 --> 00:01:12,380
or form, I was just a, probably a
little different in that even as a kid,

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00:01:12,380 --> 00:01:16,380
I thought it was impossible to
do, and I think as I got older,

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00:01:16,380 --> 00:01:20,680
and I met people who were applying to NASA
program, I thought it was even more impossible -

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00:01:20,680 --> 00:01:20,900
>> Brandi Dean: Really.

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00:01:20,900 --> 00:01:23,900
You had all those degrees,
and, and worked for the CIA,

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00:01:23,900 --> 00:01:26,580
you thought it was impossible
to become an astronaut?

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00:01:26,580 --> 00:01:27,060
>> Jeanette Epps: Yes.

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00:01:27,060 --> 00:01:34,280
In looking at the past astronauts and the people
who are astronauts now, they're amazing people,

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00:01:34,280 --> 00:01:39,080
and, you know, maybe I'm, I, I never
thought I was one of those people.

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00:01:39,080 --> 00:01:44,790
And even though I worked towards the goal
of at least becoming a scientist, you know,

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00:01:44,790 --> 00:01:50,160
when that little seed was put into my brain as a
kid that you can be a scientist or an astronaut,

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00:01:50,160 --> 00:01:55,890
you know, the scientist part seemed
feasible, but astronaut, [sigh] impossible -

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00:01:55,890 --> 00:01:58,400
>> Brandi Dean: Well, so what changed?

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00:01:58,400 --> 00:02:03,580
>> Jeanette Epps: Well, working hard
through the years and just developing myself,

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00:02:03,580 --> 00:02:07,970
I think I had a friend Leland Melvin
who encouraged me to apply, and -

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00:02:07,970 --> 00:02:09,800
>> Brandi Dean: A fellow astronaut, right.

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00:02:09,800 --> 00:02:13,500
>> Jeanette Epps: That is correct, and every
time I said, well, I don't think, you know,

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00:02:13,500 --> 00:02:19,290
I don't think, you know, I'd be selected, and,
but I had other people say that to me as well,

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00:02:19,290 --> 00:02:21,860
and I never thought I, I'd be selected.

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00:02:21,860 --> 00:02:28,260
But I realized that this last time back in
2007, 2008 time frame, it may be my last chance.

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00:02:28,260 --> 00:02:30,880
So I said I'm just going to go for it.

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00:02:30,880 --> 00:02:31,370

>> Brandi Dean: OK.

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00:02:31,370 --> 00:02:35,710

So what, when you decided to go for it, what, what did you do?

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00:02:35,710 --> 00:02:37,670

What was your first step?

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00:02:37,670 --> 00:02:39,850

>> Jeanette Epps: The first step was to at least apply.

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00:02:39,850 --> 00:02:43,910

I have many people come to me and say, oh, I've always wanted to do that,

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00:02:43,910 --> 00:02:48,420

and when I ask them whether or not they've applied, they always say no, and I'm, like,

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00:02:48,420 --> 00:02:51,160

well, you'll never get it if you don't apply.

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00:02:51,160 --> 00:02:51,610

>> Brandi Dean: OK.

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00:02:51,610 --> 00:02:54,070

Well, what's, what's the application process like?

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00:02:54,070 --> 00:02:56,460

>> Jeanette Epps: Well, the application process was easy initially.

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00:02:56,460 --> 00:03:02,970

You just go online, and you submit your

application, and you put in every detail you can

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00:03:02,970 --> 00:03:07,220

to make sure your application looks great, but then is the waiting that,

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00:03:07,220 --> 00:03:10,300

that gets you because you've got to wait to see if you get an interview,

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00:03:10,300 --> 00:03:16,990

and getting an interview is, it's just a feeling that I can't describe.

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00:03:16,990 --> 00:03:20,580

And once you, you get an interview, you go through the first interview process,

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00:03:20,580 --> 00:03:23,340

which is nerve wrecking because you're sitting at a table.

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00:03:23,340 --> 00:03:28,170

It's just you, and you have about 11 to 12 people around you, and they're questioning you,

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00:03:28,170 --> 00:03:31,780

but we also had to go, you know, you know, give good answers and things like that.

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00:03:31,780 --> 00:03:36,990

So that was just the first round, and then for us, we had a second round of interviews

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00:03:36,990 --> 00:03:41,940

that we were called back for, and getting the second interview was even more nerve wrecking

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00:03:41,940 --> 00:03:43,160

than the first time.

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00:03:43,160 --> 00:03:46,730

And so the second round of interviews meant they were really considering you,

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00:03:46,730 --> 00:03:49,250

and you went through all the medical exams.

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00:03:49,250 --> 00:03:54,140

And so that was a little bit different from my understanding than in the past where I think

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00:03:54,140 --> 00:03:56,150

if you were selected for an interview,

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00:03:56,150 --> 00:04:01,350

you went through the entire process whereas this time they had two separate interviews.

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00:04:01,350 --> 00:04:07,480

And so the second time only 120 people came back, and we were all given the physical exam,

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00:04:07,480 --> 00:04:09,970

and we had to do another interview -

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00:04:09,970 --> 00:04:12,970

>> Brandi Dean: So I think with the originally several thousand people applied, right.

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00:04:12,970 --> 00:04:17,700

They narrowed it down to how, probably a few hundred for the first interview,

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00:04:17,700 --> 00:04:21,890

then 120 for the second interview, and then it came down to just how many

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00:04:21,890 --> 00:04:24,080

of y'all were actually chosen in the end?

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00:04:24,080 --> 00:04:26,750

>> Jeanette Epps: Well,
there were nine Americans and.

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00:04:26,750 --> 00:04:31,720

So it, it is a percent of a percent of
a percent to be selected, and so that,

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00:04:31,720 --> 00:04:33,670

that's one reason why I never
thought it was possible.

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00:04:33,670 --> 00:04:39,000

I mean, when you think about the process and
how many people apply, and then to be one

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00:04:39,000 --> 00:04:42,190

of the few that's actually
selected, it is, you know,

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00:04:42,190 --> 00:04:44,960

when you think about it,
it's, it's amazing to be here.

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00:04:44,960 --> 00:04:45,580

So -

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00:04:45,580 --> 00:04:47,070

>> Brandi Dean: But it clearly
does happen, right.

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00:04:47,070 --> 00:04:48,380

So you're here.

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00:04:48,380 --> 00:04:49,990

>> Jeanette Epps: I am truly
an example of that.

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00:04:49,990 --> 00:04:56,860
So I'm, I am trying to encourage people who have the right background and are interested,

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00:04:56,860 --> 00:05:01,040
I try to encourage them no matter what just apply, and you never know what happens.

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00:05:01,040 --> 00:05:08,000
You never, you'll never know what happens until you at least try and apply and go from there -

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00:05:08,000 --> 00:05:08,240
>> Brandi Dean: OK.

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00:05:08,240 --> 00:05:11,390
Well, so as far as the interview process,

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00:05:11,390 --> 00:05:13,740
was it different than other jobs that you've applied for?

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00:05:13,740 --> 00:05:20,640
Was it the same kind of questions or a lot, a lot more complex or harder or detailed?

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00:05:20,640 --> 00:05:24,410
>> Jeanette Epps: Well, the questions were, were interesting, and I think the method

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00:05:24,410 --> 00:05:28,540
that they use, and maybe I'm wrong, but you can plan your, your answers,

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00:05:28,540 --> 00:05:32,470
and you could try to tailor the questions and try to get them to ask you certain questions

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00:05:32,470 --> 00:05:36,660

that you've practiced, but they have such a rapid-fire method of asking questions

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00:05:36,660 --> 00:05:40,990

that you just start answering, and you, you have no choice but to be yourself -

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00:05:40,990 --> 00:05:41,700

>> Brandi Dean: And be truthful -

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00:05:41,700 --> 00:05:43,800

>> Jeanette Epps: And be truthful, exactly.

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00:05:43,800 --> 00:05:48,130

So I think the interview process was a little different because we went through medical,

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00:05:48,130 --> 00:05:51,540

a lot of physical things as well as intellectual things as well.

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00:05:51,540 --> 00:05:56,220

So this job is different in that the physical aspect is included in the job.

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00:05:56,220 --> 00:05:59,790

>> Brandi Dean: What would you say was, I don't know, the hardest part or the, you know,

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00:05:59,790 --> 00:06:02,850

the craziest you got, or the most memorable part?

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00:06:02,850 --> 00:06:08,030

>> Jeanette Epps: Well, [sigh] one of the, during the interview process,

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00:06:08,030 --> 00:06:13,830

we got to work out with Peggy Witson and several other astronauts, and just the level

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00:06:13,830 --> 00:06:16,490

of fitness of these ladies was amazing.

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00:06:16,490 --> 00:06:16,950

>> Brandi Dean: Really.

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00:06:16,950 --> 00:06:17,410

>> Jeanette Epps: Yes.

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00:06:17,410 --> 00:06:22,300

And then that was, for some reason, that
always stuck in my mind, and even to, today,

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00:06:22,300 --> 00:06:25,900

when I think about the interview process,
that's one of the first things I think about,

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00:06:25,900 --> 00:06:30,950

but then even beyond that, sitting at the
table and having to answer the questions and,

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00:06:30,950 --> 00:06:36,040

[laughs] and just being very nervous, but you
get to the point where you just have to answer,

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00:06:36,040 --> 00:06:39,070

and you answer honestly and truthfully
because, you know, like I said,

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00:06:39,070 --> 00:06:42,040

that rapid-fire method works really well.

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00:06:42,040 --> 00:06:43,030

>> Brandi Dean: OK.

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00:06:43,030 --> 00:06:47,600

Well, so, you made it through the
application process, you became an astronaut,

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00:06:47,600 --> 00:06:49,790

or an astronaut candidate I guess first of all.

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00:06:49,790 --> 00:06:52,020

What happened then?

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00:06:52,020 --> 00:06:58,220

>> Jeanette Epps: Well, we came on board, and we started from day one, it became busy.

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00:06:58,220 --> 00:07:02,670

We went to land survival training in Maine, and then after that several of us

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00:07:02,670 --> 00:07:07,990

who don't have a pilot's background, we went off to Pensacola for six weeks, and we learned how

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00:07:07,990 --> 00:07:12,730

to basically just be safe, pretty much, in a T6 out of Pensacola.

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00:07:12,730 --> 00:07:16,210

They taught us a great deal, but, you know, in six weeks, you can't be,

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00:07:16,210 --> 00:07:19,800

become a pilot in command of, of a plane just yet.

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00:07:19,800 --> 00:07:25,020

So we get back from that, and we start into the T38 training, which has been amazing.

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00:07:25,020 --> 00:07:28,250

I mean, when you think about it, you're sitting on an ejection seat, and you're sitting

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00:07:28,250 --> 00:07:31,380

in the back end, you get to
go, in some cases mach I.

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00:07:31,380 --> 00:07:35,680

So it's a supersonic jet, and that's, that's
been great, but then after that, you know,

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00:07:35,680 --> 00:07:41,210

we started into some scuba diving,
preparing for the EVA training, robotics,

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00:07:41,210 --> 00:07:45,000

and then beyond that we had a lot
of the ISS systems that we learned.

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00:07:45,000 --> 00:07:47,490

It's an amazing space station.

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00:07:47,490 --> 00:07:51,530

So, and then after that, you know,
we, we started in the Russian.

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00:07:51,530 --> 00:07:55,510

So learned the Russian language
also has been very interesting.

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00:07:55,510 --> 00:07:56,160

[laughs]

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00:07:56,160 --> 00:07:56,510

>> Brandi Dean: So let's see.

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00:07:56,510 --> 00:08:01,230

Learning to fly, learning another
language, I think I saw a photo of you in a,

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00:08:01,230 --> 00:08:05,890

in a space suit in the water at the, the,
the pool where we train for space walks.

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00:08:05,890 --> 00:08:09,700

It's quite a variety of, of activities, huh?

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00:08:09,700 --> 00:08:13,120

>> Jeanette Epps: It's amazing amount of activity.

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00:08:13,120 --> 00:08:14,750

I wouldn't trade this job for the world.

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00:08:14,750 --> 00:08:18,370

So one of the best things about this job is that you get to do

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00:08:18,370 --> 00:08:22,260

so many cool things, and that's just in one month.

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00:08:22,260 --> 00:08:22,960

[laughs]

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00:08:22,960 --> 00:08:26,340

>> Brandi Dean: And that's just the training to, to prepare for the real job, right?

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00:08:26,340 --> 00:08:27,400

>> Jeanette Epps: That's correct.

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00:08:27,400 --> 00:08:28,490

That's correct.

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00:08:28,490 --> 00:08:28,840

>> Brandi Dean: OK.

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00:08:28,840 --> 00:08:33,020

Well, what's been your favorite part so far?

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00:08:33,020 --> 00:08:36,290

>> Jeanette Epps: My favorite part is actually probably one of the toughest tasks.

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00:08:36,290 --> 00:08:41,650

I think most people will tell you in the Corps that, which is the EVA stuff.

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00:08:41,650 --> 00:08:46,570

Working out at the [inaudible] buoyancy lab and the thought of getting into a space suit,

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00:08:46,570 --> 00:08:51,630

going into the water for six hours, and practicing, you know,

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00:08:51,630 --> 00:08:57,500

maintenance tasks on the station, practicing installing new equipment on the station,

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00:08:57,500 --> 00:09:01,420

it is one of the toughest jobs you'll ever experience.

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00:09:01,420 --> 00:09:03,880

I mean, for six hours, you're in the suit, and you're working,

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00:09:03,880 --> 00:09:09,340

and the suit is 300 pounds alone, over 300 pounds, and, you know, it's,

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00:09:09,340 --> 00:09:13,570

sometimes you're not so neutrally buoyant so you, you do get a little tired,

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00:09:13,570 --> 00:09:16,250

[laughs] and I'm understanding that, just a little tired.

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00:09:16,250 --> 00:09:21,560

So four hours into this, you're thinking,
wow, I've got two more hours [laughs] in here.

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00:09:21,560 --> 00:09:23,060

But when you come out of the suit,

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00:09:23,060 --> 00:09:27,070

and you realize what you've just
done, it is, it's a good feeling -

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00:09:27,070 --> 00:09:29,110

>> Brandi Dean: Yeah, I bet.

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00:09:29,110 --> 00:09:35,020

Well, how, how do you anticipating
using your background, your degrees?

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00:09:35,020 --> 00:09:39,900

I know, let's see, I think astronauts applicants
are required to have a, a bachelor's degree

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00:09:39,900 --> 00:09:42,550

in math, science, or engineering.

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00:09:42,550 --> 00:09:46,100

What, how, how are you going to use that?

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00:09:46,100 --> 00:09:49,920

>> Jeanette Epps: Well, I think most of the
people in the Corps and the people that came

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00:09:49,920 --> 00:09:52,270

in with me, we all have these
varied backgrounds,

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00:09:52,270 --> 00:09:56,930

and I think all in that experience
plays into being able to adapt

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00:09:56,930 --> 00:10:02,970

to whatever situation we're put into, but also
in order to do the science that's required

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00:10:02,970 --> 00:10:08,540

on the station in order to understand
the science and actually go through

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00:10:08,540 --> 00:10:13,120

and do the experiments in a detailed way
and produce good data for the scientists

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00:10:13,120 --> 00:10:17,190

on the ground, and all of that data
will be used for future exploration.

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00:10:17,190 --> 00:10:20,970

So hopefully we can all contribute
in some ways, shape,

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00:10:20,970 --> 00:10:24,510

or form to the future of
exploration in that sense.

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00:10:24,510 --> 00:10:26,190

>> Brandi Dean: I imagine so.

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00:10:26,190 --> 00:10:30,630

And you anticipate going to the Space
Station at some point, or what are,

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00:10:30,630 --> 00:10:32,390

what are your hopes for the future?

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00:10:32,390 --> 00:10:34,890

>> Jeanette Epps: Well, I am hoping,
but that's up to my boss, Peggy Witson -

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00:10:34,890 --> 00:10:35,550

>> Brandi Dean: OK -

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00:10:35,550 --> 00:10:39,550

>> Jeanette Epps: So, [crosstalk] I am hoping to go, and I'm looking forward to, I mean,

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00:10:39,550 --> 00:10:43,160

six months on the station, you can do quite a few things,

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00:10:43,160 --> 00:10:46,430

and you do make it your home in that six month time frame.

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00:10:46,430 --> 00:10:50,850

So I'm looking forward to the Space Station being my home for six months.

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00:10:50,850 --> 00:10:53,270

>> Brandi Dean: And in the meantime, what are doing?

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00:10:53,270 --> 00:10:56,700

>> Jeanette Epps: In the meantime, I'm a part of the ISS integration branch,

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00:10:56,700 --> 00:10:58,710

and I'm learning to become a capcom -

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00:10:58,710 --> 00:10:59,210

>> Brandi Dean: Oh, OK.

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00:10:59,210 --> 00:11:01,370

Will you working here at the [inaudible] maybe?

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00:11:01,370 --> 00:11:02,190

>> Jeanette Epps: I'm hoping.

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00:11:02,190 --> 00:11:07,280

I'm hoping, and the springtime to be a full-time employee in, as a cap com -

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00:11:07,280 --> 00:11:08,690

>> Brandi Dean: Well, we'll look forward to seeing you here.

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00:11:08,690 --> 00:11:09,180

And, I'm sorry.

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00:11:09,180 --> 00:11:12,820

You said the other thing was working in the ISS integration branch.

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00:11:12,820 --> 00:11:16,380

>> Jeanette Epps: That's correct, and that's [crosstalk] looking at the ISS systems

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00:11:16,380 --> 00:11:20,790

and looking at issues with the systems and working with the other components of, like,

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00:11:20,790 --> 00:11:25,280

the EVA branch, robotics branch, and all of us working together to,

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00:11:25,280 --> 00:11:28,180

to perform the tasks that's needed on the ISS.

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00:11:28,180 --> 00:11:28,800

>> Brandi Dean: OK.

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00:11:28,800 --> 00:11:33,960

And I guess, you know, we talk about a lot how the International Space Station's getting us

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00:11:33,960 --> 00:11:36,930

ready to go further out into space, and I'm sure that's something that a lot

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00:11:36,930 --> 00:11:40,250

of the astronauts are, are
thinking about a lot as well, right.

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00:11:40,250 --> 00:11:41,950

>> Jeanette Epps: That is correct.

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00:11:41,950 --> 00:11:45,180

I think in the, in the near term, though,
I think a lot of people are looking forward

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00:11:45,180 --> 00:11:49,640

to the Space Station [inaudible]
and going to the Space Station,

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00:11:49,640 --> 00:11:55,350

but also working with the commercial crew
office and looking at what's on the horizon.

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00:11:55,350 --> 00:11:56,430

>> Brandi Dean: OK.

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00:11:56,430 --> 00:12:02,290

Well, any final advice for anybody
who's thinking about applying or have,

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00:12:02,290 --> 00:12:07,450

has already applied, and maybe is
anticipating hearing back soon?

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00:12:07,450 --> 00:12:10,370

>> Jeanette Epps: I would,
I have two pieces of advice.

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00:12:10,370 --> 00:12:11,920

One is at least apply.

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00:12:11,920 --> 00:12:12,950

Just make sure you apply.

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00:12:12,950 --> 00:12:17,270

You never, if you, if you [crosstalk] don't apply, yeah, you'll, you'll never get in.

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00:12:17,270 --> 00:12:22,750

So at least apply, and the second thing is to have a career that you're working

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00:12:22,750 --> 00:12:25,020

in currently that you're very happy with.

217

00:12:25,020 --> 00:12:29,880

Because you never know what will happen, but you want to make sure at the end of all

218

00:12:29,880 --> 00:12:31,930

of this, you're, you're still happy.

219

00:12:31,930 --> 00:12:33,050

So.

220

00:12:33,050 --> 00:12:37,060

>> Brandi Dean: [Inaudible] Were you, think you're happy where you ended up?

221

00:12:37,060 --> 00:12:39,540

>> Jeanette Epps: I'm extremely happy where I ended up.

222

00:12:39,540 --> 00:12:42,920

I don't think there's another job like it.

223

00:12:42,920 --> 00:12:44,340

So, yeah, extremely happy -

224

00:12:44,340 --> 00:12:45,760

>> Brandi Dean: Well, thanks so much for talking with us.

225

00:12:45,760 --> 00:12:47,340

We really appreciate it.

226

00:12:47,340 --> 00:12:48,490

>> Jeanette Epps: Thanks for having me.

227

00:12:48,490 --> 00:12:52,500

>> Brandi Dean: And this is Jeanette Epps,
a member of our most recent astronaut class,

228

00:12:52,500 --> 00:12:53,770

and as we've been talking about,

229

00:12:53,770 --> 00:12:57,010

we are now taking applications
for our next astronaut class.

230

00:12:57,010 --> 00:13:02,260

You can go to [www dot NASA dot gov](http://www.nasa.gov)
slash fly NASA to, first of all,

231

00:13:02,260 --> 00:13:07,700

find out more about the astronaut application
process and then also you can find a link

232

00:13:07,700 --> 00:13:11,820

from there to the fly NASA blog, which
Jeanette is featured on at the moment.

233

00:13:11,820 --> 00:13:16,690

She has a blog and some photos of her
time so far here in the astronaut office

234

00:13:16,690 --> 00:13:18,440

that you can take a look at there.

235

00:13:18,440 --> 00:13:21,420

Again, that address is [www dot](http://www.nasa.gov)

NASA dot gov slash fly NASA.