Mindy Howard wants to be the first Dutch woman in space. What she learned in life: not everything is rational and explainable in life, and Dutch men call back two weeks later, after a successful date.

I am grateful that commercial space travel exists. It is good that space is also accessible to less fit, less perfect people. It offers me an opportunity to live and work in space, which I have wanted almost all my life. I hope for a job as a hotel manager - innkeeper of a space hotel. That sounds like science fiction, but it's coming. It's almost there. You can't do it for too long because of the radiation. I would think it would be perfect to do it for a year or two. It's a role I'm suited for. There aren't many people with my technical background who also want to entertain and make people happy.

When I was six, I was in love with The Six Million Dollar Man. I fantasized that I was flying through space hand in hand with him. And he was bionic. I also wanted to be bionic. Soon I will get a bionic knee so I finally succeeded at that. Although for me, I am paying the price of doing extreme sports - softball, hockey, rugby and polo. I once had a part-time job as a polo pony groom, so I had the opportunity to learn how to play polo. It’s best sport ever. I loved the speed, the thrill, the connection with the horses. In addition, you were allowed to bump into men roughly as part of the game. I think men were always amazed at how hard I could slam into them for a petite woman.

I grew up in Long Island, New York. Both my parents were teachers, I have an older sister. A pretty normal childhood. Yet I have always felt different. Because: a part of me had to remain hidden. I am Jewish. And my parents always said, don't talk about that. Be careful. My family did not experience the effects of the Holocaust, but there was a deep conviction that it was safer to leave it unsaid. I've kept the secret until now. But what was safe to show up as, was doing well, and performing. Performing well was important to my parents. I remember coming home from first grade, to an empty house because they were still at work. I prepared a snack for myself and then had to play the violin for an hour.

From a young age I said: I want to be an astronaut. My parents didn't understand where that came from, but they didn't discourage me either. I only got negative reactions later, in the Netherlands. Astronaut? Who did I think I was? "Yeah, sure and I'm going to the moon." It surprised me, but I didn't let myself be pushed back into my cage. I had no doubts about becoming an astronaut until I was rejected from NASA for the first time. I didn't understand how that could happen. Everyone said I was cut out for it. It was the first time I noticed that I couldn't achieve everything I set my mind to.

I came to the Netherlands for a purely practical reason: being able to obtain a doctorate in four years. That was a NASA requirement and, in the US, it took at least ten years. Coming to the Netherlands felt like going to Antarctica. Suddenly I was cut off from my family. It was 1990, there was no internet yet, calling home was too expensive. I no longer had a car - how do you go shopping by bike? If I ordered a sofa it took ten weeks for it to arrive. Couldn't that be done faster for an extra fee? No. In the US you can get everything if you pay more. Do you know the movie, When Harry Met Sally? Sally ordering something but wanted pickles with it and not this and that? That was me. I wanted sandwich number five with parts from sandwich four. Nope. Impossible. I resisted that for a long time. Until I thought: I'll make myself unhappy if I keep fighting the system. I learned the art of acceptance. Well, the learning process is still ongoing. I'm thinking now, if I was on the moon and sandwich number five was space food, I'd be happy with it. I try to reframe my disappointments into something else, like an adventure.

Never thought I'd marry a Dutchie. I had dating issues in the Netherlands. When I said that I got my PhD at Eindhoven University of Technology, men were not turned on by that. They didn't want a tech-savvy or highly educated woman. In the US, I always had a lot of boyfriends. Here, it took forever to get asked out, and after the date, guys didn't say anything for two weeks. I was stunned when they still called 14 days later. “Who is this? I said, I have forgotten about you 2 weeks ago”. Eric called after three days. He is a man who knows what it is like to perform at the top level - after two Olympic Games in the Dutch water polo team. But I still don't quite understand how the love language works here. Perhaps the Dutch are more patient.

I got such a good job at Shell that I stayed in the Netherlands. I traveled all over the world. In the meantime, and I kept applying for an astronaut. I became Dutch to be able to do that at ESA, the European space agency. When I was 37, I was told that I was too old. In 2010, due to a reorganization at Shell, I was able to leave with a training for my next job. I was asked what I would like to become. Well, I said, an astronaut. Ha ha ha. Although they didn’t quite believe it, they sent me to a centrifuge in the US where you can train and be exposed to high G-forces. It was there that I first heard about commercial space travel.

Until now, commercial space travel has been one big PR thing. As if everything always goes well. That's not realistic. People can be scared along the way. They can kick each other in the head or panic while weightless. Many undesirable things can and will happen in space but you don’t hear about them yet.

Everyone who travels into space wants to experience the “Overview Effect”, that peaceful zen feeling that astronauts always talk about. If I have one fear, it is that I will go into space and not experience it. But it all happens very quickly. On a commercial flight, you have four minutes of weightlessness. It has to be done in those few minutes with screaming people around you who want to do somersaults. Training beforehand can help people have their own unique experience. I train commercial astronauts. I teach them techniques to remain calm, to call up calm and focus on demand when the pressure is greatest. With those techniques, described in my book, “Blast off - train like an astronaut for success on earth”, I also help people get rid of fear of flying or claustrophobia.

I never used to believe in God or in 'something greater'. It wasn't until I got older that I started to think: there is more out there. Long before the internet, I went to a Hindu priest in Malaysia. He described Eric, who I didn't know yet, and said I would meet him in three months. And it happened! He also said I would go into space. I hadn't said anything to him about these topics and thought: how does he know that? I was always very rational. I powered through life using my brain. But once something like that happens to you personally, my skepticism started to fade. This intuitive side of me started to open. Some of my friends have an excellent inner wisdom. They have helped me to discover that other side of myself. My intuition is a weak muscle that is just starting to grow.

I recently got a dog, Cosmo. I regret not getting a dog sooner. When I look into his eyes, I feel such joy. I can't believe I can love something so much. I still want to be an astronaut, but it's not all about me anymore. Others are in the foreground, as well as the planet. A trip to space can increase our love towards the Earth. Reinforcing the feeling of being part of a bigger whole. I want to help people realize that dream.