



CRASH AND BURN

THE LISA NOWAK STORY

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How Could This Have Happened?

From the minute the story of astronaut-gone-wild Lisa Nowak and her star-crossed romance broke into the national headlines, America could not stop talking about it. If possible, it seemed even more compelling than the Runaway Bride saga of a few years ago. In terms of hatching a bad plan and then executing it incompetently, it certainly takes the prize.

The comics had a field day talking about the astronaut with the Wrong Stuff. Wigs, trench coats, pepper spray, rubber hose, latex gloves, large garbage bags, air cartridge BB gun, steel mallet, four-inch folding knife and, of course, the diapers. It all became a punch line. After all, she sounded like she was getting ready to conduct an interrogation worthy of Jack Bauer!

One thing seemed clear about this woman. Whatever was going through Lisa Nowak's mind when she came up with the plan, this was no mere crime of passion, something coming from emotions of the moment. Driving 900 miles to attack her supposed rival for the affections of astronaut Bill Oefelein was clearly pre-meditated.

As a few days passed, though, the shock and laughter gave way to even more serious questions. These questions brought the story clearly back to Earth.

Obsession

Lisa Nowak was in line for a major promotion, potentially becoming the main voice of Capcom, communicating with astronauts in space. She was also the mother of three children, a teenager and twins.

Why would any sane woman give it all up?

And, if the answer is that she wasn't sane, then how could NASA not notice, and what did this incident say about the psychological vetting that is supposed to be done before sending humans into space?

As we consider building a lunar base, or taking a years-long trip to Mars, what would it mean to have a woman as unstable as Lisa Nowak on board?

And, finally, the sheer human tragedy can't be underestimated. For as odd and criminal as Lisa Nowak's behavior was, she was by the accounts of friends, neighbors and co-workers, a sweet, stable and "normal" person. Yet seven months after flying on the Space Shuttle, she

was attacking a co-worker in a parking garage, wearing a disguise while armed and dangerous.

The answer is obsession.

No one becomes an astronaut without becoming obsessed with the idea of going to space. Lisa Nowak was six-year-old when she watched Neil Armstrong walk on the moon and decided that she, too, would like to do that.

No one commits the brazen stalking of another person, in the way that Nowak did, without being obsessed. Lisa Nowak had transferred her compulsive desires to a new astronaut -- one that was more within her reach -- Bill Oefelein.

A Way to Tell This Story

Our cautionary tale, *CRASH AND BURN: The Lisa Nowak Story*, will try to answer these questions and understand the nature of obsession by following Lisa Nowak's arrival at NASA through the ultimate resolution of her criminal case, and layering in important events outside of that timeline.

Our structure, however, will be unique. This will not be a clearly chronological story.

At its center, we will cut between the two most impactful missions of Lisa Nowak's career.

- The first mission, her nearly two-week Space Shuttle mission, from last July...
- The second mission, her maniacal drive from Houston to Orlando, through her arrest...

In both missions, we will see the preparation and attention to detail needed. Both are calculated risks that require planning and training. One will end in a heroic return to Earth. The other will end in shame and despair.

Outside of this parallel structure, we will fill in court appearances, assumed conversations with her lawyer and with the psychiatrists she is already explaining her actions to. We will see moments from her past that may explain the actions in her present.

We will see the hurt this act has left in its path, from husbands and wives to children and friends and co-workers.

Mostly, though, we will see the hurt that even an educated, intelligent, successful person like Lisa Nowak could feel inside -- a hurt so deep that not even the severe consequences of failure could hold her back.