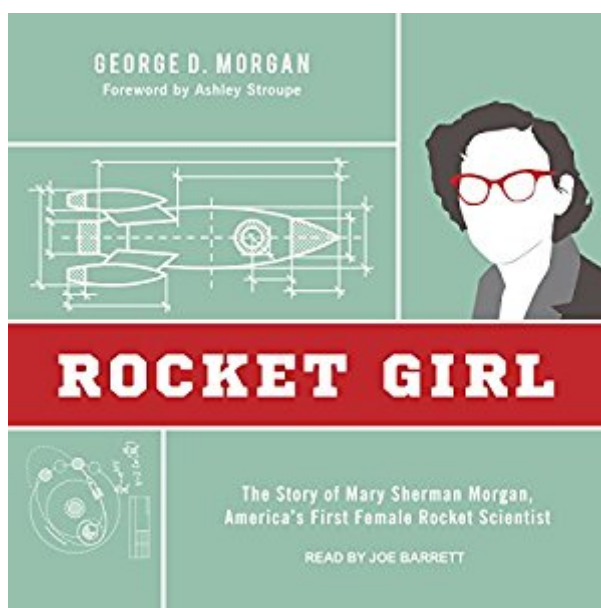


The book was found

Rocket Girl: The Story Of Mary Sherman Morgan, America's First Female Rocket Scientist



Synopsis

In 1938, a young German rocket enthusiast named Wernher von Braun had dreams of building a rocket that could fly him to the moon. In Ray, North Dakota, a young farm girl named Mary Sherman was attending high school. In an age when girls rarely dreamed of a career in science, Mary wanted to be a chemist. A decade later, the dreams of these two disparate individuals would coalesce in ways neither could have imagined. World War II and the Cold War space race with the Russians changed the fates of both von Braun and Mary Sherman Morgan. When von Braun and other top engineers could not find a solution to the repeated failures that plagued the nascent US rocket program, North American Aviation, where Sherman Morgan then worked, was given the challenge. Recognizing her talent for chemistry, company management turned the assignment over to young Mary. In the end, America succeeded in launching rockets into space, but only because of the joint efforts of the brilliant farm girl from North Dakota and the famous German scientist. While von Braun went on to become a high-profile figure in NASA's manned space flight, Mary Sherman Morgan and her contributions fell into obscurity - until now.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There are many forgotten individuals who contributed in small and large ways to America's entry into space. There are many who took credit for the work done by the people they supervised. Many engineers signed "Hiring Agreements" that any patent they received belonged to the company, not them. Many people worked from the forties and fifties to the nineties and beyond, who did not have

degrees, and led those who did. Once they left, they would never work again in their fields because experience was not enough; the degree was all important. This is such a story, of a female in a man's world, to make it even more unlikely, who kept her mouth closed, did her work, kept her secrets and contributed mightily to America's journey into space. It is told by her son, who has every right to be extremely proud of her, and who had to ferret out the facts on his own after a half century of them being buried. It is the American Dream, with an unexpected twist. Many mothers, including my own, did highly important work during the Second World War with an education inadequate for the job at hand. In spite of all odds, they succeeded and won the war, and the cold one that followed, just as much as the men who fought it. A good read about a true story, with some guesses to fill in some of the facts which may never be recovered, and a time in history when world leaders, as they are often wont to do, did not recognize the importance of events occurring before their eyes. Thank God, at least Mary Sherman Morgan will not be completely forgotten.

This book traces the life story of a Midwest farm girl through her tough childhood through a rocky young adulthood as she educated herself in the sciences she felt so passionate about. Through determination and raw talent Mary Sherman wound up in the front row of America's space and missile programs in the 50s. Unfortunately, her life is still shadowy. Mary Sherman was a private person working in fields that were shrouded in secrecy. The book seems awkwardly padded in places with fictional narratives that try to faithfully paint a picture of Ms Sherman and her world. But it's still a good read.

I have read a number of books in the past year about women and minorities in the space field. In June of 2013 a NASA astronaut class was, for the first time, 50 percent women. I read a book a few years ago about Sally Ride on the 30th anniversary of her flight. Also, read of the 50th anniversary of Valentina Tereshkova's historic space flight. This year I read the books "Rocket Girls" and "Hidden Figures". It has been a long hard battle for women to be accepted in the field. This book is about Mary Sherman Morgan who played a key role in the launch of the first satellite, Explorer 1 in 1958. The book is written by her son. He tells of her life on a farm in North Dakota to running away to go to college. Morgan was gifted in chemistry and mathematics. Morgan was the first woman hired in a technical position at North American Aviation in the late 1940s. She was a chemist at the Plum Brook Ordnance Works during World War II. Mary had to overcome poverty, emotional abuse, sexism and government bureaucracy to achieve her goals. She developed a reputation as an expert

in developing propellant combinations for rockets and missiles. She was assigned to solve a critical problem: develop an alternative to the alcohol and liquid oxygen (LOX) propellants used on the Jupiter Rocket that would improve its performance enough to allow it to launch a satellite. She developed Hydyne. The author does not follow a chronological arc. Instead he skips around in time and interweaves her life with Werner von Braun and Soviet rocketry pioneer Sergei Korolev. The author calls it "creative nonfiction". I understand there was not a lot of information about Mary so he filled up space with the famous people she worked with. I found it interesting to learn about this early pioneer in the rocket fuel area. The book is 336 pages long and was released in 2013. I bought the book from in eBook format. I read it on the Kindle app for my iPad.

I really enjoyed this book about someone who has been left in the dust of history. My brother worked for Rocketdyne in Missouri which built rocket engines that sent men and women into space. Before they could do their thing, the fuel issue had to be determined and Mary Morgan was on the ground floor of that immense discovery. It changed so many things in our history.

I found this a highly readable and quite informative book, but I did think it could have been better and am looking for the rest of the stories...of women in the early sciences, of the Sherman/Morgan family, of Mary Morgan herself. The book was a good read, not least because it raised as many questions as it answered. It's likely that the questions about Mary and her family were well researched by her son; it's not certain whether all the answers would have been published to the world. The questions about women in the rocket business have been explored elsewhere (e.g., I'm waiting for "Atomic City" to arrive and tell me about lower level women, at Oak Ridge.) I don't suppose the whole story of the author's journey is told anywhere else, though, and while the description here is clear--and fascinating--it feels incomplete. Read it anyway; see if you can figure out what sticks in my mind. What kind of person starts where she started and does what she did? What must it have taken in brilliance, passion, mentorship, and sheer courage to make that leap? Was depression the price she paid for the suffering of her early years, the conflicts of the middle phase, or the ennui of putting one foot in front of the other through the third, very different, chapter of her life? If she was rightly fearful of exposure and disclosure, was there another layer of fear, perhaps from her family of origin or from a workplace event she would not have been able to address? There are more, but you will have your own. You will also find Mary unforgettable.

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