

# Four astronauts watching billions of stars: Billions of people watching four astronauts

*Heather Anne Wakeling Lister - May 2026*

As a child, my father would take my hand and we would go for a walk after dinner. Dad liked to retell the first time I saw an evening sky, star-lit bright. Apparently, I shouted, pointing upwards: “oock, oock, oock at the kie. At the kie!” Now 65, I still look to the night sky with awe and repeat to myself, “oh look, look at the sky!”

Young minds are impressionable and some moments remain imprinted in time’s memory.

It was July, 1969, hot. July 20 to be exact. My parents were having a party at their country property the day the Apollo II moon landing took place. Copious amounts of beer and food were consumed, and the teasing laughter after the chair my Aunt Ruth was sitting on fell through the floorboards became a stilled silence once Dad turned our black and white television’s ‘bunny ears’ to receive a rather gravely broadcast landing.

Astronaut Neil Armstrong stepped out of Apollo II, on to the moon’s surface, accompanied by his infamous words, “one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.”

I keep a framed bubble-gum card photo of the Apollo II landing as well as a commemorative stamp near my office desk. A self-admitted fan of space exploration, I am taking a great deal of pleasure in adding another NASA photograph of our planet -- a brilliant blue globe as seen over the cusp of the moon’s curvature.

Contrast that moment in time with the horror felt when working at Maclean’s magazine as I watched along with other staff the Challenger’s explosion on January 28, 1986. The last words recorded from the Challenger crew before all data and lives were lost were ‘Uh, oh’ spoken by pilot Michael J. Smith at 73 seconds into the flight.

This April, four astronauts, Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Canadian-bred Jeremy Hansen joined the fortunate few who have been privileged to view our world from space. And with this mission’s five hours allotted for observation, they took notice, photographed and documented interesting landscape and markings on the dark side of earth’s moon.

Thinking that the moon was gray, I was surprised to learn that the dark side of the moon has shades of brownish and greenish hues, indicating the possibility of mineral deposits.

Humbling to know that the Orientale basin, which is a region close to the moon’s near and far sides is thought to have been formed 3.8 billion years ago.

Talk about feeling insignificant in terms of my own lifespan.

I, like billions of our world’s population, was enthralled with the Artemis II mission, hoping beyond hope that the Greek origin of its name meaning ‘safe’ or ‘unharmful’ would offer protection. Watching with anticipation the lift off, I cheered in my living room as the rocket blasted off, soaring without incident into orbit.

As Artemis II surpassed the 1970 Apollo 13 record for the farthest distance humans travelled from earth, so many of us followed along as these astronauts were catapulted through space, relying on a slingshot trajectory around the moon to traverse a full distance record of 248,655 plus miles.

Data collected will be analyzed as to how the human body reacts to being in a capsule in deep space for 10 days. Information useful in future exploration and designed development of enclosed life sustaining systems, including what makes for successful re-entries under extreme high-temperature and turbulence conditions.

Guidance and navigation systems, along with communication and environmental control systems were tested: including how to fix a toilet malfunction. How a plastic bag came in useful protecting drinking water from contamination.

There is much talk about this accomplishment in scientific terms. Observations, 35 geological features noted in real time, colours that indicate mineral deposits, and a solar eclipse as seen from space. But one of the more memorable messages came from Hansen when he gave tribute to Reid Wiseman’s wife Carroll who passed in 2020.

As a “cherished member of the astronaut family” the crew honoured her memory by naming a lunar crater ‘Carroll’. Juxtaposed against this incredible feat of science, innovation and financial investment, was the April 7th American presidential announcement. One that endangered the safety of the world. You know, the only one we live on, by threatening that “a whole civilization will die tonight,” in reference to the war between America and Iran, home to a population of 90 million souls -- all this while a crew of four were exploring deep space.

I sent out a prayer of hope that these four astronauts would return to a liveable, habitable planet.

Earth survived this threat, remaining a precious jewel -- a rotating blue globe in a vast expanse of consciousness, she accepted into her ocean waters near San Diego, California, the Orion capsule. Named Integrity, this feat of engineering protected the astronauts during their re-entry, shielding them from the tremendous impact of hitting earth’s atmosphere at a speed of 25,000 mph, or 40,000 km/h.

Holding true to its integrity, the design of Orion’s capsule held. Her doors, after impact, opened to flood the capsule with fresh ocean air, where four people, alive and well, smiled broadly to the cheers of ‘welcome home!’