

Stephen Hawking

We are all different in our own ways, yet we are the same.

Whatever be life challenges, there is always a silver lining which assures hope. These lines are an embodiment of the life of Stephen Hawking, the British theoretical physicist who beat the odds and lived to the age of 76. He was the brightest star in the firmament of science, whose insights shaped modern cosmology and inspired global audiences in the millions. He passed away after a long struggle with motor neurone disease. His absence will create an intellectual vacuum in the wake.



Stephen Hawking was born on January 8, 1942, on the 300th anniversary of Galileo's death and breathed his last on March 14th, the anniversary of Einstein's birth.

Hawking was diagnosed with motor neurone disease, or ALS, at the age of 21 but he continued his fruitful journey with zest and enthusiasm. Hawking was married and divorced twice. His first wife, Jane Wilde, was a fellow student at Cambridge to whom he was married for 28 years. He then married his nurse, Elaine Mason, whom he was with for 11 years before they separated. The incapacitating illness gradually paralyzed him, confining him to a wheelchair, and in 1985 a tracheotomy robbed him of his voice.

In order to communicate, Hawking used a computer system attached to his wheelchair. He used a switch to select words printed on a screen, and as he formed sentences, these were sent to a speech synthesizer. He thus became one of the most famous voices in the sciences even as he communicated via a synthesized-speech box. Although Hawking may have been languid physically, he is the best-known theoretical physicist of his time, Hawking wrote so lucidly of the mysteries of space, time and black holes that his book *A Brief History of Time* became an international bestseller, making him one of science's biggest celebrities.

Hawking was a Mathematics professor at the University of Cambridge and held 13 honorary degrees. In 2009, the then-US president Barack Obama awarded him with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honour awarded in America. Hawking won the Albert Einstein Award, the Wolf Prize, the Copley Medal, and the Fundamental Physics Prize.

In 2007, Hawking became the first quadriplegic to float in zero-gravity when he took a flight in a NASA aircraft used to train astronauts. Hawking studied and explained complex theories of space, time, black holes and relativity. Hawking – his animated lookalike – appeared on numerous television shows, including 'Star Trek: The Next Generation', 'The Simpsons', 'Family Guy' and 'Dilbert'. In some instances, he appeared as himself, while in others animated characters were created to resemble him.

May his soul eternally brighten the celestial space.