

NASA JOHNSON SPACE CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

EDITED ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

SANDRA J. GRIFFIN
INTERVIEWED BY SANDRA JOHNSON
HUNT, TEXAS – JULY 9, 2019

Note: Sandra J. Griffin made significant edits to this transcript during her review. The changes are not indicated, and as a result, the text no longer matches the archived audio recording.

JOHNSON: Today is July 9th, 2019. This interview with Sandy Griffin is being conducted in Hunt, Texas, for the JSC Oral History Project. The interviewer is Sandra Johnson, assisted by Jennifer Ross-Nazzal. I want to thank you again for agreeing to talk to us and letting us see your beautiful home.

GRIFFIN: You're welcome.

JOHNSON: We'd like to start today just by asking you about your background. Your childhood, your education, and where you met Gerry [Gerald D. Griffin].

GRIFFIN: That's easy. I actually grew up here in Kerrville. I'm a native—well, I moved to Kerrville when I was two years old. My dad was a German baker and the bakery here was owned by an old German man named Carl [H.] Wolfmueller. Neither of his sons wanted to inherit the bakery, so brought in a young lion to take over his business, and it was my dad.

My dad was good. He was young. I was two and my sister, who is my only sibling, was a baby, and we moved here from Brownwood [Texas], which I never claimed again after I moved to Kerrville. I was very much a snob about Kerrville, and I loved everything about it.

We eventually owned the bakery here in Kerrville. I grew up here. I had a very idyllic life and wouldn't have traded it for the world. It was a perfect time to be alive and perfect place to live.

I was born in '36, which meant WWII played an active and major role in my life. We lived behind the bakery in a house that had originally been Florence Butt's homestead. Mrs. Butt owned the little grocery store in that same block, which was the beginning of H-E-B [Texas grocery store chain]. The house was actually in the middle of the block behind the bakery in downtown Kerrville. That piece of history was later cut in half and moved out to the Butt Foundation ranch. That's where I grew up and spent the years from two to twelve. I loved playing in the alley behind the downtown buildings and along the Guadalupe River, which was across the street.

The only grandparent I knew was my grandfather, my dad's father, who was a baker and a chef big-time, celebrity baker and chef. My dad was born in St. Louis [Missouri] but my grandfather, a German immigrant, had eventually settled in California. When they interned the Japanese during WWII in California, he was afraid they might do the same to the Germans. He figured he would be safe here in Kerrville with all the other German people in this community and nearby Fredericksburg [Texas]. He lived with us, "hiding out" and playing pinochle with other German speaking old men. As soon as the war was over, he couldn't handle the small-town Kerrville anymore, so he packed up and went back to San Diego [California].

Growing up in the bakery, was both hard work and my playground as well. When Gerry and I got married, people asked if I was going to go to work, and I said, "Absolutely not. I'm retiring." I was 23 and I had already worked my 23 years. To me it was wonderful when I went away to college. I was able to escape the bakery, like going on vacation.

Actually my father died quite young; he was 45. My mother couldn't handle the bakery by herself without her number one baker, and the brains behind the whole thing. She eventually locked the door and walked away, but she spent most of the rest of her life here in Kerrville. This was always home. I loved it here, absolutely everything about it. I graduated from Tivy high school in '55. I wanted to go to the University of Texas [Austin], certainly intended to, but our high school counselor said, "Oh, honey, you're from a small school. You'll not make it over at the big school. You need to go to a smaller school." Okay, fine. She suggested I go to Trinity [University, San Antonio, Texas], which I did.

I wanted to be an architect. "Oh, honey, girls aren't architects, they're interior designers." Okay. Majored in interior design. Took me one year, transferred to Texas as I wanted to do the first place, continued on with interior design, because I couldn't figure out how to get to the architect thing, because girls don't do that. An addendum to that, 30 years and one semester later, I graduated from the University of Houston at Clear Lake with a degree in fine art applied design. I did just fine at the University of Texas, and the big school didn't overwhelm me at all. I quit before I finished after Gerry and I got engaged, because if that relationship was going to go anywhere, I was going to have to drop out of school. He was in the Air Force about to take a permanent assignment, and had we not got married and I gone with him, that wasn't going to go anywhere.

JOHNSON: How did you meet him?

GRIFFIN: It was during the summer of '57, after my dad had died. I was here in Kerrville teaching swimming, Red Cross water safety and lifesaving and swimming classes in the public

pool for the city, the water program here in Kerrville and Red Cross. I went to Harlingen [Texas] one weekend to visit my best friend at the university, spent the weekend with her. At that time Harlingen had an Air Force base [Harlingen Air Force Base] that had a training command. It was a navigation training base [3610th Navigator Training Wing] and Gerry was in nav training. He'd graduated from [Texas] A&M [College Station] in '56 and he was about midway through his Air Force nav training at that point and he was stationed down there.

I had a blind date with him. I had no intentions of ever having another blind date. I was through with that. I was only going to date people I knew, period. My friend begged, she was dating an Air Force guy who had a couple of friends, and I had another friend from University of Texas with me. We had driven to Harlingen together to spend the weekend. I had a blind date with Gerry. She had a blind date with a guy who we are still very good friends with.

Gerry turned out to be a perfect gentleman. Not only that, he was an incredible dancer. Turns out he was a dance instructor. He taught dancing at A&M at the MSC [Memorial Student Center]. I didn't have to fight him; I had an absolute ball. We went to Joe's Place, a night club in Mexico; first time I'd ever been to Mexico. Just had a grand evening. However, I was not looking for a husband, I fully intended going back to school the next semester, which was the start of my junior year.

Two weeks later, Gerry and his twin brother Larry, who was in pilot training at Hondo [Army Airfield, Texas], brought a couple of their buddies to Kerrville. I was still teaching swimming. I don't know whether you guys have ever heard of Crider's [Rodeo & Dancehall] or not. It's an open-air Country and western dance place west of Hunt on the Guadalupe River. It's still there. It's a cement slab under a giant oak tree, and it's exactly as it's always been, and it's only open in the summertime. Whole families go there; they dance with their dates, their

fiancés, their mates, their kids, their grandkids, their great-grandkids, everybody, and it's still exactly the same. Crider's Dancehall. They have a rodeo on Saturday nights, still do. That's still a viable thing to do. If you want to stay until this Saturday, you can go to Crider's.

Anyway, Gerry came here, I got his twin and his buddies dates, we went to Crider's, and Gerry and I had our second date. Then he burned up the road driving to Austin for dates. I thought he was rich. He had a brand-new car and he was in the Air Force. After all, aren't people in the Air Force rich?

Not only was he a good dance and a gentleman, but he had also lived in an exotic land. He had spent his summers working in California as a draftsman when he was at A&M. Oh, my. He had done such exciting things and been to such exciting places. He was very worldly. Of course he's originally from Fort Worth [Texas], which was pretty exciting to me as well.

JOHNSON: Then you said you left school when you got married.

GRIFFIN: Not exactly.... I went back to school in September, and he made a number of trips for dates. It was obviously getting serious. My dad had died, and my mother was having difficulty running the bakery, which meant my finances were becoming a problem. At Thanksgiving time, Gerry gave me this ring, and we decided we were going to get married the next summer, prior to Gerry's first permanent assignment. I intended to stay in school the next spring semester, and Gerry was transferring to Waco for the next phase of his training. I had gone to summer school here at the Schreiner Institute [now Schreiner University], so I had some extra hours, and by midterm I was a senior.

Finally, I was running out of money, so I dropped out of school at the end of the fall semester, and I came back home to Kerrville. I was helping my mother with the bakery and not enjoying the situation at all. About mid-March, Gerry and I looked at each other and said, “What the heck are we waiting for?” We decided to go ahead and get married. We were married at the First Methodist Church, here, on April 19, 1958. We lived in a one-bedroom apartment in Waco for two months while Gerry finished training and at James Connally Air Force Base.

In June, he took his first permanent assignment, which was really difficult duty. It was Hamilton Air Force Base, Marin County, California. We were married, so I went with him. We loaded everything we owned into our car and we went to California. Very exciting. The adventure begins!

It was a bit of a culture shock, but not really. I was ready. I was ready for a bigger world, even though I had never been anywhere other than Kerrville. I don’t know why. I don’t know where I got that.

JOHNSON: Being a part of the Air Force, did you live on the base?

GRIFFIN: No. We couldn’t get base housing at first because Gerry was low man on the totem pole. The first thing we did was rent a little apartment that you could stand in the middle of the one room and touch everything in it. It was in Novato [California], which is totally changed now. It was its own little town then. We lived in the little apartment about a week when we found a little house down the street that we rented from the people that lived next door, Al and Alice Kiddy. When we became eligible for base housing, we didn’t move. We stayed there. We liked being able to get away from the Air Force.

It's kind of nice to not be totally immersed in any part of your world, and there are other signs of that in our lives. For example, we've always belonged to a country club because Gerry was a golfer. But we never wanted to live on our golf course, we always lived away from it, so that we weren't totally immersed in it. We had other things in our world, and that's the way we were with the Air Force. We lived in Novato, and I loved it. I had a little baby. Our 60-year-old son was born on the 4th of July at the base hospital near Novato.

JOHNSON: You mentioned a culture shock. Was it a culture shock not just being in California but just being an Air Force wife? Was that a different type of life than you thought it was going to be?

GRIFFIN: No, not really. I had become familiar with Gerry's Air Force career as we dated, and I was prepared to be a part of it. I'm not a women's organization joiner, but I did join the officers' wives' club because it was expected of me. Women's organizations are usually filled with more minutiae than I care to get buried in.

I always had my own world. I would rather knock a wall down or repaint the house. I love rebuilding things, refinishing furniture, or doing the yard work. That's just the way I am. I like working hard physically.

JOHNSON: That's good. Keeps you healthy too.

GRIFFIN: Yes, but my body is rejecting me, in my old age. I've worn it out, but it's okay. I wouldn't have had it any other way.

JOHNSON: Doing what you wanted. That sounds like you were still using that architect background.

GRIFFIN: Yes, very active physically. Oh, man, I didn't want to be in your book club or bridge club! Oh, please, no.

JOHNSON: How long did you stay at that Air Force base in California?

GRIFFIN: Gerry signed up for an extra period in order to get that good assignment, so we were there almost four years, which was absolutely fantastic. His first real pilot assigned to him was Bill [William A.] Anders. Valerie [Anders] and I were a part of the Air Force wives at the same time. Bill had already been in for a while, because he had graduated from the Naval Academy. Our shared lives with the Anders started long before our NAS years. Gerry had said back then, "Someday Bill is going to do something really big." So when he got to be an astronaut he said, "Maybe that's it." However, it didn't stop there, for sure.

JOHNSON: You lived in California for a while, and at one point you moved to Fort Worth in '62.

GRIFFIN: Gerry was a backseater, navigator, radar observer, weapons officer, because at that time you had to have perfect eyesight to be a pilot. Gerry wore glasses. As a non-pilot, Gerry was relegated to the backseat or a desk.

At the time he was considering the Air Force as a career, but it became evident that his career in the Air Force was limited because he wasn't a pilot. The pilots were going to be the generals.

He got out. We knew that operations was his bag. He wanted to use the machines for what they were built for. He didn't want to ponder them or do research on them or anything like that. He wanted operations, that's what he enjoyed most, which is evident by the fact that he ended up in mission control. We got out, and he went to work for Lockheed in their Satellite Test Center, which was in Sunnyvale [California] in the South Bay area. We moved our little one-year-old baby boy down to Santa Clara [California]. Larry, Gerry's twin brother, decided to follow us.

His career is parallel to ours except he spent most of his time flying for the [National] Guard and Reserve. He ended up going back in, and then making the Air Force his career, so that took him out of our path, which was fine. They were both working at the Test Center launching unmanned spy satellites, which was secret. However, one knew what they were doing. All you had to do was go out and watch the parking lot. When the parking lot filled up, they were launching.

They were launching from Vandenberg [Air Force Base] on the west coast of California and catching them with a hook when they were reentering. Snagging their parachute canopies from an airplane and reeling them in. They were actually launching and flying and recovering spy satellites for the Air Force. Shhh.

We did that about three years. When Sputnik [first Russian satellite] flew, and [President John F.] Kennedy announced that the U.S. was joining the "space race" by creating the National

Aeronautics and Space Administration and landing a man on the moon in 10 years, Gerry said, “That’s what I’ve got to do.”

In the meantime, we had been in California all these years, and Texas was really pulling on us. We had not been back and couldn’t afford to visit very often. It’s too far. NASA was firing up. They had started construction on the Manned Spacecraft Center [now Johnson Space Center (JSC)] in Houston. Everything was moving at high speed. Gerry said, “I’ve got to get going.”

General Dynamics offered Gerry a job. They had always been a bomber plant and wanted to get into the space business. He was an Agena guidance, navigation, and control expert. That’s where he ended up starting for NASA, because the Agena was to be the docking target for Gemini. He went to work for General Dynamics in Fort Worth, and that’s what got us back to Fort Worth and Texas.

Not long after going to work for General Dynamics, he said, “I’ve got to work for NASA.” He goes down to Houston and interviews with Gene [Eugene F.] Kranz. Gene was telling him how significant everything was with NASA, and he kind of big-dogged Gerry. Gerry’s reaction to it was, “How many satellites have you flown?” Of course, the answer was none. Gene offered Gerry a job at a humongous pay cut, and Gerry said, “Not going to do it,” so he turned Gene down.

He came back up to Fort Worth, worked another year or maybe a little bit more, but he couldn’t stand it any longer, put his hat in his hand, went back, reinterviewed with Gene, took the pay cut, and went to work. He had to be a part of it, pay cut and all. That’s how we ended up in ’64. By then we had our second child, Gwen, who was born in Fort Worth.

We were only in Fort Worth about two years. When Gerry got home after that second interview he said, “Okay, we’re going to move to La Porte [Texas].” The only reason he said La Porte was because it was down there, and neither of us knew anything about the area. He said, “That’s where we’re going. We’re going to La Porte.”

I said, “There’s nothing but swamp in La Porte.” We loaded up our little babies and moved to Nassau Bay. Our house was on Basilan Lane. It’s the first cul-de-sac right over the wall in Nassau Bay. Those were the only houses that were close to being finished.

JOHNSON: Did you get to go down and look first to pick out someplace to live?

GRIFFIN: I didn’t, Gerry did. In fact he went down and stayed with our friends, Anders’. They were living in Clear Lake City. We had a boat that we water skied with on Eagle Mountain Lake in Fort Worth. He hauls our boat down, parks it in Bill Anders’ yard, and stayed with them while looking for a house.

We really couldn’t afford to do it any other way, and we had two little kids. I was fine with it. It was us together, a team. We had already bought two houses together, and I knew I would be satisfied with whatever he could find. Besides, we talked a lot about locations and loved the idea of being across the road from water. Nassau Bay even had a place to put our boat in the water.

JOHNSON: You said that in Nassau Bay, the street where you bought a house was the only one with houses already built.

GRIFFIN: The houses on Basilan Lane were the only ones in Nassau Bay. At that time I thought Clear Lake City was a preplanned slum. Of course that was absolutely wrong. That whole community has aged beautifully. Friendswood Development and Exxon totally outdid themselves with that project. Well-done. No question.

No, I didn't want to live in [Clear Lake City]. I was a snob about it, just like I was about Kerrville. It's really interesting.

JOHNSON: It was a change, coming from the hill country, in a different environment, different weather, different everything, and then moving down there, where it wasn't long after [Hurricane] Carla had hit that area, and then you were moving down there. Talk about those impressions of the area and where you were moving to, compared to being in different places.

GRIFFIN: By the time we got to the Clear Lake area, I didn't see any of the effects from Carla. Therefore I had no idea what to expect from hurricanes. Thankfully, we had none during those first nine years. I had already decided I could live anywhere. We had already moved a number of times, and I knew I could deal with moving to new places and situations. I don't know where I got this, because in my mother's mind you didn't go anywhere, you lived where you were forever and ever, amen. Wherever we lived, I was prepared to spend the rest of my life there. It didn't make any difference. I could and would adapt. This has been true our whole life.

I saw so many people around us with NASA, as well in the Air Force, that were miserable. They didn't have to be. There were people miserable in Marin County in the Air Force. How could you be miserable in Marin County, California? It's gorgeous. It was a wonderful place to live. I don't care what the guys were doing. I absolutely loved it.

We lived in a new part of Fort Worth that was absolute prairie, without a tree. There are parts of Fort Worth that are absolutely gorgeous, with lots of trees, but we didn't live anywhere close to those. However, we had a boat, and we were close to Eagle Mountain Lake, and we water-skied. We planted lots of trees. Never saw any grow up, but, as I said, we lived in each place as if it were forever.

I attacked everyplace we ever lived. I thought the Clear Lake area was the end of the world. How could you live down there? You can't breathe with the heat and humidity. What you do is you learn to breathe. You grow gills and you give yourself permission to sweat, not perspire. Once you do that, you're fine. I also stopped fighting the big hairdo. I cut my hair short, started playing golf, and learned to love the world around me.

JOHNSON: You adapted.

GRIFFIN: You can adapt to wherever you are. We lived in the Mojave Desert of California, (Gerry was at Dryden [now Armstrong Flight Research Center]) two different times. Talk about an environmental change. The first time I thought, "You're going to die instantly when you move into the desert. You're just going to shrivel up and die." After we got there, I told Gerry, "Actually I'm fine, I can learn to live here. It has its beauty, and I can live here the rest of my life, but if I die while we're living out here, find a tree to put me under. I can't stand the idea of just being parked out here in the middle of this desert with no shade." That was my only requirement. The wind does blow hard most of the time, and I don't like wind!

When we moved to the [Texas] Hill Country, we weren't running from Houston. I absolutely fell in love with Houston over the years. Particularly after we lived in town. Wow,

what a dynamic city. I think Houston is probably the most exciting city we ever lived near, bar none. Houston's can-do attitude capture's you. I don't care who you are or what you've done. Houston is open and ready. Loved it. It's nice living in the Hill Country, wouldn't change that for the world. But Houston will always be special. I'm so proud – the first word from the Moon was "Houston." Go Astros! Texans!

JOHNSON: When you first moved to Nassau Bay, were there other people in the neighborhood that were working for NASA? Were your neighbors all NASA people mostly?

GRIFFIN: Yes. At that time most everyone in Nassau Bay and Clear Lake City were NASA. League City and Webster were real towns, but very small. There were a few "local people" in our area. Kemah and Seabrook were fishing communities. But at that time, Kemah had "red lights" and serious gambling. There were yacht clubs, but they were in Houston. Webster had a fire station and a school and that was about it. We didn't even have a grocery store close by. There was later a Safeway over in Clear Lake City, but I continued to drive down to Thrifty Market in League City. The Thrifty Market and Kilgore Hardware (lumber yard) were joined together [both were local family owned stores]. There was also a very small department store – Penn's. The only employee I ever saw was Mr. Penn.

The Texaco station was owned by a local guy, Chuck Miller. He later owned the Ford dealership. We were absolutely thrilled when the McDonald's [fast-food restaurant chain] opened, and I had a place to take my kids for hamburgers. When we moved into our house on Basilan Lane, Nassau Bay consisted of the houses on those three cul-de-sacs between the water tower and the [Nassau Bay] Baptist church. That was all that was there; however, it rapidly grew

toward the swimming pool, the little lake and Clear Creek. The homes were being built by and for NASA and contractor families. I loved living there.

JOHNSON: When you moved in did people welcome you to the neighborhood? I know you said you don't like to join those women's groups, but were there any neighbors that welcomed you and your kids?

GRIFFIN: There weren't any neighbors. We were among the first in Nassau Bay. Some people were already there, but they were spread out all over the area: Clear Lake City, El Lago, Timber Cove, and all the little towns in the area. The original astronauts were there. The second group of astronauts came in about the same time we did (the [David R.] Scotts and that group). We were all coming in at the same time. The Center wasn't open. They were building like crazy across the street. Gerry worked in the Stahl-Meyer Building on the Gulf Freeway for I don't know how long. People were working in office buildings all over Houston. It was an amazing construction frenzy all over the entire Bay Area (NASA commercial, and homes).

It was great, exciting, and I was thrilled to be a part of it. We definitely had the astronaut crowd, which added to the excitement. They were special celebrities, which was fine with me. We already knew Valerie and Bill Anders, who were friends from our Air Force days. I knew [Ann] Lurton [Ott] Scott, David Scott's wife. I had met her when she was in high school in San Antonio, Texas. She didn't know me, but I remembered her because she had such a strange name: Ann Lurton Ott. I was visiting a friend and we met at a Halloween party.

It didn't take long. Nassau Bay was filling up, and our kids went to school with astronauts' kids. I was a Cub Scout den mother. My den chief was [James] Michael Aldrin

(Buzz Aldrin's son). Den 1 was a classic mix of the neighborhood, and our daughter, Gwen, was our mascot and in the middle of everything. Kirk's best friend was Kenny Wilson. His dad [W.W. Wilson] was NASA and built tools and things. They lived two doors down. Kenny had turtles.

The [George I.] Pettitts lived next door. G.I. was NASA, but I don't know what he did. They had two boys, one the same age as Gwen. They were "good buddies." The next-door neighbor had ornamental peppers growing in her flower bed and Gwen convinced Bret to eat them. He almost had to go to the emergency room. It totally took his breath away. It was stuff like that. It was a normal neighborhood.

Nassau Bay flooded all the time. Kirk and the [Richard F.] Gordon boys, who had a flat-bottom johnboat, were water-skiing in the street. The Nassau Bay cop came and told them they couldn't do that because it was against the law. The boys quit, but they never were convinced that there was a law that said they couldn't water-ski down the street. Kirk came home and told me. I said, "I doubt there's a law, but if he said you can't water-ski you probably shouldn't water-ski."

One of Kirk's best buddies was in our den, Jimmy Martin. He and Kirk really wanted a sailboat, so Kirk saved cigarette cartons to get a little 10-foot Styrofoam Sea Snark. He got the 7-Eleven at the entrance to Nassau Bay to save them for him. They rigged a little trailer that they could hook up behind a bicycle and haul the little Sea Snark down to the Nassau Bay Lake. They spent more time upside down than they did right side up, but Kirk and Jimmy learned to sail. In fact, Kirk became a very accomplished deep-water sailor in later years.

Kirk sold that little boat some years later, but he learned how to sail in it, that's for sure. I never ever went down there with them. Our kids were pretty much free to do "whatever" as long as they were in the confines of Nassau Bay.

We also had the swimming pool a couple of blocks from our house. Swim lessons were a major priority for both kids. Now I can't remember when they couldn't swim.

JOHNSON: You were a [Cub Scout] den mother, and I know Gerry was an Eagle Scout. Did he have time to do any of the extracurricular stuff with the kids?

GRIFFIN: No, not really. He did make a couple of campouts with them, and a few meetings. During that time they created Webelos, which was a stage between Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. It was to be a transition from den mother to a male leader. We never could find a male leader, so I became as far {as I know) the first female Webelo leader. Helen Garriott ended up doing the same thing. She and I both were Cub Scout leaders, and I think she ended up with a Webelo den too. The guys just didn't have time.

Kirk was in Little League, and I bet you Gerry didn't see a half a dozen Little League games, period. That's just the way it was. I don't think the kids paid any attention to it. They just went on about their business.

I think Gwen was over at Tracy Cernan's house swimming—they had a pool. Barbara Cernan made them get out of the pool to watch TV, because Gene was walking on the Moon or something. As soon as Gene finished his thing, "Well, can we go back in the pool now?" They were aware of it, but as I said they just went on with their own little worlds.

JOHNSON: Did they understand what Gerry was doing? Because he wasn't an astronaut like some of their friends that they ran around with.

GRIFFIN: Yes, they knew what he was and pretty much understood what a flight director does.

JOHNSON: It was important too, what he was doing.

GRIFFIN: He was important, yes. I don't think we knew we were making history. I say we because I felt a part of it. I think we knew we were part of something bigger than us for sure. Most people in the world around us had no idea what we did. We did know we were a part of something bigger than us. We didn't know it was going to be so monumental, but we knew we were part of something big. Yes, it was exciting, and I was absolutely thrilled to be part of it. Wouldn't have been anywhere else. I was thrilled that Gerry was taking me along for the ride. Just absolutely elated. I couldn't have gotten there by myself, that was for sure, but I sure as heck could help him get there. I helped make it possible for him to do what he was doing.

JOHNSON: His hours I know were long. It was probably different during a mission than when there wasn't a mission going on.

GRIFFIN: It was just very erratic. You never knew. That was okay. I was used to my family working very erratic hours already anyway. My dad worked in the middle of the night, and I was used to my family working all the time. That was not unusual for me either. We all worked. You did whatever you had to do.

Gerry went to work. He made the money, and I kept everything going. I mowed the grass, and when Gerry had time, he mowed the grass. But when the lawn mower broke, if I couldn't fix it, I got it fixed. A lot of times I fixed it. I kept the cars running, I kept them full of gas. When we lived in Washington and we had gas shortages, I kept the cars full of gas so Gerry could commute. The requirements changed but I always had my assignments too. I was the one responsible for the kids. Gerry never took the kids to the doctor, and I never waited for Dad to come to home to punish. Punishment was always swift and immediate.

JOHNSON: You mentioned that grocery store you had to go to; when you first got there, there were no grocery stores. How far did you have to go for other things like doctors and dentists and even entertainment as far as going to a movie or doing things with the family, or the kids?

GRIFFIN: Shortly after we got there, they built the little movie house in Clear Lake City. It was over on the main street, whatever that was. I can't remember the name of the street.

JOHNSON: The theater was on El Camino Real. I think it's a Chinese restaurant now or something.

GRIFFIN: That was it. I never ever went. My next-door neighbor Mary Nell Pettitt did, but she spent most of her time at Gulfgate, the shopping center back toward Houston. I seldom went down there. I shopped at Mr. Penn's, a small department store in League City. I stayed close to home. I hate shopping anyway. Penn's had things I needed anyway – Levi's Jeans, Boy Scout uniforms, and supplies. We had a movie in Clear Lake City, but no grocery store. I spent a lot

of time in the hardware store in League City, because I was a den mother. It was attached to the grocery store. I would go to the grocery store and park Gwen on the end of the conveyor belt with the groceries. She loved it. It was a simple but good life, and I can't complain about a thing. We didn't see Gerry a lot, but everyplace we've lived Gerry has been totally occupied with his task and his challenge, and we were always in a support role. The same was true in Washington [D.C.]. We probably saw less of him when we lived in Virginia. He left before daylight and didn't get home till after dark.

JOHNSON: You had a boat.

GRIFFIN: Always had a boat.

JOHNSON: Did you use it much? Or did you have time as a family to go out in that boat when you were there?

GRIFFIN: Oh yes. We'd load up and go water-skiing or just out for a boat ride.

JOHNSON: Did you go out in the bay or did you stay in the lakes there?

GRIFFIN: Oh, it was a little ski boat. We stayed in Clear Lake mostly. We had a sailboat which we sometimes sailed in the Nassau Bay Lake. We did a little of everything on the water. It was convenient and we could do a lot in a very little time.

JOHNSON: When he had time off you mean?

GRIFFIN: No, we could squeeze water skiing or a short sail in most any day we could find an hour or two. That was one of the nice things about living where we did. When we had “time off” we camped. Sometimes with our family only. Everybody was in the same boat. We all had little time and little money, so we all camped together. We had a pickup truck, and originally we put a mattress in the back. We later bought a pop-top tent trailer.

JOHNSON: Where did you go camping?

GRIFFIN: Back early on our family-favorite place to camp was Dam B up in East Texas. When we came back as Center Director, we went to Lake Livingston, also in East Texas, several times, with people like John [W.] and Cheryl Aaron. We water-skied, and we fished trotlines. We didn’t do serious fishing. We caught catfish, had group fish fry’s, water-skied, and enjoyed the company. We did take several family vacations with brother Larry and his family to National Parks in Colorado and Montana.

JOHNSON: Did you go into Houston much during those early years?

GRIFFIN: Almost never. We did have an occasional official event in town, but Gerry and I preferred to do home, boat, and car projects.

JOHNSON: You said you didn’t go to Gulfgate, so I wondered if you went anywhere in Houston.

GRIFFIN: No, not really. I did take the kids to the Houston Zoo, the circus, and Peppermint Park [Kiddieland]. Some things like that.

JOHNSON: How about Galveston? Did you ever go to the beaches and do any water things in Galveston?

GRIFFIN: I took the kids a few times, but neither Gerry nor I are beach people.

JOHNSON: Stuck to the lakes.

GRIFFIN: Yes, stuck to the lakes. Beaches are sandy and gritty. I don't really like sand and saltwater. Besides, I'm a hill country person.

JOHNSON: Yes, you like that clear river water, don't you?

GRIFFIN: I like the clear river water, that's right.

JOHNSON: I understand that. Did you ever get a chance to do things maybe without the kids? Did you have childcare options early on?

GRIFFIN: Just babysitters. We went to splashdown parties and an occasional dinner out, but not much else. I used to say, "Oh, just take me to downtown Houston and check me into a hotel just

one night.” But we never did. We didn’t really have time. I would load the kids up and come up here [Kerrville, Texas] to visit my mom. Sometimes Gerry came with us but usually we came without him. I didn’t require that he be with me. I could come up here by myself, and I enjoyed driving. I was pretty independent.

We did make a ski trip and an elk hunting trip without the kids. Both times we traded sitting chores with Ellie and Arnie [[Arnold D.] Aldrich.

JOHNSON: I know we’ve read, and some of the astronaut wives we’ve talked to, they had an informal get-together every once in a while, as wives. I know you mentioned you weren’t a joiner for women’s clubs. But did the mission control wives do anything similar?

GRIFFIN: I don’t think so. I don’t know. I didn’t. I did have my individual friends, but no group things. As I said, I was usually tearing a wall down or repainting something. I never lived in any of our houses freshly painted. Every time I got a house painted, we moved. Gerry’s job longevity seemed to be about four years except during the Apollo Program. We were in that house in Nassau Bay for nine years.

That’s an interesting thing. A difference in the attitude between my family and me, and I don’t know where I got it. When I told my mother, who was still living here in Kerrville, that Gerry was going to take the job in Washington, D.C., I said, “It’s really exciting and quite a challenge. A Texas Aggie engineer is going to be the head of Legislative Affairs? That’s absolutely amazing.” My mother’s reaction was, “Well, Sandra, I thought you liked your house.”

JOHNSON: Different attitude. Different time.

GRIFFIN: I said, “Well, I do like my house. But my house doesn’t have anything to do with it.”
End of story.

JOHNSON: Did you belong or join any churches or anything in the area when you came down?

GRIFFIN: We didn’t. I had always been very active in the Methodist Church and youth group.
Gerry was kind of anti, not atheist, but—

JOHNSON: Organized religion?

GRIFFIN: Yes, kind of anti-organized church. He and brother Larry had a bad experience when they were 12 and their mother died. The “hovering ladies of the church” had overwhelmed them. He was not overly enthusiastic about church after that. It hadn’t been convenient when we were in California, and it was easier not to push him.

When we got to Fort Worth, he did get interested, and we did get very involved. There was a little Episcopal Church near our house with a young dynamic pastor that challenged Gerry’s thinking. It fit both of us quite well. The kids were both baptized. Gerry and I were confirmed, Gerry sang in the choir, and our 4-year-old Kirk was a little acolyte.

As we traveled on, we never were that active again. We attended sporadically when we got back to Houston at St. Thomas [the Apostle Episcopal Church] in Nassau Bay. When we moved into West Houston, St. Martin’s [Episcopal Church] was just down the street from us.

Claude [E. Payne], the minister, wouldn't let us not be a part of his congregation. Gerry had spoken to one of their organizations when he became head of the Chamber of Commerce and Economic [Development] for Houston. Claude glommed onto Gerry and wouldn't turn loose. We did try to stay away from St. Martin's when President [George H.W.] Bush and Barbara were in town. Too much Secret Service and traffic. We did become active at St. Martin's until we left Houston, however.

After moving to Hunt, we've just been plain lazy. The beautiful St. Peter's Episcopal Church is in town [Kerrville]. We do periodically go for special events to the Hunt Methodist Church or one of the various churches in town. Somewhere in the archives of the First United Methodist Church in Kerrville is the record of our wedding. We were married in that church in 1958.

JOHNSON: Who were some of your closest friends when you first moved into that area? Did you have anybody that you spent a lot of time with?

GRIFFIN: The flight control people. Arnie and Ellie Aldrich. Gerry worked for Arnie. Tina and [Thomas Rodney] Rod Loe. These were all flight control people. We all had kids the same age, we babysat for each other. When Arnie and Ellie went skiing, we babysat. Also John and Cheryl Aaron. Never babysat for the Aarons, but their kids were a little bit younger than ours. These are just a few, but still good friends.

We were huge football fans. We had season tickets to the [Houston] Oilers [former NFL team] (Go Blue!) with the Loes. I thought Gerry and Rod Loe were going to get killed in the

parking lot, because the Oilers always lost, and they were always angry when we left the Astrodome.

We camped with brother Larry [Griffin] and his wife and their kids in the summertime. We have a camper, we still have it; it's a tent trailer. We still have our ski boat that we had in Florida also. We've only had it 30 something years. It still runs. Gwen has it on Clear Lake now. We water-skied all the time. We skied after work a lot with a guy named Jim [James R.] Fucci and his wife. He was a contractor with Philco/Ford Corporation. I really don't like water-skiing on Clear Lake. You fall off and you're up to your knees in mud. Absolutely hated the mud, but it was a big piece of water and it was right at my door.

We ate out a lot locally with these people. Gerry was also a golfer, so we also had the group of friends from Clear Lake Country Club over in Clear Lake City.

JOHNSON: Where did you eat when you went out to eat?

GRIFFIN: We didn't have a lot of places, but the ones we had had really good food. They were scattered out in the little towns. I'm having a hard time remembering the names. Hofbraugarten, a German restaurant in Dickinson, was a good place. There was someplace over near Alvin where I got something crab amandine [Mike's Rendezvous]. Delicious. Over in Seabrook was a Mexican food restaurant named Laredo's that had maybe six tables and sat about a foot from the railroad tracks. As I said, we never went into town [Houston]. A lot of people did. Gerry's the same now. I can't get him to go to town to eat. No way. When he gets home, he's not going to want to go into town. "Do we have to?" Nothing's changed. The Country Club also had really good food, especially buffet lunches.

We barbecued a lot on our back deck.

JOHNSON: Did you have barbecues in the neighborhoods or block parties or any kind of social gatherings on occasion?

GRIFFIN: Yes. But mostly associated with splashdowns. We didn't really have neighborhood gatherings. Too busy. Gerry played softball with the guys. The guys had beer busts after flights, which always ended up making me mad, because they were off celebrating, and I was home tending the kids. But it was all relative. It was nothing major. In fact when Apollo 13 exploded Gerry was playing softball after his shift. We didn't have cell phones then; I had to chase him down. They were having a beer at one of the guy's apartments. When we did get together, we hung out with the other flight control people.

JOHNSON: Not long after you got there NASA had a few setbacks. There were some accidents when Elliot [M.] See and Charlie [Charles A.] Bassett were killed, and then C.C. Williams. Then the Apollo 1 fire in 1967. Talk about that for a moment, that time period, and how it affected the families, those types of accidents in the astronaut corps.

GRIFFIN: Those first two were aircraft accidents. You never get used to that, but I had already experienced that in the Air Force, we had lost some people. You expect to, as it is indeed hard to fly without feathers, and there is risk. You can't manage risk to zero, period, I don't care what you're doing. It's to be expected. Sad, but those are going to happen anyway.

The Apollo 1 fire was a disaster waiting to happen obviously. Took them a couple years to redesign [the spacecraft], which needed to happen. Number one is we were functioning with 100 percent oxygen, which was not very smart, but we didn't realize it. That's where you start. Other things like the hatch opening in instead of out were things that became glaring mistakes. Gerry was assigned immediately to listen to the tapes over and over and over again to see if he could decipher what it was they were saying. That almost drove him nuts. It was very difficult for him.

I knew what he was doing, and it wasn't easy for either of us, but you just go on. That was the first really monumental thing that impacted us. The aircraft accidents were tragic, but nonetheless to be expected. There will be more, and we'll probably leave somebody in space before it's all over.

JOHNSON: Were the kids aware of the accidents as much? Or were any of their friends astronaut kids?

GRIFFIN: Yes and no. The kids all knew each other, but none were a best buddy or anything like that. Kirk did later have a crush on Sheryl Chaffee. I don't really know. No one ever commented on it. It was not traumatic to the point that anyone gnashed teeth or wrung their hands. You just go on living.

JOHNSON: When you got there in those early years in Gemini and early Apollo, did NASA ever provide any kind of opportunities for families to get together like picnics or trips into Houston to Astroworld once that opened or the Astros [baseball team] games or anything like that?

GRIFFIN: No, not really. The only thing I can remember NASA ever doing is when we were at the Cape [Canaveral, Florida] years later, and Disney World opened. They had a NASA night at Disney World, so we all loaded up and went over there. But that wasn't NASA. That was Disney.

During those early years, NASA was busy trying to figure out who and what it was. NASA was going to the Moon. It didn't care what we did on the weekend. Everybody was pretty much on their own. Most people did more than we did. Gerry and I didn't go out and get involved much. Our next-door neighbors, the Pettitts, did, but we preferred to stay home, play in the backyard, keep the dog from biting the neighbors, grow a garden, work on our cars, our boats, our house. In later years, NASA did offer such things through its [Robert R.] Gilruth Center and various organization, but not in the 60s.

JOHNSON: In mission control, the average age was 26 at the time of Apollo. They were young and they had young families and there were so many moving into the Clear Lake area. How do you think that infusion of so many people affected the communities around NASA, as far as the schools and how it helped to create that community, having maybe a little younger, more vibrant group?

GRIFFIN: Oh, it took the world over. It overwhelmed those communities. Webster fought it for years. Webster didn't want us there. They finally have embraced the whole thing, it was interesting to watch it happen. The NASA/Clear Lake community was being created.

The vortex created “the community.” In effect the community didn’t exist. There were little communities, but they were totally individual. Seabrook and Kemah and those along the water were fishing communities. I don’t know what Webster was, it was just this little town between Houston and Galveston. It had an elementary and middle school, a post office, a fire station, a couple of churches, and a few businesses.

I don’t know, but I think most of us just ignored the people that lived in Webster. They probably hated us, because they were losing their community as they knew it. It didn’t make any difference whether they hated us or not, we were there, and their world was changing.

JOHNSON: What about the schools that were available and how quickly they grew? Where did the kids go to school?

GRIFFIN: Webster. The schools already were good, and they have remained good, there’s no question. The Clear Creek school system cannot be beat. It’s grown beautifully with the community. Early school systems around the area carried this incredible load dumped in the laps.

That whole community is just impressive from beginning to end. In fact my grandson and his family have just moved down south of League City, and I think it’s the smartest thing they’ve ever done. Their world is very much like our world was, and that doesn’t happen very often. Particularly in Houston. I think it’s great. The school system is incredible. They can’t find a bad school in that whole area.

JOHNSON: It was planned well, as you said, early on.

GRIFFIN: Extremely well. The school system was well managed very early on, I don't know who was running it, but somebody knew what they were doing.

JOHNSON: It is an interesting area. Especially at JSC we have a lot of wildlife still on site.

GRIFFIN: Yes, you do.

JOHNSON: In some of the communities though, when it was first building up, there was a lot of wildlife. There were deer, there were wild hogs, there were all kinds of things.

GRIFFIN: Still are, I think.

JOHNSON: In some of them there are, but it has built up so much. Do you remember any of that kind of thing when the kids were little?

GRIFFIN: Oh, sure, mostly the giant mosquitoes that picked up my kids and carried them off. The fogging trucks that my kids rode their bicycles right behind spraying DDT [Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, used as insecticide] that seemed not to affect my kids at all. No. I have no regrets.

The wildlife, there are still wild hogs down there I'm sure. We never did see any, but of course they were there. Deer everywhere, and critters of all kinds, but mostly mosquitoes. The

wildlife was never a problem to living in the area. The hard part was controlling the mosquito issue, but again smart people have made it livable.

JOHNSON: Yes. It's still an issue.

GRIFFIN: Oh, of course it is. But the wildlife, it still exists no matter what. I think that adds to the quality of life.

JOHNSON: I know a lot of the neighborhoods, especially the ones that had astronauts living in them, had tour buses come through, and the press, the public interest. Was that in your neighborhood too?

GRIFFIN: Not in our particular block, because we didn't have any astronauts, but in Nassau Bay it certainly was a problem. It was a pain in the neck. It limited where you could go during a mission because the paparazzi was there. It's just like it is anywhere. Yes, it impacted all the neighborhoods. It's like I said, we went to St. Martin's Episcopal Church except when the president was there for the same reason. You couldn't even get close to the place when the president was in town. It was the same kind of thing. I didn't envy the astronaut families at all, I felt sorry for them because they couldn't escape. I was glad that the world ignored us actually.

JOHNSON: You talked about belonging to that officers' wives' club because it was expected of you. Was there anything expected once Gerry became a flight director?

GRIFFIN: No.

JOHNSON: There wasn't anything social that you were responsible for?

GRIFFIN: Just don't get a ticket on base (the Center). Don't do anything on base to get in trouble. Gerry told me the same thing when we got married.

JOHNSON: During a break, we were talking about Helen Garriott. Now that we're back on, maybe you can just talk about the canoe that she built, and maybe some of the other things you had in common with her.

GRIFFIN: I got to know Helen Garriott because she was a Cub Scout leader at the same time I was, and she has a son. We had that in common, but she did all kinds of things. I was in awe of her. She did ceramics, and at the time made Moon Pots. She called them funny little saggy pots. I have one that I just absolutely love, and it has the landing sites and things marked on it with rhinestones. But she's the only person I've ever known that built a canoe from scratch, literally, with wooden stays and covered with canvas and painted green. I was always in awe of Helen. Amazing lady, and fine artist actually, but could do anything.

She sent a robot to her son's wedding. He got married in Europe and she sent a robot with her picture glued to the main body of it so that the people could literally talk to her live. An amazing lady.

JOHNSON: We were talking just a few minutes ago that you got golf lessons from your husband around 1970.

GRIFFIN: Gerry was a big golfer. He'd grown up in Fort Worth near where Ben Hogan was. In fact he lived just within a couple of blocks of where Ben Hogan played golf and he used to watch Ben practice all the time. He was totally enamored with Ben Hogan, and started playing golf, he and his twin brother, when they were kids. Gerry grew up to be a really good golfer. Never had really enough time to devote to it, but his swing never changed, and in fact he was notorious for having a Gene Littler swing, which is very grooved and a good natural swing.

Gerry always played golf. I thought it was stupid to spend that much time, but he always played golf from the day I met him, and we always seemed to belong to a golf club, or he always had that accessible, even when we were in California with the Air Force. He played golf, and it was a part of our life. He was a member of Almaden [Golf and Country Club]. Beautiful.

I never paid much attention to it. I thought it was kind of dumb that he spent part of every weekend playing golf. But when our kids both got in school, I think it was probably '70, Gerry gave me six golf lessons at Clear Lake Country Club from Johnny [Joseph J.] Maca [golf pro], and boy, did I fall in love with pounding golf balls. I love swinging hard. I don't have much finesse, but I did become totally bitten with it. I have played a lot of golf over the years, and it became a major part of my life. Also it made moving frequently much easier on me, because first thing we would do is find a place to live, and it always had to be somewhat close to a golf country club of some kind so that we could have that available to us. I knew that I could walk in the front door and instantly belong. I didn't have to apologize to anybody or make up any stories, I could walk in, take a deep breath, and say, "Hi, I'm Sandy Griffin, I play golf, can I

sign up?” and immediately belong. It was my entree every time we moved, and it truly made life easier for me. I instantly had something to belong to, something to do, something totally apart from Gerry’s world, and totally apart from my kids’ world, strictly mine.

It was true until my body decided that I didn’t need to play golf anymore, which happened a few years ago. I can still hit the golf ball. I can hit the golf ball out of the sand trap, I can’t get me out of the sand trap.

JOHNSON: In the ’60s there were a lot of things going on in the country, there was a lot of unrest, the civil rights movement, and a lot of people viewed the Apollo Program as such a positive thing that came out of the ’60s, when everything else was going on. But a lot of the men that we’ve talked to that were working, especially astronauts, flight control definitely, they tell us that they weren’t even aware what was going on in the rest of the world because they were so focused on this mission. Was it like that for you too as a member of this community? Was the whole community like that? Or were you and the other women you knew, families, were you more aware of what was going on in the rest of the world?

GRIFFIN: Yes and no, I think. We were probably more aware than the guys of what was going on in the rest of the world. We were watching the news every day, more so than the guys because they didn’t have time to sit and watch the news. There was great unrest, but we were also involved in what our husbands were doing. We just went through that time. In fact Gerry’s twin brother was in Vietnam, and Gerry was prepared at the drop of a hat to go to Vietnam if brother Larry had been missing or something. He would have packed and gone, which I thought would have been stupid, but he would have done it.

JOHNSON: It's a twin thing I'm sure.

GRIFFIN: It was the twin thing. But Larry got home just fine, and we had a big party.

JOHNSON: I imagine that was stressful, knowing his brother was there, and then still having to concentrate so hard on what he was doing.

GRIFFIN: I don't think he thought much about it. It was just a matter of fact. I did all the correspondence. I drew cartoons. Larry would write to us and then I would draw a cartoon of whatever he had written about that time and send it back to him. He has a whole collection of them.

JOHNSON: That's nice. You just kept him informed of what was going on with the family?

GRIFFIN: I did. Gerry maybe wrote him once. I don't remember. I did all of the letter writing. As I said, I would draw a cartoon and return it to him to give him something to smile about. His family, they moved to Clear Lake to live near us. Gerry became the surrogate father. In fact Larry's daughter was born while he was in Vietnam, and Gerry is her other daddy. He took Judy to the hospital, during the middle of some flight probably. We had so much going on, and Gerry still played golf too.

JOHNSON: Found some time to relax every once in a while.

GRIFFIN: Just on and on.

JOHNSON: In listening to you and some of the other wives we talked to, women traditionally are the heart of the family, the ones that keep things going, and as you mentioned doing the correspondence for him because he was busy with his brother and doing different things. Before we started, we talked about how important it was that you were able to do that, because if the wives weren't doing that, then their husbands wouldn't have been able to concentrate on what they were doing, and how important to the mission that contribution that you made was and how you feel about that.

GRIFFIN: I didn't think about it at the time, but yes, absolutely, I do now. I'm proud of me.

JOHNSON: With good reason, because it's important to keep things running.

GRIFFIN: Yes, and I was capable of doing that. I really was not very tolerant of women who were not willing or didn't think they were able to stand up and take care of things. I am not very patient with them, I wasn't then and still aren't.

JOHNSON: Not all the marriages survived, unfortunately.

GRIFFIN: No. In fact a lot of astronaut marriages failed. It was definitely a stressful time. A lot of women expected more of their marriages than I think marriages should be expected to provide. You make your own happiness. Your partner doesn't make your happiness.

JOHNSON: When Apollo came along, he was a flight director. I think it was after the Apollo 1 fire, during that time he went into flight director training instead of doing the GNC [Guidance and Navigation Control] work. That was a different, and I imagine added stress to what he was doing. Could you just talk about some of those missions, like Apollo 8? Do you have any memories of that mission, or watching that on television, since it was on Christmas Eve?

GRIFFIN: Oh yes, it was fantastic. Man had left the influence of the Earth. I agree with Gerry. I think that was probably the most monumental, because we stepped out there. That's amazing. That was the first big step, leaving the Earth, period. Fantastic.

JOHNSON: It was stressful, I would imagine.

GRIFFIN: I don't know. I wasn't aware of the great stress. I don't think Gerry was either. Gerry likes being out on the end of the diving board, he still does. That's what he liked when I met him, and that's just the way our life has been; I never think about it.

JOHNSON: Do you remember that Christmas Eve? Were you at home with your family, or were you with other people during that time watching it?

GRIFFIN: We were probably in Houston because Gerry never was anywhere except in the control center. I'm sure we were there. My mother very likely was there with us. I don't remember.

JOHNSON: How about Apollo 11? What are your memories of that mission?

GRIFFIN: It was just like all the others, fantastic. The world was watching, and I was aware that the world was watching. I was also aware that it was not just us, it was the world that went to the Moon. I felt that then, still do, it wasn't just the USA, the world went to the Moon. Everybody in the world was watching, guarantee you, and I knew it.

JOHNSON: You mentioned before you weren't as aware of how important what they were doing was until later. Was that one of your first times that you started being aware of that importance?

GRIFFIN: Oh, probably, but I didn't dwell on anything. Just go to the next page. Just turn the page.

JOHNSON: Do you remember any of the splashdown parties after that mission?

GRIFFIN: Oh God, yes. I didn't last very long at that one, I was home early. Yes, the parties were always at the hotels all around us. One thing I really enjoyed, Jim [James L.] Hartz had become one of our very best friends. Jim Hartz was NBC. Ended up later being the [NBC] *Today* show host. Big-time. He hung out at our house all the time. At the Nassau Bay Hotel, the *NBC News* thing [booth] was a little doodad on the top, and he spent most of his free time at

our house shooting horse [basketball game] with our little boy and eating burgers with us and stuff like that, picking Gerry's brain, trying to learn all he could about engineering. Crash course in engineering. He's still a good friend. It was fun having Jim Hartz, who was an important NBC news guy hang out at my house. That was always fun. I loved doing that.

JOHNSON: Do you remember where you were when you were watching them walk on the Moon for the first time?

GRIFFIN: In my house in Nassau Bay. Always home. Always in front of my very own TV, because Gerry was always over at the control center.

JOHNSON: I think Apollo 12 was the first lead flight director mission for him.

GRIFFIN: That was his first one, and boy, he was excited.

JOHNSON: Was he?

GRIFFIN: Yes. He was going to be on the end of the diving board for sure, and he was. Lightning struck. His voice got very high. You could hear it.

JOHNSON: On the communication loops.

GRIFFIN: You can hear it.

JOHNSON: Yes. It was an interesting mission. Apollo 13, you mentioned that you had to chase him down because he was playing softball somewhere when that happened. Did you see him much after that?

GRIFFIN: No. He was gone. Actually during a lot of the missions we didn't see him at all, because I had little people [at home]. Kirk was getting older, and he wasn't a problem. But I had a little one, and Gerry was having to sleep quite often during the daytime, so he often stayed over on site. The control center had sleeping quarters. It had no windows, was cold, dark, and quiet, so he stayed over there. He would come home, shower, get clean underwear and clothes, and then go back. That was fine, because I had my world that had to happen on a regular schedule. Kids had to get to school, normal things still had to happen, doctors' appointments, and other stuff.

One thing about it, I didn't have to worry about feeding him, which is still fine when he's gone. I don't have to worry about feeding him. It's always easier.

JOHNSON: It's something you became accustomed to after all the years.

GRIFFIN: Yes. After a week or so I'm ready for him to come home, but I never ever minded him being gone for short periods. It happened from day one, because when we were at Hamilton he sat on alert. They had live weapons on their airplanes, and when they were on alert he was out at the alert hangar, so very early on I had a husband that was gone.

JOHNSON: Since he was in mission control, I probably already know the answer to this, but did you ever have a chance to see any launches or landings?

GRIFFIN: No, not until we went elsewhere. Some of the people, when they weren't on an active flight, did go down and watch launches. Gerry said they didn't pay him to go stand around and be a spectator. They paid him to be in mission control. He never left mission control during the entire Apollo Program, he didn't see a flight of any kind until we got to Washington, and me either. Couldn't afford it. NASA wasn't going to pay to send me to the Cape. I never could even get into mission control.

JOHNSON: Really?

GRIFFIN: No.

JOHNSON: You never got in to see anything.

GRIFFIN: No.

JOHNSON: The viewing room, or any part of it.

GRIFFIN: No, not until later. We didn't have access to anything. I loved it when he was the Center Director. I had access to everything.

JOHNSON: I can imagine. He did move on, and I think '73 is when he moved to [NASA] Headquarters [Washington, D.C.].

GRIFFIN: That's right.

JOHNSON: You took the kids and went with him at that time?

GRIFFIN: No, kids were still in school. He got that assignment before the end of school, and I didn't even go up and house-hunt with him. Didn't have time and couldn't afford it for one thing. NASA would pay for one trip to house-hunt, but there was always extenuating circumstances.

JOHNSON: With kids in school.

GRIFFIN: Kids in school and too much going on. It was before Kirk's junior year in high school, and Gwen was 10 and in elementary school. I loved the house that Gerry found in Vienna, Virginia. We joined Westwood Country Club, which was about a block and a half away. The house is still very nice in a very nice neighborhood. It backed up to a green belt and a path and creek. Gerry did good. We loved living in Vienna. It was a separate little town of its own; not just a suburb of D.C.

We had a refrigerator in our family room, on the bottom floor of our house in Vienna, with a beer keg in it and a tap on the side. We also had it in Nassau Bay where we had a huge back porch that we had built, with the beer tap in the utility room.

When we lived in Nassau Bay, we bought our Pearl beer kegs from the Singing Wheel in Webster. We bought our beer kegs and gas from the Vienna Inn in Vienna, Virginia. I can't remember where I got the CO₂ gas when we lived in Nassau Bay, but gas and kegs were on my to-do list. Our gas bottle was an old fire extinguisher. I had it filled and parked it in the utility room for Gerry to connect up when he got home from work. Somehow, they hadn't gotten the safety seal put on very well, and the thing blew. I'm in the kitchen, and here comes this red fire extinguisher bottle spinning out of the utility room, outgassing CO₂, and I'm running from it, just another adventure in the life of Nassau Bay during the space race.

JOHNSON: He went ahead and bought a house in D.C. Were you responsible for selling your house? Did you sell your house at that point?

GRIFFIN: I did, I put it on the market. We got twice as much for it as we paid for it, which was amazing. However, it cost us twice as much as we made on the Nassau Bay house to get a house in Vienna.

JOHNSON: Yes. Cost of living is a higher there.

GRIFFIN: It was definitely a shock. We never ever got ahead. Everyplace we lived cost us more. Same was true in California. When Gerry was at Dryden, we lived in Lancaster, California. When he was at Kennedy [Space Center, (KSC) Florida], we lived in Satellite Beach.

JOHNSON: You lived in different communities. You went to Vienna and then after that out to Dryden and then Kennedy and then back to Headquarters at some point.

GRIFFIN: No, I never did go back to Headquarters.

JOHNSON: You didn't go back when he went?

GRIFFIN: No. I stayed in Florida, and Gerry commuted. He was Deputy Director of KSC on Monday and Friday, and at NASA Headquarters in DC as Associate Administrator for External Relations on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday for close to two years. It was Gwen's junior and senior years in high school. She was the head cheer leader and also taking college classes at Brevard Community College. I was playing a lot of golf and also acting as secretary for the first ever men's senior PGA tournament event ever held at our country club, Suntree, in Melbourne, Florida.

JOHNSON: Just talk maybe just for a second, because you had to live in different communities. Especially at Dryden and then again in Kennedy, were you in communities similar to what you were down here as far as NASA people living in the area? Or were you in more separate areas?

GRIFFIN: No, we never were in a NASA community again. That situation never existed again. That community in Clear Lake was unusual. The other communities we lived in, we never really wanted to live right near the Center. We didn't want to be totally immersed in the NASA world. We never wanted to live on the golf course either, because we never wanted to be totally

immersed in the golf course world. We wanted always to have some space between our worlds. It was a good way to do it, because that way we were a part of a number of worlds. We always had our golf community, we always had our NASA community.

When we lived in Vienna, those legislative affairs people lived all over the place – Virginia, Maryland, and DC. They had never ever been to a beer bust or Texas barbecue, so we had a big beer bust and barbecue at our house on the driveway. We cooked brisket, chicken, ribs and pot of beans and shot baskets. They had a ball. Those people had never done anything like that in their lives. Legislative affairs had certainly never ever done anything like that.

JOHNSON: You brought a little Texas to them.

GRIFFIN: Absolutely. Brought Texas to the Vienna community. Actually we lived only two blocks from the golf course, but none of our neighbors played golf. I could walk to the club, and I had a pull cart to carry my clubs. The kids would go off to school and I would go to the golf course. I played a lot of golf. Beautiful golf course. The Westwood Country Club.

Loved the wintertime because the lakes froze, and I could bounce my ball across the water. I did join the women's golf association because that was the group I played with on a regular basis and it afforded tournaments and intra-club events for me to play in. It's the only women's organization I ever joined in the places we've lived.

JOHNSON: Eventually you did come back to Houston. Did you choose to live in Houston this time instead of the Clear Lake area when you got back? Or did you live in Clear Lake?

GRIFFIN: Yes, we first lived in Clear Lake. We lived in a patio home just outside the Center. Absolutely loved it. Zero-lot-line. What's that area called?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Is it University Green?

GRIFFIN: Yes, University Green. We had a huge hot tub/spa. Gerry and Ace Decking Company, which was made up of half of the astronaut corps and the flight control people who volunteered and built our deck. I think Ellison [S.] Onizuka's wife never believed that he was actually at our house building a deck. They never would let El have a hammer because he kept missing the nails and dinging the redwood. He was relegated to holding boards and stuff like that.

I loved that little house, it was all decked, with a little bit of grass for our dog. It was so easy to keep inside and out. We were there until Gerry went to town.

JOHNSON: When he retired from NASA?

GRIFFIN: Yes, when Gerry left NASA to be the president and CEO of the Houston chamber of Commerce. He commuted for about six months. It was obvious that wasn't going to work. Again, it was kind of like with this place, he said, "Find us a place to live." I started hunting and found another zero-lot-line place. The house was on a pipestem driveway on Briar Drive that backed up to Buffalo Bayou just outside Loop 610 on the west side of Houston. A great house, absolutely fantastic. It was one of three freestanding at the end of the pipestem. I absolutely loved it, nicest house we ever lived in, much less owned.

In fact we came up here and signed the papers on this place, and here it is, a manufactured home, a double-wide. I told Gerry, as we were driving back to Houston, “Tell me again why I’m selling the nicest, most expensive house I’ve ever lived in to live in a manufactured home, a double-wide? Tell me again why I’m doing this.” But we’re where we ought to be, and we love it. Gerry still works, contrary to what people believe. He has not retired; the activity challenge has just changed.

JOHNSON: When you went back to Clear Lake and University Green, that had been a few years, like almost 10 years, since you’d lived there. How had Clear Lake changed in that time?

GRIFFIN: Oh, wow, mushroomed, exploded. Of course we didn’t have kids at home, so our world had changed. I intended to get immediately back into golf. However, Gerry’s world had changed to the point that it was requiring more of me than his world had required of me before. Before I really didn’t have an active part in it. Now the social requirements were different. As the Center Director’s wife, I had to be charming on occasion, and present myself to the public in a fashion that was acceptable as the “wife of the boss.” My world changed drastically.

He didn’t really have time to play golf anymore, and neither did I. The world told him that the Center Director can do anything he wants to. Betty Sue [Feddersen, the Center Director’s secretary] had prepared his calendar so he could have every Wednesday off to play golf. That turned out to be totally unrealistic; he flat didn’t have time, period.

JOHNSON: That was the beginning of the Shuttle Program, so I imagine it was pretty busy.

GRIFFIN: He played golf occasionally, and I started classes at the University of Houston – Clear Lake (UHCL), with the idea of finishing my degree. We never ever rejoined a club. By then Clear Lake Country Club wasn't viable anymore anyway. Then when we got to town with the Chamber of Commerce, Gerry said, "If River Oaks [Country Club] will give me a membership, I would love it. Would love to be a member of River Oaks even for just a short period of time." Our name never got on that list. We didn't really have time to campaign for it anyway.

I didn't play golf for that 10-year period when he was Center Director, nor when he was with the Chamber of Commerce or when he was the head of the Korn/Ferry International office either. Just too much going on in our world, too much social, too much travel. By then we could afford to do things, because he was finally making a decent living, but just really didn't have time, and we never did join another country club.

When we got here, after I got this place built, and it was all up and functioning, I looked around, and I had become a housewife again. That was boring. I told Gerry, "We're going to have to join the country club. I need golf or something, I've got to have some outlet." We joined Riverhill Country Club here in Kerrville. It is the best golf course I've ever played, bar none. Gorgeous golf course built by Byron Nelson. I have played some of the best golf of my life here, as a matter of fact. I've loved every minute of it, and I've played a lot of golf.

JOHNSON: You said you were responsible for more social events when he was Center Director. What type of things do you remember doing?

GRIFFIN: Gerry had a speech every morning, every noon, every night. Rubber chicken and green pea activities. I was responsible to be on his arm, smiling and charming. That became

magnified as we joined the Chamber. One of the major events then was the Red Rose Ball, University of Houston-Downtown, which we were both great supporters of and still are. You just automatically get involved as the head of JSC or the Houston Chamber.

JOHNSON: You said you got your degree at University of Houston-Clear Lake 30 years and one semester later.

GRIFFIN: Thirty years and one semester. Yes, the proudest single event of my life. I had started college in September 1955. I finally got the degree in December 1985.

JOHNSON: Was that during the Center Director time?

GRIFFIN: Yes. Gerry had been given an honorary degree from the University of Houston-Clear Lake. He ended up presenting me my diploma, which was a total surprise to me.

JOHNSON: Oh, how wonderful.

GRIFFIN: I loved every minute of going back to school and working to get that degree. I had always intended to finish. It was very important to me. I had only set that aside when I met Gerry during my junior year at University of Texas. As we traveled through our life, we had things that we needed to do, so that had to get put on hold. Almost every place we lived, I signed up to go to school. I really got serious about it when we were at Kennedy Space Center, when Gerry was the Deputy Director down there. I was doing freelance commercial art, and I needed

to upgrade my skills; it was before the day of computer graphics, just the beginning of it. My graphic design skills were all hand, and I needed to refresh that, so I went over to the local Brevard Community College. I already had 90 something hours, I was already well past junior college level, but I signed up for a basic design course, which I'd already had several times.

I was taking this basic design just to refresh my skills, and I fell in love with going to school. I also found out that I couldn't just go to school to take courses. If I'm going to be in school, I'm going to earn an associate degree for goodness' sakes. So, I ended up with an associate degree in art. I did everything in art they had to offer. We even painted a mural of 1934 downtown Melbourne that ended up on the side of a building. I had more fun and loved every minute of it.

After finishing at BCC, I had actually enrolled at University of Central Florida in Orlando, fully intending to finally get the degree. About that time, Gerry decides to leave NASA, accepts a job in California, and we're gone. Daughter Gwen ends up going to the University of Central Florida rather than me.

We're back in California, Gerry is working with Dave [David R.] Scott as a partner in Scott Science and Technology. That's fine. I sign up and am accepted at Cal State [California State University] Northridge, which is just over the mountains toward LA [Los Angeles], and I'm ready to register for classes when Gerry goes back to work for NASA at the Cape, pending being named the Director of JSC.

Here we go again. Degree is put on hold, and I'm left behind again to sell the house. This time it's for the job of a lifetime. What an honor to be the third Director of the Johnson Space Center following Dr. Gilruth and Chris [Christopher C.] Kraft.

We get back to the Houston/Clear Lake area, I go over to UH-Clear Lake and register for more art classes, and tell Gerry, “Keep this job long enough for me to get my degree!” I had the best time. I discovered that not only was I a good student, but I was actually much smarter than I thought I was. Gerry said all I did was screw up the curve for the kids. I made straight As and graduated with honors. We finally stayed in one place long enough for me to get that degree, 30 years and one semester late. Which was originally May of 1959.

JOHNSON: Better late than never.

GRIFFIN: Better late than never.

JOHNSON: It’s accomplishing a goal, which is important.

GRIFFIN: That’s the best thing I ever did for me. Loved every minute of it.

JOHNSON: It’s a good school.

GRIFFIN: Oh, good grief. Now it’s a four-year school.

JOHNSON: Yes.

GRIFFIN: I'm proud of it. I loved every minute of it, and my association with it. That was one of the things that I disliked about our move to town with the Chamber job. I had to stop taking graduate classes at the Clear Lake campus.

JOHNSON: That was the early years of the school too. It hadn't been around that long when you were going there.

GRIFFIN: No.

JOHNSON: I was going to ask Jennifer, see if she has anything to add.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, I had a couple of questions. I was making some notes for myself here. You had said that the community in Clear Lake was unusual, and it was never going to exist again. Did you have a sense when you were living there in the '60s how unusual this community was? Or was it only when you came back that you realized it was unusual?

GRIFFIN: It was unusual from the beginning. There were very few people living there except NASA people. Slowly the oil and chemical people from the La Porte/Baytown area started osmosing into the community around JSC. For example, Kirk's friend Jimmy Martin's dad worked for Shell Oil. People like that started moving in as there was more and more very nice housing and the area became a viable community with good schools.

Our doctor was Frank Sims. He and a couple of partners opened a little clinic/general practice in League City about the same time we arrived. They were young and just starting out

like all of us. He became our daughter's doctor again when she moved back down there in the '90s. He retired soon after.

There were little bits and pieces of other things. The little shopping center there in Nassau Bay: Graham's Men's Store was opened there. It was a great men's store. In fact the sport jacket that Gerry is wearing this week is from Graham's. He had to go back to it because the blue sport coat he had flat fell apart. We had to throw it away a couple weeks ago and dig out the one from Graham's. It was the only thing he had.

The bank was opening there also, so it was beginning to be a real community. But it was different, and you knew it. You could tell. People were beginning to move in from other areas. They were joining the community, because obviously it was going to be something big. "This is going to be big, guys. This place is exciting. Let's go along for the ride." The more diverse the community became, the more exciting and interesting it became.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Some of the people that we've talked to about this time period say it was like a family.

GRIFFIN: Oh, it really was.

ROSS-NAZZAL: But what made it like a family? What brought you all together? Was it NASA? Was it Apollo? Was it a combination? Was it something else?

GRIFFIN: It was all of that. NASA was the catalyst. You were in this swamp where people weren't supposed to live, for one thing. It really was. In fact it was kind of like—most people

that move to places like that get hardship pay. But it really was a difficult place because no one had ever lived there before—a huge population hadn't. We felt like we're in this together, and together we can make this good for all of us. We all were sharing a lot – not unlike a family. Houston is an anomaly, for crying out loud. Something that big and that dynamic shouldn't be where it is. The whole thing is mud. So what happened in the Clear Lake area just fits with what Houston did. It's almost a spirit or something that generates its own energy – its own force. NASA fits into that naturally.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You were talking to Sandra about El Lago. I was curious, were there any neighborhood traditions that were established during the '60s that you recall? Different things that you guys might have done that have carried through over the years?

GRIFFIN: Oh, I don't know. I have no idea. We were just living one day at a time.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned the Clear Lake City Country Club. I actually live in the original part of Clear Lake City and I've met some folks who were members of that. They talked about how that country club and then the Clear Lake Rec [Recreation and Community] Center really were a place where there was a large community, a place for people to gather who didn't have a lot of family or friends in the area. Was that the case for you?

GRIFFIN: It was a great place, a great place to eat lunch, for one thing. They had a great restaurant. They had a much larger pool there than we did in Nassau Bay. I took my kids over there swimming a lot. I'd take Kirk over there and he'd bash balls on the driving range for

hours. The whole Clear Lake area was just a safe and easy place to have a family, and I'm sure it still is.

They could do anything on their own. A funny story that goes along with that Clear Lake Country Club was a great place to eat lunch, as I mentioned. During the Apollo Program in the middle of one of the flights, I had gone over for a buffet. We had had days and days of rain, streets were flooded, we were drowning, typically. One of the servers (an older lady, maybe 50 years old) pulls me aside, "Honey, you're going to have to talk to your husband and tell him they've got to stop walking on the Moon. It's what's causing all of this rain."

I said, "Okay."

She said, "No, I'm serious. God is angry. We have got to stop walking on the Moon." She said, "Please tell your husband for me." She pulled me out of the line to tell me this.

I said, "Yes, ma'am, I will be sure to tell him that."

We were in the middle of a mission. Someone was walking on the Moon, and that's why we were flooding. I assured her that I would take care of it as soon as I saw him again. I did, I told Gerry. I don't know whether he stopped them or not. But Clear Lake, yes, it was a great place to hang out. I bashed a lot of balls over there. I never was a finesse golfer, but I could hit the stuffing out of a golf ball, and I played a lot of golf starting there at Clear Lake Country Club.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned you couldn't get over into mission control. How closely were you following your husband's job, and how much was he sharing with you of what he was doing? You knew he was a flight controller, you knew he was a flight director, but were you getting in the weeds in that?

GRIFFIN: I understood what he was doing. I have an analytical, mechanical kind of a mind, so I knew quite well what he was doing. A lot of wives didn't know what their husbands did. I happened to be able to understand it. I'm not an engineer or anything; I'm not interested in that kind of detail. I'm more as he is, interested in operations. He would tell me what was going on. He would call me and say, "Hey, make sure you pay attention to the news tonight, such and such is about to happen or something like that. Or we've had a problem and so go turn the news on." I wasn't privy to anything necessarily. I understood it a lot better than a lot of people did. A lot of wives were oblivious to everything. But I loved it, loved being a part of it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned his voice went up for Apollo 12. How did you know that? Did you have a squawk box or that was on the news?

GRIFFIN: No, the astronaut families had little radio things in their homes, we didn't. I heard it later on tapes. No. We weren't privy to anything. I couldn't even get in the viewing room. The only reason I could get on site is I could deliver Gerry to work or pick him up. I had no extra privileges. I loved him being Center Director. I finally got to go just about anywhere. I even had parking places.

JOHNSON: That's special there.

GRIFFIN: That's the best job I thought he ever had. To him the best job he ever had was flight director. No question.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Center Director, really got a lot of weight on your shoulders.

JOHNSON: It's all administration.

GRIFFIN: Yes, too much housekeeping stuff. But it wasn't weight on my shoulders. I just had to smile and be nice to people.

ROSS-NAZZAL: When you guys came, when they opened the Center, did you get a chance to go out there with the kids and see what NASA was like and tour the facilities? Was that available to families?

GRIFFIN: Oh goodness, it was grim. It was dusty and dirty and new buildings. We didn't have access to anything, and there was nothing organized to show it to us. They were already up to their ears with "going to the Moon." It never occurred to anyone to show the facilities to the families.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you feel put off by that at all as a wife?

GRIFFIN: No. We'd been Air Force, I didn't have access to any of that either. Didn't make any difference. It wasn't anything that I ever thought about.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned earlier when we were off tape about taking apart your washing machine and fixing it. Did the other wives whose husbands were working at NASA ever come

to you and say, “You seem to have some of these skills, and I’ve got a problem, can you help me fix it?”

GRIFFIN: No. It’s just what I was interested in doing. I’m a tomboy, and it’s what I liked doing. Helen Garriott did that kind of stuff too. I had a hard time doing—well, still I don’t do girl things very easily. Not interested. I’d rather be taking something apart than playing cards or visiting at a tea.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I just had one more question, and this is a thought that I have. I’m wondering what you think. I think that the women were really integral to building the Clear Lake community.

GRIFFIN: Oh, no doubt.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I’m wondering what your thoughts are on that and how they built that community.

GRIFFIN: No doubt. Rusty [Russell L.] Schweickart’s first wife.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Is that Clare?

GRIFFIN: Yes, Clare. Boy, you talk about having a major impact. Some of the wives had a major impact on what happened in that community. I didn’t. I just kind of went along with the

flow. Not being a joiner, if it works it's okay with me. However there were a lot of well educated, very talented, capable women in that area whose husbands were very busy, and they needed challenges of their own.

For example, when we first lived in Nassau Bay it was long-distance to call Houston. Literally. You had to pay a long-distance fee to call Houston, or Clear Lake City, or League city, etc. Clare Schweickart was singularly responsible for getting that changed. I don't know what she did, but by the time she got through with the phone companies it was not long-distance to call Houston anymore. That's just one example.

I think most wives just sat around like me and did nothing, but there were some of them that got involved in all kinds of thing, many became active politically. A lot of them were teachers who had a great impact on the school system. A lot of them went back to school. That had a major impact on UH-Clear Lake. Like Shuttle commander [Francis Richard] Scobee's wife, June Scobee. She went back to school at UH-Clear Lake. She also later helped share the special education programs there.

Interesting story about her. She got her doctorate at [Texas] A&M [University, College Station]. This early in Dick's astronaut career. June couldn't afford to rent an apartment at College Station, so she lived in a freshman dorm in the summertime. She had a freshman roommate. Her roommate came in when they first got settled and said, "Ms. Scobee, where's the action?" Ms. Scobee laughed and said, "I haven't the slightest idea." She and her roommate made it through that summer.

JOHNSON: That's funny.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's hilarious.

GRIFFIN: There's not much that the wives didn't do. Ms. Scobee had a freshman roommate. She got her doctorate.

ROSS-NAZZAL: She was committed.

GRIFFIN: She was committed. An amazing lady like others. She and Dick started school together after they were married. Neither one of them had been to college. Amazing. A lot of people doing a lot of things, but a lot of the wives just succumbed to the whole thing, and it beat them.

JOHNSON: That's interesting, the difference between, I guess personalities play a big point.

GRIFFIN: Personalities, I guess. In my case I felt ignored sometimes, but I also always felt like it was Gerry and I together. I felt that "we" were in this whole adventure together.

JOHNSON: You were a team.

GRIFFIN: We were a team. I got pretty upset with him a few times. My team member wasn't pulling his weight. And we didn't have any money, my gosh, none of us had any money. That was the hard part. We really didn't.

JOHNSON: That's dedication to take that job knowing you were going to have a cut in pay, and you had two kids to raise.

GRIFFIN: It was really funny. We were finally making \$1,000 a month. We thought we were rich. He took a pay cut. "Gerry. You've got to be kidding. Okay."

ROSS-NAZZAL: I imagine that would have been an interesting conversation to sit in on.

GRIFFIN: Oh, no, it didn't actually last very long. It was going to be okay; tell me where to stand. You can do anything for a while, you really can. That's the way I felt about everyplace we lived. Heck, I can live there. I can do that. Everyplace we lived was fun, had something different to offer. A new adventure if you would just let it be.

Golly, when we lived in Florida, we had our ski boat in our backyard. What's not fun about that?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Sounds like you have that NASA can-do spirit.

GRIFFIN: It was fun. Certainly one of those adventures

JOHNSON: Is there anything we haven't talked about that you wanted to mention before we go?

GRIFFIN: I can't think what it is, covered just about everything. Our kids grew up very cosmopolitan. Wouldn't trade that for the world. Both of them. You know Gwen, don't you?

ROSS-NAZZAL: I've talked to her on the phone several times. We're actually going to do an interview with her after all these.

GRIFFIN: Very dynamic, both of them. They can talk to anybody about anything. Kirk is a general contractor here, but he worked for NASA. His degree was building construction, but when he got out of A&M the Houston economy was on its rear. He couldn't get a job, couldn't find work. It was terrible, it's when everything went under. It's when Gerry left NASA and went to work for the Chamber of Commerce. Gerry represented government and high tech, and they were depending on Gerry to help redirect Houston's economy, which made sense to me too.

Kirk ended up getting a job with Ford Aerospace. When Gerry retired from NASA, Kirk then went to work for NASA. He was in payloads for 15 years, so he's a NASA guy. With all our moves the kids and I learned that we had to "suck it up." Hi. I'm Sandy Griffin. Hi. I'm Kirk Griffin. Hi. I'm Gwen.

When we got to Florida, Gwen came dragging in one day and said, "I am so tired of being on. I am so tired of introducing myself to people." Here she is, between her junior high and high school, and she's learned how to do that and how important that is. Both of them are really good at it. They are both dynamic. And I have no regrets.

JOHNSON: That's wonderful.

GRIFFIN: Yes. They have fared well as a result.

JOHNSON: Not a bad way of growing up.

GRIFFIN: No, and they both know it. Gwen fought it. As a teen, she hated everything about our world. She didn't want anything to do with the space business. Funny thing about it is that now her world is totally immersed in it. I used to think Gerry knew everything and everybody in the space world. But no, Gwen does. Kirk and Gwen are both charming. They learned their lessons well.

Actually, I'm basically very shy. But I can say, "Hi. I'm Sandy Griffin." And I can talk about most anything.

JOHNSON: It's a long way from that girl growing up in Kerrville in a bakery.

GRIFFIN: As I said, I have no idea where I got that.

JOHNSON: Sounds like it was a good life, and still is.

GRIFFIN: Yes, it most certainly still is. Oh, I wouldn't trade any of it for the world. It's not all been sweetness and roses, but I've had a great life.

JOHNSON: No one's life is. There are ups and downs.

GRIFFIN: We've been healthy, as well as our kids. Our life has been good. No major negatives. We're still here, still perking along. Gerry is still as busy as he can possibly be, and our adventure continues. We smile a lot.

JOHNSON: We appreciate you talking to us today and spending so much time with us.

GRIFFIN: My pleasure.

[End of interview]