

NASA JOHNSON SPACE CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

EDITED ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

DOROTHY M.C. DUKE
INTERVIEWED BY SANDRA JOHNSON
NEW BRAUNFELS, TEXAS – NOVEMBER 12, 2019

JOHNSON: Today is November 12th, 2019. This interview with Dotty Duke is being conducted in New Braunfels for the JSC Oral History Project. The interviewer is Sandra Johnson, assisted by Jennifer Ross-Nazzal. I want to thank you for joining us today and allowing us to come into your lovely home. I want to ask you about your background and a little bit about where you're from and what you were doing, and maybe about your education and everything before you met Charlie [Charles M. Duke].

DUKE: I'm from Atlanta, Georgia, born in 1940, and lived all my life there. Father was a doctor, and so we were pretty settled in Atlanta. Went to public high schools. Just one interesting thing that I think it would be fun to put in is that to graduate from my high school you had to do a 10-minute speech in front of the class. That made me really extremely nervous because I wasn't comfortable standing up in front of people, so I started thinking about what I wanted to write about.

That was a time that Alan [B.] Shepard was flying, and the program was beginning. Actually when I first saw *Life* magazine and all the seven they had picked for Mercury, I was just really upset, because I thought why didn't they pick bachelors, why were they picking people that were married? That was just terrible. Just assuming that this was not going to be a good program.

I was very influenced by the press and a lot of talk at that time. My paper was why do we want to go to the Moon, why are we going to go in space? I was totally against it, and we should spend money on cancer research, and we should spend money with Africa, we should spend money these other places. Just didn't see any point at all. I got an A on my lovely speech, which helped my class, but that's how I started off.

I first went to Hollins College in Roanoke, Virginia, a girls' school, loved it there, small school, and then transferred to University of North Carolina [Chapel Hill] for my last two years. I just wanted to experience both a girls' school and a coed school. Preferred the girls' school and was influenced even more into areas and things. I remember having one class and the professor was talking against doctors. I thought wait a minute. There was a lot of communist type thinking at that time. I was beginning to get more and more socialist. When I came to graduation, I was telling Daddy about my thoughts, that everybody should be equal and all pay and all this. He said, "Well, if you think like this when you're your age, college age, then you have a heart. But if you continue thinking like this when you grow up and mature, you have no brain." I thought it was very wise of him to say that. He didn't argue with me. Sure enough, of course, later as I matured, I read a lot of books about what happened in the communist area, and so I'm not for socialism at all.

I wanted to go and see the world essentially, and I really wanted to go and to do something productive when I graduated. First wanted to do the Peace Corps in Africa. My parents wouldn't let me go. Then I wanted to go work in a nursing home in London and my parents wouldn't let me go. You did what your parents wanted you to do back then, and so I didn't go, even though I was really hurt. Then I picked Boston [Massachusetts]. They had lived

in Boston. Their concern was really I would meet somebody over there and not come home. I think that was their biggest concern.

They were fine about Boston. After I graduated, I went on a tour of Europe and came practically straight to Boston after that with some friends and looked for a job there. The second day I was there I was staying with some sorority sisters that had graduated a year before, and Charlie and his roommate came over to see them, because they were going to rent this apartment when the girls moved out. They were there, and I was tired because I'd been looking for a job all day. I waited and waited, and they just stayed.

Finally I came out and we talked. He had been in Europe for three years before, with the military. He was five years older, but he was from the South. He was from South Carolina. We talked and everything, and having that in common, Europe, was good, and the South was good. He went home between summer and fall and said he'd find me when he got back.

I didn't know how he could, because I didn't know where I was going to be living, but he was resourceful. He first goes home though, and he tells his mother he'd met the girl he was going to marry. We had talked for probably an hour. I looked at him as a big brother, he's older, and he can take me around. Wasn't interested in marriage; I just graduated from college. But it only took him two months to convince me, and so we got engaged. This was September we met, and we got engaged on Veterans Day unofficial, and then we got officially when he went to Atlanta to ask my father for marriage, which he was prepared to say yes.

They had never met him. He came down at Christmas and we got officially engaged then. Surprise, when I look back on it, my parents had already scheduled an engagement party for the next night with all our family, which we had a lot of family that lived around there. They hadn't even met this guy who was coming to ask for my hand in marriage. But Charlie appeared

with a country ham. My mother loved country ham. That's a Southern thing. I think him being military too, all that just won their heart.

We got married then the next June. Something cute about that too. We've written this all in our own book. That there was a costume party that Christmas when he was visiting. Charlie says, "Why don't we dress up in our flight suits?" We were going to get married in June. He said, "Why don't we have a sign?" To the Moon in June. One of them wore to the Moon and the other one wore in June.

Mother even asked him that. "Do you want to be an astronaut?" "No, no." He was going to probably quit the military and go into insurance with his father in Lancaster, South Carolina. That was what I thought was going to be happening.

Anyway, he graduated from MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge]. Very difficult the first two years, because he was always studying. The courting had been very strong for the few months that we courted, and so all of a sudden the courting was over, and he was getting down to business.

Then when he finished school, he didn't tell me this, but he had met some astronauts, and was beginning to get interested in it, but I didn't know that. He just said he wanted to get back to flying, so he applied to get in test pilot school. Having the degree helped to get in test pilot school out in California at Edwards Air Force Base.

So we moved out there. Very different from Atlanta. No real trees. Joshua trees, which are like cactus. Very dry, very remote. We stayed there. Again, he was just really excited about the planes. I got pregnant there with our first son, and was very anxious to leave anytime, because it was not so pretty.

We were there two years, and after he graduated, he got a job as an instructor at the test pilot school. But right after that, the announcement came out they were looking for more astronauts. I was all for that, for him to be in the space program. I actually was a neighbor of Clare Schweickart. Was just Clare Whitfield then. Good friends. She was older, but still good friends. Good neighbors. I knew she was married to an astronaut and knew a little bit about that. I knew they traveled.

It sounded fine to me, and so I approved. They asked the wives then if they agreed for their husbands to be an astronaut. They wanted to make sure the wives were supportive because they'd had problems with the earlier selections.

JOHNSON: Did they interview you?

DUKE: No, no. Maybe I spoke on the phone, or maybe I passed it through Charlie. I probably spoke on the phone, something like that. But no interview.

Then we moved with our child, who was now a year old, to Houston. We got to the Manned Spacecraft Center where they had their offices for the astronauts. I met Alan Shepard right away. Afterwards I said, "Oh, Charlie, I met an astronaut!" I was impressed with Alan Shepard, an astronaut. I didn't assume Charlie was an astronaut at that point at all, he was just my husband. He still is just my husband.

Then we settled in there and they started traveling right away. Right away. I don't know if you want more background of that.

JOHNSON: Yes. Let's talk a little bit more about background. When you were at Edwards, did you participate in any activities on the base with other wives that were involved with the test pilot school? Or did you start forming some of those relationships?

DUKE: At test pilot school you had your little class, and I think there were 10 or 11 of us. All of them had been military for a while, been married for a while. They had kids. They're a little older. I didn't know all the military stuff, I couldn't even recognize anything about it; I didn't know ranks or anything. I felt a little out of it because I didn't know all that and their kids were older. But we did get together. There would be parties all the time that we would get together.

I taught school a little bit, substituted there. No degree, but they needed subs. Tried that for a while until I was pregnant, and then it really wasn't comfortable anymore. Then I took a pottery class there, made some ceramics. In fact it's not up there now because I don't have the Christmas decorations up, but I made something for my grandmother that she gave me when she passed away, a little creche scene there.

We went to church in Lancaster, [California] 30 miles away, and sometimes we went to eat dinner in Los Angeles, which was an hour-and-a-half drive. Then on weekends if he wasn't busy, I'd try to go somewhere. We traveled a lot. We skied, we did a lot of camping and things like that out there, trying to see the area, so that was fun. Even when the baby was born, we took him camping when he was just I think six weeks old or something. We tried to enjoy the area. Probably the only thing I really got involved with was just pottery class. Just getting together with the guys.

JOHNSON: When he applied, you said you thought that would be okay. Were you surprised when he got chosen? Or were you expecting him to get chosen to come to Houston?

DUKE: I guess I was excited. Surprised, no, probably not. Surprised in a way like really? I had my hands full with a baby and stuff, and so I was just excited he got selected, because it was a big honor to get selected.

JOHNSON: I was looking at your chapter in the book about that time. You mention you were excited to come to someplace that had trees and grass. As a comparison from being out on the high desert in California.

DUKE: Right, I was excited about that. It was a little bit closer to home too, so I was looking forward to that part.

JOHNSON: Talk about that trip. Did you come at the same time as Charlie to Houston? Did you drive down?

DUKE: Yes, we actually drove from Boston to Atlanta to get stuff, and out. That drive was really something, driving out to California, because we had no air-conditioning in our car. We got to I guess it was Las Vegas area or someplace out there, and we came into a windstorm, a sandstorm I should say. Sandstorm. We actually ended up taking our shirts and getting them wet to put them on so we could have some air blow on us and cool us off. Because it was so hot without the air-conditioning. We'd heard that somewhere.

We went through Death Valley and arrived in Edwards. I guess I don't know if that's all in the book or not. But we arrived at Edwards, and we ended up going over to the enlisted area first. Enlisted area is not as nice as the officers. We went in that, and there really wasn't any grass there. It looked like Mexico. It really did. Oh me, what have we gotten ourselves into? But then we had a nice little house. We had a house right away, we'd just been married a year, and on a nice road, and the others lived either on our street or behind us on another street, so we were all together in our class, because they move them in and out.

It was nice there. Again I had to work at having time together. That's why I would plan our trips. I did the same thing in Boston when he was in school there. We're going to go on a trip this weekend so we can have some time together. I wanted to be with my husband.

JOHNSON: Which is understandable. Then when you came to Texas, you drove down together again?

DUKE: Yes. We drove together.

JOHNSON: Had you ever been to Texas before? Or was this the first time?

DUKE: I guess we drove through Texas going out.

JOHNSON: Yes, probably so.

DUKE: When I drove out west as a child, I don't think we came through Texas then. I can't really say that I knew anything about Texas, except people always teased about Texas that they bragged all the time. I understood it when we got here, this is a great place, so it's not they're bragging, they're just saying. People like where they live, they like they live here. We even got a bumper sticker after we moved up here, "We weren't born in Texas, but we got here as fast as we could."

JOHNSON: Yes, I've seen that one before.

DUKE: We lived in three different places before we had a house built.

JOHNSON: Where did you live?

DUKE: We first lived in Dickinson, and we were just there for a month I think, in a little apartment there. Then we found a little bit better apartment in League City that was closer to NASA and we stayed there until we had my second child, because I got pregnant soon after we moved. Not too many months after we moved, I got pregnant, and then had that second child. When I was pregnant, we knew we were going to have this other one, so we moved to a duplex in Seabrook, and it was there where I had the baby. Then we moved into our house just a few months after that.

JOHNSON: Your house was in El Lago?

DUKE: El Lago, yes.

JOHNSON: Did you know a lot of the other people that lived in El Lago when you moved there? Were there other astronauts and NASA people? Is that why you chose that area?

DUKE: Charlie, in talking to Bill [William A.] Anders—just mentioned El Lago, and that there was a lot next door to him that was available, and so we looked at it and thought it was great. We both like big yards like we have here. We both are not into having perfectly coutured yard, and we felt like Nassau Bay always looked like that, so I didn't want to pull hoses around like I had to in Houston, so we decided to build there, and it was just great, because the kids could ride their bikes to school when they started going to school. There was a little swimming pool behind us. It was casual. We're more casual, and so I liked where we lived.

It was difficult because as soon as they got there, they started traveling immediately. They started geology trips immediately, and then all these other trips, it was just really a lot. We had our friend who lived there, we made a friend, who was the son of a friend of my mother's from Atlanta that lived there, or that had a relative that lived there, and they introduced us to their son. He was an architect, and so he did the drawings for our house, and so we got to meet them, and they became very very good friends. Still are.

He helped design the house. But Charlie was gone almost the whole time the house was being built, and I was pregnant with the baby, and it was really a very interesting busy busy time on that.

JOHNSON: You had to keep track of everything that was going on with the house and pay attention to everything.

DUKE: Yes. The builder, he had just been a builder, not really a custom builder, and so he was surprised when I called him on some things that weren't correct. We did not have a really good relationship, and in fact one time I went over to the house and carpets were supposed to be put in, and it wasn't swept. There were nails and stuff everywhere. I tried to get him, couldn't get him, so I called the carpet people and canceled it. Charlie is in Hawaii, the builder calls, "I quit. Not going to build your house." Of course it's halfway through, more than halfway through, because the carpet is getting ready to go down. Okay, what do I do now?

He came back and he finished building it, but at the very end when we signed everything off, he said, "This is the second worst time I've had building a house."

JOHNSON: Just because he had to do what you wanted instead of what he wanted.

DUKE: Yes, and we didn't even get on him, because our architect, he looked at the house when they had constructed the outside and said, "They didn't do that right, they didn't make this as high as it was supposed to be." We mentioned that to him.

"That would have been doing the whole roof over again."

We said, "Okay, that's all right, we'll go with that." But there were other things that we had to have him redo. That was interesting.

But the pregnancy went well, and we moved in, like I say, soon after he was born.

JOHNSON: Where were you going as far as for the doctor and hospitals and that sort of thing in the area? Because when you came, things had started to build, and NASA had been there a few years, but obviously not a long time. What did you do for that medical care that you obviously needed when you were pregnant and hospitals?

DUKE: I'm just trying to figure how I found this doctor. It might have been through our friends that lived in Houston. I'm not really sure. Dr. Westbrook. I went to him, and he was a great doctor. He didn't believe in pain. I thought that's nice.

JOHNSON: That's good.

DUKE: He was very good.

JOHNSON: When you moved in as far as shopping or for groceries—

DUKE: I'm not a shopper.

JOHNSON: What about just groceries, drugstores?

DUKE: The grocery store was there, and we had Foley's, I would go there, on the Gulf Freeway. They had a big Foley's. Was it called Foley's then? I guess it was called Foley's then.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was. It was Foley's.

DUKE: It's Macy's now, I guess.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was Foley's then.

DUKE: I loved Foley's much more. Yes. I'd go there and I'd shop for the kids. There was a Sears there, I shopped there for clothes.

JOHNSON: Was that Alameda Mall when they built Alameda?

DUKE: Yes, Alameda Mall. Yes. That was fairly new there.

JOHNSON: Yes, that was the late '60s [1968] when they built it.

DUKE: Yes, as far as that kind of shopping I usually always went there. I didn't really go downtown. Later I got a job downtown, but that was later.

JOHNSON: Did you do any shopping locally or was anything available? Or it was just easier to go to the mall at Alameda?

DUKE: Everything was there, I didn't need to go anywhere else. Again I'm not a shopper. We had plenty of furniture. Grocery store was there in Seabrook, I went to that grocery store. I guess the post office was there too. It was all convenient.

Those first years I got together with a couple of the girls that had younger children. One ended up having to leave because her husband had very bad allergies, and so they had to leave the program. Then I became very good friends with a neighbor, her husband was a contractor, TRW. That's the group that I became really close with, people that had kids my age, which you'd do. We would do things together.

This couple, in fact, they loved to travel like we did, and so they'd go on a trip, we'd babysit their kids for three or four nights. They'd come and stay with us; the kids were exactly the same age. Sometimes I'd be feeding two in a highchair, because we're talking about little kids. They had a little girl in a highchair, and I had a little boy in a highchair, feeding them. It was fun. It just was more fun even having their kids there than not. We would leave, and our kids would go over there, and they loved it. We did a lot of swapping, which was really great. People don't seem to do it now, but we did that a lot.

Then I had another neighbor. Her husband worked for NASA and she lived in the neighborhood, and their kids were similar age too. We just spent a lot of time having picnics and going to the pool in the summer and just keeping entertained and just visiting with each other.

Church, we got involved. We first went to St. Thomas [the Apostle Episcopal Church] in Nassau Bay. Then the kids actually went to day school there when they were three. I think they started at three years old then two days a week. I think four years old it was three days a week. Maybe even five-year-olds didn't have—we didn't have kindergarten, I don't think, in the schools. Then they went to Ed White [Elementary] School. No, they had kindergarten at Ed White, yes, that's right, went to school there.

But we decided to try to find another church, so we went to the Episcopal church in La Porte, St. John's [Episcopal Church] at La Porte, and stayed there.

JOHNSON: Were there other people involved with NASA that were at that church too?

DUKE: Maybe some that were not close friends, but I'm sure there were some people that worked in some ways at NASA. Sure.

JOHNSON: When you first came down, I know it changed with different astronaut groups, but with your group was there any kind of meeting or anything with his group and with the wives that NASA had arranged, kind of a welcome to NASA kind of thing?

DUKE: No. I think they had already started the wives' club then, that Marge [wife of Donald K. "Deke" Slayton] had started that. Gosh, I thought it was once a month, but I don't think it was that often. But it was very informal, and we'd meet at people's houses. I went to those and got to meet other people and other girls.

JOHNSON: Would the wives, when you first got there, did they introduce themselves, the ones that were already there, and welcome you into the wives' group? Or did they just invite you to come?

DUKE: They were nice. They already had their group, their friends. It was nice.

JOHNSON: Did you interact more with his astronaut class group, their wives, more than with the ones that had been here previous? Or was it pretty much everybody just interacted together?

DUKE: I guess so, because the interactions mostly were pin parties and splashdown parties, and parties that you always went to somebody's house during one of the events. You would just choose one of the wives, and it was mostly Apollo. We got there in '66 and so I can't remember if the crashes, [Charles] Bassett's accident¹—it happened about that time.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DUKE: There was these kind of things going on too. But when I talk to the other wives now, everybody's a little different I guess. When there was an accident and somebody died, I didn't hear talk about it. It was just okay, move on. I didn't feel any sense of heaviness, or panic for sure, nothing like that. Pilots are steady, they're steady. I just learned to be that too. You have a problem, well, okay, you do what you can and then you move on. That was the kind of thing. I don't think Charlie and I really talked about, "Oh my, that means you're going to die"—never anything like that. I never probably used the word die in front of him. He was optimistic, and I was optimistic. Even with the [Apollo 1] fire², because that happened soon after we got there, even with that, it was just okay, they're going to fix this, they're going to fix this, they had a lot of things wrong.

I knew the guys. Not well, but I'd met them at something. Ed White lived close, and so I remember going by his house to see Pat [White]. But in our house, there was never this feeling

¹ Astronauts Charles Bassett and Elliot See died when their Northrop T-38 Talon crashed at Lambert Field in St. Louis, Missouri, on February 28, 1966.

² Apollo 1 crew, consisting of Virgil I. "Gus" Grissom, Edward H. White II, and Roger B. Chaffee, died in an accidental fire on January 27, 1967 during a plugs-out test at Cape Canaveral, Florida.

of you're in a dangerous business and something's going to happen or could happen. I never felt that way.

JOHNSON: I know some of the wives have mentioned that their husband came from test pilot training and that type of world where people were dying occasionally anyway.

DUKE: Yes. When we were out at test pilot school, I don't think anybody died when I was there. Some people died after we left, but I hadn't been around that. People that married their husbands even before they became a pilot, it's probably different. Here, I'm married to one who's been a pilot for what, five years now, maybe more than that. He was a good pilot. He said he was good, I believed him. Just took it.

I do think that they struggled more if they maybe saw them begin. People wash out and that kind of stuff. I never saw any of that.

JOHNSON: I know you said you didn't talk about it, but did it weigh on you? Did you worry about the—especially once the flights were getting closer?

DUKE: No, no, no. It was more like, "Oh, I hope he gets that flight, I hope he gets that flight." That's what he was there for, to get a flight. I tell people today. "Were you scared?" I say, "No, no." In fact by the time he got his flight, and Vietnam [War] was really strong, and people were dying over there, and he would have been there. In my mind I was in a better place. In fact I just looked at it this way. How can I be worried about my husband when 400,000 people are working to make a safe trip? I know where he is. People are getting shot at, husbands are

getting shot at and dying in Vietnam. How in the world can I have any excuse? That was what I felt really.

JOHNSON: Yes, you had a better deal.

DUKE: Yes. I don't want to use that word but just a complaint? No. I was more like Charlie is—competitive. The guys wanted to fly. You wanted your husband to fly. I had no idea if he would get on one of the missions. Most of my time really was not reflecting on that, it was just taking care of the kids and doing what I was supposed to do at home. Taking care of the house, mowing the yard, doing all those kind of things you had to do.

JOHNSON: Doing all the things he wasn't there to do, so you had to take it on.

DUKE: Yes. Moving the furniture when they had to take the airplanes off and a hurricane was coming. We stayed there, made sure the furniture wasn't going to fly around outside. You had a lot to do. I was more concerned with what I had to do.

JOHNSON: I know like you said they were competitive. Did the wives feel competitive for their husbands?

DUKE: Yes, I never felt competition with the wives. We were just doing this together. I didn't feel competition, I just knew that they all wanted to go, and I wanted my husband to get it. I say competition now, but I really didn't even feel competition back then. I found out later that some

people were actually trying to politick themselves into a flight. Charlie was never that. It was just you just do your job, and he was doing what he was called to do, and maybe he'll get a flight, maybe not. Competition isn't the right word for me to use, no. It's just that he's there to fly and it'd be nice if he gets a flight.

I guess the overall feeling was we want to beat the Russians, and we've got this assignment, and it's supposed to be done by such and such a time, and by golly let's do it and work hard doing it. I'll do my part by taking care of the house and doing the jobs I had to do there. I felt a part of it. I was doing what I was supposed to do. I was focused on my job for this. This was bigger than all of us, and it was an important thing, and beating the Russians sounded like a wise thing to do. I was more caught up in that.

JOHNSON: Was there ever any implication from NASA, or even the other wives, that you had to make sure that things were calm for your husband?

DUKE: No. The other wives mentioned that. I think they were taught it in the military. I was never taught that, no.

JOHNSON: You didn't feel any pressure even from NASA to toe the line, make sure you didn't do anything that would upset anybody?

DUKE: No. Barbara Young [wife of John W. Young] told me that. That's how I first heard it. She tried to keep things from him because she was told that she wasn't supposed to [upset him]. I wasn't told anything about that. Whether I could have done it or not I don't know. Of course

they're working so hard, they're not paying much attention to what you're saying most of the time anyway.

JOHNSON: And they're male.

DUKE: And they're male.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I was going to say even if they're not working that hard.

DUKE: Yes, male, yes. Charlie has a better excuse now. His hearing is terrible. But back then he really didn't have an excuse for ignoring and not paying attention.

JOHNSON: Were you involved, or did you have the opportunity to take part in the *Life* magazine contract also like the earlier astronauts?

DUKE: They signed it. I don't think *Life* ever came and did pictures. Maybe they did something right before the flight, I don't remember anything. But it was just that the policy was that the contract now is for more people.

JOHNSON: Were there any perks involved?

DUKE: You have a car.

JOHNSON: Oh, okay, so you had the car.

DUKE: The car, yes, that was nice, I mean my gosh! I think for \$1 we got two cars. A pickup truck and a station wagon I guess they were called back then. We were very practical. He didn't go for the Corvette.

JOHNSON: He wanted to get more than one person in a car.

DUKE: Yes. He liked the pickup truck, and he's had a pickup truck ever since. I'm fine with that. I'm not in cars. He's not that much in cars. That was a perk. Oh, and sometimes we'd get invited. We got to go to a lot of activities that were down at the Astrodome. That was nice to go to those events and things like that.

JOHNSON: Were there any formal events? I know for some of the wives we've talked to this was the first time, coming from the Air Force or Navy, to be involved with an event where they needed a formal dress. Then once they got to NASA there were events where they had to dress up. Do you remember doing any of that when you first got there or while you were there?

DUKE: You might be invited to a cocktail party or something and you would dress up for that. But in Atlanta I went to things there when I was growing up.

JOHNSON: You were used to that.

DUKE: Yes, dressing up.

JOHNSON: When you got together—you mentioned there were other get-togethers like the splashdown parties and those kind of things—in your neighborhood, were there barbecues or any kind of impromptu things that would happen in the neighborhood?

DUKE: No. We didn't have any neighborhood stuff.

JOHNSON: That's interesting. Even after flights? I know if there were several people that were involved in NASA, places like Timber Cove, sometimes when the guys would come back, they would have little events, parties, block parties and things like that, for them. Did they have anything in El Lago?

DUKE: The only thing close to that was that somebody built a wooden American flag, and the lights were the colors of the flag, and so whenever anyone flew, they'd put that flag in their front yard. When Charlie flew, we had the flag in our front yard. There were neighbors there around the flag to greet him when he came back. But that's the only thing. No. I don't think our neighborhood had anything that I know of. We had a swimming pool to get together with during the daytime, but I don't remember much at night.

Entertaining, we did a lot of just couples for dinner that were neighbors and friends. Charlie was into hunting, so we met people through hunting. He was into golf and so we met people through golf that were in town. We had a lot of friends that were in town. We'd go up to Champions [Golf Club] and we had friends there. Still are friends with them. He'd play golf up

there and I'd go up and visit. We were involved in a lot of different things around the whole city.

JOHNSON: Sounds like it. What about activities that you would do outside the home? I know you had small children, but were there any other activities besides the wives getting together? Did you volunteer at school or at the church or that sort of thing?

DUKE: Yes. I volunteered at the boys' home there, teaching English as a second language. I got that book—oh gosh, I used to always remember the name of that book—it was some special way to teach kids reading. That was fun, teaching the kids there. Did that for a while.

Also when Head Start opened there, I went there and worked at Head Start and was a volunteer. It was all volunteer stuff. Volunteered there. With the church, I was involved with leadership roles and different roles with church. As I said, when the kids went to school, then I got a part-time job downtown at a travel agency, because we had met these people through hunting. I worked there. I wasn't trained, I just had odd jobs. But I learned how to write tickets. They did back then. I also was given all these past due bills, and so I was supposed to contact these people and try to get them to pay. But I enjoyed that, it was in the Rice University area, and I'd drive in for that.

JOHNSON: Which was a drive back then.

DUKE: Yes. Did that. I tried to keep involved.

JOHNSON: Were your kids in scouting? Boy Scouts?

DUKE: We did Indian Guides. I think they both did that. Then sports. Oh yes, we really did get involved in sports. They did baseball. Started off with T-ball. Went all through that up until we left. Then when soccer came there, we went to a meeting, and they were looking for people to coach soccer, and so I pushed Charlie and he started coaching soccer. We went to a lot of soccer games, baseball games. It was just those two sports. But then he started doing golf with the boys too when he started staying home more.

JOHNSON: Was that after his flight?

DUKE: Yes, it was after his flight. Because before his flight, I guess what was hard, you were there, and there were such opportunities like when we would be invited to the Astrodome to see things, and meeting people, and invited to go deer hunting. He went deer hunting for the first time there. But then he would get invited to go hunting in Oregon, to go the Super Bowl in Florida, and all these other things. So not only was he traveling during the week with all the things that they had to do, then he would start traveling on the weekends too.

That's when it became a little tough, because I kept thinking you're choosing the Super Bowl over your family, you're choosing this over the family. Yet I wouldn't say anything to him, because it is an opportunity, and I knew he wanted to do it, a once-in-a-lifetime sort of thing. But then you also have this feeling of neglect and just rejection, and that started during that time. If you've read the book then you know I went through a lot of that during that time, and just was waiting for the time to be over for that. But that was the struggle.

JOHNSON: During that time when you were having those feelings that he was gone all the time, did you talk to any other wives about that at all?

DUKE: No, I didn't.

JOHNSON: Did you talk to anyone about it or have any opportunity to talk to even a professional person if you started feeling bad?

DUKE: No. When it got bad, I talked to my daddy about it when I went home to visit. But no, I didn't talk to anybody else, because we were all in the same spot. I'd go to church, and people would say, "Well, where's Charlie now?"

"Well, he's so-and-so." That was all the time. It just seemed like all the time. He was gone a lot of weekends. They just used to have me at church, not him.

JOHNSON: Did you ever wish that you could talk to someone other than your father?

DUKE: No.

JOHNSON: I know some wives didn't want to do anything that would reflect poorly on their husband.

DUKE: No, I wasn't thinking about that. It was just my situation, and again, I guess I was thinking that after this is over things will get better. Every situation I was in that wasn't so good, it was just it'll get better once.

JOHNSON: Once it's over.

DUKE: Once it's over. It wasn't till he came home from his trip I realized. It's not going to get better. I had a number of those already from MIT, from Edwards, and then the flight, and then I didn't have any more excuses after that. It didn't get any better. That's when it blew up, not blew up, but that's when I really did get depressed. Then I did start looking for answers, I guess you would say.

JOHNSON: Nowadays, it's not a stigma to look for answers and try to find out what's going on.

DUKE: No, no.

JOHNSON: I think you mentioned self-help books, and there's so many now that people go to, and everybody puts everything on the Internet. It's like every time they stub their toe it's on social media. But during that time people didn't talk about stuff like that as much.

DUKE: No. Because again you were part of the sacrifice for what the country was doing. It wasn't just what Charlie was doing, it was what the country was doing, and it was a big thing,

and so you shouldn't complain. Your husband had a job that he loved, and it was important, and so it's not right to complain and get all down or anything like that. He didn't know really.

He knew I nagged. Sometimes we would go out to eat, and this is sad really. We'd go out to eat. I wanted to sit next to him, both boys wanted to sit next to him. Finally one time he said that the boys were before me because they were little and they couldn't understand. I knew I was way down on the list. Job, boys. Way down on the list.

JOHNSON: I can imagine that was hard, especially if you didn't have people you could confide in, but it's nice that you did have your father.

DUKE: It wasn't that I didn't have people. I could have. I had a real good friend and I could have. But it was just—

JOHNSON: I guess everyone else was in the same boat. So you felt like there wasn't anything that could be done.

DUKE: Yes.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Do you think it was generational? Because this is something else we've been talking about.

DUKE: Yes, there's a lot of generational, yes, I think a lot generational. Our generation before the war is very different from the generation after the war. Very very different. Even in college

I identified with people that would have been in college when my mother was in college more than people that were in college that were born after the war. There's a big gap there.

I was alive during World War II. That was a sacrifice. My daddy left. He was gone two years. Two years. No phone, no nothing, except these little letters that the government printed up that you would write on that would come every so often.

JOHNSON: They would redact things out of those letters sometimes too.

DUKE: I don't remember seeing that. Maybe they did. But he was gone two years. We went to live near my mother's sister, and you were part of the effort.

JOHNSON: That translated to NASA too that you were part of that effort.

DUKE: Yes. I think everybody who experienced World War II just had that mindset that sometimes you sacrifice, and that's good. In fact it's a valor, I looked at it, you sacrifice. I love to sacrifice spending money on stuff so you could have it later for something. I didn't buy much.

JOHNSON: About the community itself, there wasn't a whole lot there before NASA got there. It was a very small community.

DUKE: I didn't look at it as that small. Edwards was small. This was big compared to Edwards.

JOHNSON: That's true. But the area did grow quite a bit after NASA got there and the communities started forming.

DUKE: Yes. Nassau Bay was already there, and a lot of the third group moved there. That was big. Timber Cove was there. Clear Lake City was beginning I guess, some, but nobody moved there, because I guess it really wasn't much. I don't really remember what was in Clear Lake City at that time. But my heavens, we had Seabrook, and all the shops and things there. Nassau Bay had all those things there, and all the big buildings along NASA Road 1, even though it was just two roads. I didn't ever feel like I was in a small community, because I like small communities.

JOHNSON: Do you feel that the community supported NASA with everything, as far as that feeling in the community that we're here, we're providing restaurants and stores for this NASA family to get them to the Moon?

DUKE: I'm sure they must have, but I didn't meet them. It was just contractors and NASA employees. Of course you would meet them at the parties. I probably didn't meet the normal people that were living there, except we went over to buy shrimp a lot. One of our neighbors, he had a shop, shrimp, he had boats. I did know them. There were some around I'm sure.

I think everybody was very proud to have the NASA group there that lived there. I never felt any resentment and it was just very happy, positive time, and friendly. Schools were good. Our yard, they'd ride their bikes right through, a lot of people along this area. We had a nice little path and that was great, it was fun. The people that bought it put a fence up. But I'd ride

my bike in the neighborhood. I had a bike, and it [the landscape] was flat. You'd see people outside riding bikes. Their kids were playing outside all the time. It was very much outside, outdoors. We had a little boat that we could put in the water and went fishing over there, and we water-skied in the lake with our little boat. All of us. I don't know if Charlie could get up on that boat, but I could. It was 35-horsepower, so it wasn't a big boat. A little boat. We enjoyed that. We really enjoyed picnicking and going all around in the boat.

JOHNSON: I know a lot of people took part in the water activities because you lived there, right on the water.

DUKE: Yes. Our kids could just walk to the place where they could fish. It was the boat ramp right there because we were right on Lakeshore [Drive]. They could just walk. The kids went out all the time, so I'd ring a bell at dinnertime and that would bring them back. You didn't worry about them. Dogs went everywhere, there was no dog law then, anything like that. Our dog went everywhere.

I had a big bell; I still have it. I'd ring, and they'd hear the bell and know they were supposed to come home and eat dinner. It was really just a very open neighborhood. It's a shame how things have changed.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DUKE: But it was very much like that then. We moved when they were just—I think they were 8 and 10. Anyway, one was in third grade and one was in fifth.

JOHNSON: They weren't that old when you left. That's interesting. Some of the kids we've talked to feel that it was a unique way to grow up.

DUKE: It was.

JOHNSON: Just to have all these different people, and in and out of other people's houses, growing up.

DUKE: Yes. You didn't call first. Just went and knocked on the door, or opened it, because it wasn't locked probably.

JOHNSON: You mentioned some of the splashdown parties and other parties. Can you just for a minute talk about some of those parties and where they were and what you remember? If any of them stand out in your mind, some of those celebratory parties.

DUKE: I think I was at Joan Aldrin's [wife of Buzz Aldrin] house for splashdown. Of course I remember the ones that came to my house. People would bring food or some drinks or something. Charlie likes to call it "between a wedding and a wake." But you really came in a joyous mood, but then when you started watching TV, then you'd all get quiet as the thing was going to happen, whatever, they land on the Moon or whatever it was. Then when it happened, the splashdown, and you'd bring the champagne out and cheer. Just a lot of food there. Again, you just picked which one you wanted to go to. You would pick which house to go to and

spread them out. I don't know if it was intentional, but I was just trying to figure which ones to go and sit with. Mary Haise [wife of Frederick W. Haise], we were close to them, because they lived not far away too. We're still very close to Fred and we went to their house.

You just sat on the floor or in a chair. The contractors' wives would come too.

JOHNSON: Really?

DUKE: Yes. Each wife whose husband was flying was assigned an astronaut. I was assigned Alan [L.] Bean. He would be there a lot, just checking on you, there if you had any questions. You had the squawk box in there.

JOHNSON: I was going to ask you if you could listen to it.

DUKE: Yes. I didn't listen to it much really. By the time Charlie flew, they didn't have it on television, the walks, so I went to Mission Control, which was fun. My family was all there, his family was all there. You were really busy during a flight, very very busy. I didn't have trouble going to sleep, I was so tired, but I'd wake up early thinking, "Okay, now what do I have to do today, what's going on?"

JOHNSON: What other activities were you doing besides going to Mission Control to watch what was going on?

DUKE: Oh, well, you were entertaining these people and taking them around.

JOHNSON: Family?

DUKE: Family. Yes. I had family at the house. My mother and daddy and my sister. Daddy pulled a piece of glass on his nose and we had to take him to the doctor, get that sewn up as they were going into lunar orbit. Just common things that happen. Just trying to decide, the kids want to go to school, is it good for them to go to school, or is it better for them to stay home?

The press of course. I was told if you go out there and you give the press a story, then they're done, just go and do it. We had that, the press. The other wives, one wife wasn't being interviewed at all. John Young had just remarried, and so she kind of hid out and didn't get interviewed. The other one was expecting her first baby and so she didn't want to have a whole lot to do with interviewing, so I just tried to do it so they'd have the story.

JOHNSON: We've heard stories of some of the neighborhoods, buses of tourists in the early years would come through.

DUKE: No, we didn't have any of that, no.

JOHNSON: Okay, you didn't have that. Just press during a flight.

DUKE: Yes, and not that much. Of course it was getting soft really by 13, but then when they had 13 and the problem, then the interest came back again, so 14 they focused on some, and then

15 was the first time they were there a long time. Then by 16 there was nothing really new, so there wasn't as much interest in coverage then.

JOHNSON: I know your husband was working during Apollo 11. He was CapCom. Could you keep up with what was going on with Apollo 11, what he was doing as CapCom?

DUKE: Yes.

JOHNSON: We've heard the video so many times of what he said about everybody turning blue. Could you listen to that?

DUKE: No. I heard it later, yes. He told me. I was home with the kids. It was on Sunday afternoon, and it was really getting close to bedtime. I was doing all that. Then after they landed, before the walks, he came back, and then we woke the kids up. I think it was like around nine o'clock or so or later that we woke them up so we could see it on TV together.

Yes, I was pleased he was asked to do that, but I never thought of it as being any big deal. But he did such a good job with that quote, didn't he?

JOHNSON: Yes, he did. He did do a good job.

DUKE: It became a big deal. Yes. In fact after all the missions I don't think any of us felt like this is something that's going to change our lives. It's just something you're doing now, and they'll have programs after this, and they'll keep going, and there'll be no interest really in the

Moon flights at that time, because there'd just keep progressing. That's I think what's made the big difference.

I think what's made the big difference is the progression did not go further out, and also that private enterprise started getting interested. I think those two reasons are why the lunar mission became a really big deal again. Because he speaks all the time now. Probably after he finished his flight and we left and moved up here, there wasn't speaking for space for years. We got into Christian ministry. Through all the '80s and a lot of the '90s our travel was all Christian ministry.

Of course they wanted him because he had walked on the Moon. But the purpose was to go and to speak for Christ. Really not till 2000 did all this sudden interest [happen]. These guys are getting old, I guess we better have interviews with them, we better do this with them. Now there are only four Moon walkers left. It's just overwhelming.

JOHNSON: It is, when you think about it, it really is.

DUKE: But I don't think anybody there—at least I never talked to anybody that thought oh, our husbands are going to be famous. I wasn't interested in him being famous. I was interested in staying home.

JOHNSON: You wanted him to be home with the family more than out being famous.

DUKE: Yes.

JOHNSON: He was backup for Apollo 13, wasn't he?

DUKE: Backup for 13. He was sick. He was the one that got the measles. He was still in his bed. He was probably pretty well, but he was still in his bed with the shades down because of the measles when they had the accident. But he got up and went on. He was able to get up then and go on to work, so he left and went to work then.

All during that time too, again, I never discussed it with anybody. Your mind is just—it's kind of like holding your breath, but you just hold it for days. You don't say anything, you just wait and see what's going to happen. No discussion. I don't remember discussing that with anybody. I didn't know that Charlie thought that they weren't going to get back at first. I was listening to stuff on TV. But you don't want to make a decision, you don't want to make anything, you just want to—let's see what's going to happen.

To me, I look at that mission as a success, because they got them back. It gave me more respect for NASA and Mission Control and that they could do everything. They did through Apollo. Maybe not afterwards, but they did through Apollo. Skylab too. I think they probably did fine through Skylab.

He was backup on 17 too. We were the only—no, I won't say that, this sounds whiny. I won't say that. But he had to go to work right away. There wasn't too much time after the flight to travel and then he had to go back to work.

JOHNSON: When did you find out he was going to be on 16? Did you already know?

DUKE: It was when he was told he was going to be backup on 13, and that was right after 11, he says. I didn't remember, but I heard him say that recently. Because you knew you were going to be on three flights later. If everything worked fine, you did not do any skiing. I don't think he skied at all the whole time we were at NASA. Not until he flew.

JOHNSON: Keep the kids away from him if they're sick. We've interviewed a lot of mostly men that have worked for NASA because that's who worked there in that time. A lot of them, especially some of the guys in Mission Control, describe how totally focused they were on this job, with getting a man to the Moon. Everything was filtered through that, and they were at work, as you know, long hours. Everybody was doing their job. But there was a lot of other things going on in the world during that time. The '60s were tumultuous to say the least. Civil rights, women's movement, all these other things, the hippie movements and protests against the war, and the war itself.

A lot of them were almost oblivious to what was happening. But you and the kids, were you more aware of what was going on socially?

DUKE: I watched TV, and so yes, I did hear it.

JOHNSON: You were talking about how much volunteer work you did before, so I was wondering if you were ever involved in any of these civil rights type movements or anything.

DUKE: No. It was just sad. The antiwar part was very sad. The civil rights protests had been going on kind of before.

JOHNSON: Early '60s, right.

DUKE: Because with Martin Luther [King, Jr.], he was already assassinated. [President John F.] Kennedy and everything. That was all earlier. I don't remember a whole lot with that. There might have been the time a Black girl went to university and the National Guard came out during that time. I can't remember. I remember that being a big thing. But you get involved in what your job is. No. I didn't get involved in any of those things.

JOHNSON: You mentioned that you didn't think your husband was going to be famous. We've talked to people and they had no idea how the world was reacting to Apollo 11 or the Apollo Program, that everyone was following it. Did you realize how the rest of the world was following it?

DUKE: I guess I did, because I surely watched on television, and they would have shown all that then. But I wasn't thinking so much of this makes these guys famous, although probably I did think that maybe a little bit. But it was just that yay, United States, we did it. The cheering. It was just we got to another place. Not a planet, but we got to the Moon.

It was excitement. But there are excitements when somebody wins a World Series and people move on. But I knew it was bigger than that. It was a big deal. It was a big deal. But that it would continue 50 years later, no. I felt sorry for Neil [A.] Armstrong too when I hear more and read more. Just seeing what little bit Charlie went through, and Gus [Grissom]. Much more now. He was such a sweet shy person, and to be thrown into all that. That's really hard.

These were people that they were engineers and they were pilots. They weren't politicians. Some of them became politicians, and some of them enjoyed doing that, but not everybody did, and he was one who didn't.

JOHNSON: How do you feel that Charlie handled it as far as that part of it?

DUKE: Charlie is okay with that. He's a people person. He enjoys that. He enjoys talking about it. He never gets tired talking about it. He'll almost do any interview he's asked. He's just very congenial. He does fine. I've had to find my place in that. The Lord provided that.

JOHNSON: Did you go to the launch for Apollo 16? Were you there?

DUKE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Where were you during the launch?

DUKE: At the family area.

JOHNSON: What are your memories of that? Were the kids there? Did they get to go?

DUKE: Yes, and all the other astronauts. It was family astronaut viewing area. If you wanted not to be in the stands and you wanted to be private. There were a lot of people there. I don't

remember who all was there, but yes, all of our family was there. Mother, Daddy, aunts, uncles, everybody. We had a lot of people, because that was fun to watch it there.

JOHNSON: Then you just came back to Houston after that? You didn't stay in Florida?

DUKE: Yes. We had to do the press conference after that. I went over and did that.

JOHNSON: What was that like?

DUKE: Again I was the only one.

JOHNSON: The others didn't talk to them?

DUKE: Susy [Feldman Young, wife of John W. Young] was sitting somewhere else, I guess, she wasn't there. [T.K. Mattingly's wife, Elizabeth Dailey Mattingly] was pregnant and so she didn't come down for it. I was the only one there that could do it. The kids went with me, and that freaked them out.

JOHNSON: I can imagine.

DUKE: If you've read the book, that was a bad moment, because our oldest one didn't like all the confusion. He didn't like to be picked out of a group. I told the press immediately, "You can ask me questions but don't ask my kids any questions." The first question asked was to that son.

From then on, he would not get near the press. He would not even get up on the stands when Charlie arrived at Ellington [Field, Houston] and they asked for all the families to come up here and greet your daddy. He greeted him down below, but he was not going to get up there on the stands.

Press I don't have really a lot of love for. We traveled around in the States speaking. He's speaking, and next day I'd read in the newspaper quotes for what he said, and it wasn't what he said. I learned then you don't believe what you read in the newspaper.

Then Charlie had to go back real quick, so he went back. I don't know how. I guess he flew his jet back. His jet – they all called it their jet – but one of the jets back. I got a ride back with somebody.

Back during that time, the contractors could fly us around. We could accept gifts from contractors back then. That changed.

JOHNSON: He took a photo of your family to the Moon.

DUKE: That's right.

JOHNSON: Was that something that you talked about before he left?

DUKE: Yes. I think it was his idea though. We got a guy that worked at NASA who takes pictures to come over and take the picture. He got it approved with Deke and put it in this plastic, and we all signed it. He took it and put it on the Moon. Again, I had no idea, and I'm sure he had no idea, that was going to become so famous too. It's used in a lot of books and a lot

of places it's mentioned. But it was neat. I was just so glad that when he dropped it it landed upright, not upside down. I guess he would have gotten on his knees and turned it over. But that was nice.

We sat up. They were really good, and I guess the girls told you this too, that in their flight manual on board they asked you, "Would you like to put some things in there to surprise them?" The kids drew pictures. Both of them drew pictures of space and stuff like that that they snuck in there. Then we had cards that we put in there, and just different things that he could see and read. He brought those all back, which was nice.

JOHNSON: Nice mementos.

DUKE: Yes. He explained well to me what they were doing. I asked a lot of questions about the geology and all the different trips, the survival trips they went on. We talked a lot about what he was doing, so I was pretty much up. In fact I even went to San Jacinto [Community College], a junior college there, and took a course in geology, so I'd know some geology a little bit, so I could converse with him on that. Trying to be part of it, much as I could.

JOHNSON: That's interesting, just trying to understand what he was looking for?

DUKE: Yes.

JOHNSON: When he landed on the Moon were you back in Houston by that time, or were you still in Florida?

DUKE: Oh yes, we came right back that afternoon after the press conference, came right back to Houston, and the rest of the time was in Houston. We were there with all the family, everybody.

JOHNSON: Were the kids old enough to understand? You said it wasn't televised. But you could see it at Mission Control? They could see that their father was on the Moon?

DUKE: Yes. There was one time. I guess we hadn't gone to Mission Control yet, because there is a picture of them. It was really cute. There were cousins there too, and neighborhood kids there too. We put a television in the garage for the kids, and they sat out there, and so there's a cute picture of our sons taking a picture of the television with their daddy walking on the Moon.

JOHNSON: That's neat.

DUKE: That got in the newspaper. There were some cute pictures like that too. Talking to them now, there was a guy in Switzerland who wanted to do a movie on the picture that was left on the Moon. He came and interviewed the kids, and one of them said that when his daddy went to the Moon it was like he was going on another trip. Neighbors had gone to the Moon, so it was Daddy's Moon.

But he was the one also that was scared of the press and he also first didn't want to watch the fire coming out of the rocket. It's funny. They say they don't remember really much. They only remember what we've told them. Sometimes I wonder well, gosh, did they just hide it down inside them?

JOHNSON: I was going to ask you that, because in the book you talk about that depression that you felt, or the feelings, and Charlie talks about feeling that way after he came back. That feeling, “Okay, I’m back. Now what?”

DUKE: Oh, now what, yes, he would never say depression. I would never say depression either.

JOHNSON: Not depression. But that feeling of “What do I do now that I’ve been on the Moon?” That’s the feeling I got from what he said in the book. Do you think that NASA was aware that some of the men coming back were feeling that way, and they just ignored it? Or like you said, it was generational that people kept those feelings to themselves? At the same time he can’t be the only person that felt that way. You can’t be the only wife that felt that way. Even the kids, if there wasn’t really any support for that at that time, was there?

DUKE: No, there wasn’t any support. As a wife, you felt more like just don’t rock the boat. But see, NASA was still working on the next flight. They had not instituted a program like that. Gratia [K.] Lousma was one that really helped that get started after all this was over.

JOHNSON: She told us that she helped get that started.

DUKE: She did. She was the person I think that got it started. Along with Marge [Slayton].

JOHNSON: Did you go to those meetings?

DUKE: I was gone by then. This was later, much later. No, they didn't have anything like that. Everybody just dealt with it their own ways. I just praise the Lord that he came. Because as you know from the book, I became suicidal.

JOHNSON: Yes.

DUKE: Yes. Charlie is more of a what's next kind of—he's not a deep thinker. When I told him I was suicidal he said, "You'll feel better tomorrow," and he turned over and went to sleep. I had been that way before. But now this was getting bad, where you're wondering what life is all about. I'm philosophical too, a thinker along that way.

Most of the guys are not that way. They just don't think that way. We were very different in that respect. Just wondering now what life is all about when your marriage is not good, and you try different things, and you know money is not the answer. You can go through those things and just figure, so you die, and there's nothing more, and so what's the point.

If people would think that, I think they would all come to the Lord or kill themselves. One or the other. Unfortunately, a lot of people are killing themselves. Very sad. Suicide has really gone up in teenagers, young people killing themselves, because they have come to that point, what's the point in life. It's sad. And life is sad. It's tough. If you have nothing to look forward to and no hope and you think when you die that's all there is, then of course you're going to think kill yourself.

It's sad. I wish I could talk to all the people that are suicidal, that are thinking about it, and depressed. That's my motivation to get out. Just for anyone. Because when the Lord

showed me, he was real and there is life after death and that he's with me and loves me and all that, my, thank you, Jesus.

JOHNSON: Your life changed.

DUKE: Oh, totally. Totally.

JOHNSON: I read that you went to that weekend revival. It was a special event at the church.

DUKE: Yes. Faith Alive.

JOHNSON: Yes. But you'd been going to church your whole life. But that was different.

DUKE: Right. But in the Episcopal Church and a lot of the mainline churches, you go and you get preached to. We'd have preachings. I was in Sunday school. I was even a Sunday school teacher. Okay. But I was also christened as a baby, so I'm supposed to be a Christian.

Now all I'm supposed to do is live and be a good person. Well, I'd been living and being a good person all my life, but I was drained. I had been giving love out, but I wasn't getting any love in. You get to a point where you're just dead inside. I'd become dead inside.

It wasn't until these people came and told me I need to become a Christian, that I'm not a Christian, that I need to become a Christian, I need to put my faith in Jesus, trust him with my life, and follow him. Just believe that he died for me and that he's taking care of that and that he

loves me and he's real. Because as I said in my book, I thought that he wasn't even real at this point. I was an agnostic even though I was going to church.

But there's a difference. That's why I like the name Faith Alive, because that's what it did. If you had even a little bitty faith, which I really at that point didn't have any, it was to make it become real. God talks to me. He'll tell me when to go over and talk to someone when we go on trips. He brings people to me, and I can witness to and tell them, and he arranges everything.

I know that my life in him, he's in control, and there's no coincidence. Whatever happens to me, whether it's surgery I had this past year or whatever, there's no coincidence. God is working good through it, and he's using me to bring others to him. My whole purpose is to show the light of Jesus in me and tell people who he is and become more and more like Jesus. That's my purpose.

He arranges things. God of the universe. I love the universe now more than I've ever loved it. During the space program, yes, but I love it now. Of course the Hubble [Space] Telescope I guess has helped, by seeing all those beautiful pictures. But the Lord is going to let me, and maybe even go with me, I don't know, but he'll send an angel with me or somebody to go throughout the whole universe, and I'll see all these things face to face.

I told the Lord, because I love sunsets, I've always loved nature, I've always loved the outside. I've loved God's creation forever, not really knowing it. All these people are taught evolution, and they're taught they're just an animal. It's sad. It's sad. I'm not an animal. I was created by God, and all people appeared by God, we're not animals. So we shouldn't act like animals. He loves us and creates. He created all this and all that.

They haven't found the missing link; they're never going to find it. We've been to conferences where they're almost all atheists there, and the Lord has opened the door to be able to witness, even to some very well-known atheists. Thank you, Lord. Just to hopefully give them a chance. Make them think a little bit.

I just love you, Jesus, and I just want everybody to know, because when you really come to know Jesus, he sends his Holy Spirit. Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. When you give your life to Jesus, he enters through the Holy Spirit into you, and so you've got the Spirit in you that converses with him and that converses with you, and that fills you with strength and power. Right now since I started talking about the Lord just the Spirit in me just starts getting bigger and bigger and bigger, because it's just so excited. I'm so excited because it just wants me to talk about the Lord.

There's a scripture in the Old Testament. The fire within me, I can't stop it. It's there. That's the Holy Spirit. That's when I became born-again, when I asked Jesus into me. That's when we become a child of God, not because we are christened or baptized even. It's when we accept Jesus and he sends his Holy Spirit to live in us. Now we're a child of God because we have God in us. It's all in the Scriptures. But the churches have messed it up. A lot of them have messed it up. We're not in the Episcopal Church anymore, we're in the Anglican Church. But it's a Bible-believing Holy Spirit church. That's what I tell people to go to and that's why the mainline churches are going down in numbers, because they're not giving any life to anybody. They tell us how to live. But yes, you can live, and you can love everybody, and then you get sick. How do you deal with that? You have somebody die. How do you deal with that? It's only when you know him, and you know there's life after death with him.

JOHNSON: When you realized the path you wanted to walk on, was Charlie accepting of the change in you as far as—because like you said you had problems.

DUKE: I was worried about that. I was very worried about that. Yes. We had had problems. That's when I told him about being suicidal. Then after that was when the Lord came into my life. Then I didn't tell him right at first. But then one night in bed I told him. It's in the book, I think. Yes, I told him. I said, "Charlie, I can't depend on you anymore, but I can only depend on the Lord."

I had suddenly realized that I was depending on Charlie for my happiness. He's supposed to love me and make me happy. We're supposed to be this team and I'm supposed to be fulfilled because I married, from him. We're that close. We live and help fulfill each other. I realized that no, he couldn't. Or he wasn't, then, I realized. Then, later, he couldn't. He's human. Only God can do that. God, every time I'd say, "Charlie doesn't love me," would say "But I love you. I love you so much. You have more love than you even need."

I was just announcing it to Charlie that way. Of course he says, "I bring home the money, I pay the bills, I'm home most of the time now." He turned over and went to sleep, and he didn't even remember that. But it was for my sake that I said that, so I could really see exactly what had happened. Yes, I can't depend on him. He's human. We've had our ups and downs, even since he became a believer. That was a number of years later when he became a believer. But Jesus is all I need.

JOHNSON: The community as a whole, and we go back to that for a minute, and your church community and different communities, when these men were working toward these goals do you

feel like did the church did anything special? The church you belonged to, during his flights, did they have any kind of special services or anything like that?

DUKE: Oh, I think that we sang the hymn though. It was first for the military, the Army and the Navy and the Air Force. Then they added a verse, space, going into space. We sang that. They'd ask me how I was doing when I was at church. But no, there wasn't anything like that.

JOHNSON: There wasn't anything special that they did?

DUKE: No.

JOHNSON: One of the things that we hope will come out of these interviews is a chapter for a book that Jennifer will be writing, and it's about how the women played such a central role in creating these Clear Lake communities, because they were the ones that were home. They were the ones that were taking care of the kids. They were the ones that were making sure everything was going to work and creating the communities for the men to be able to come home and partake in.

DUKE: Yes. But it's not just the astronaut wives. You have all these contract wives, the people that lived there.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was the women in NASA and that they helped create these communities. Do you agree with that?

DUKE: I guess so, because it wasn't Nassau Bay there and El Lago. I don't know when it was built. There was some community I'm sure there before. But see, I wasn't there at the very beginning. So probably yes. Probably did, because it probably wasn't too much there when Mercury came. Probably wasn't. They probably did, and brought other people in as people—then you brought the restaurants in. You brought all the other stuff in too.

JOHNSON: When did you-all decide to write the book?

DUKE: It was in the '80s and we'd been sharing a lot. Just thought it was time to write the book. We'd been encouraged to write it earlier. But that would have been about space. The experiences we'd been having with the Lord and what he had done in our life, that deserved a book. That's why we dedicated it to the Lord. But see, we left right after I became a believer.

JOHNSON: Okay, so that was right after that.

DUKE: Yes. I became a believer in the fall in October, and we left in January. Wasn't there long after believing.

JOHNSON: Were you happy with his decision to leave NASA?

DUKE: Yes. I'll have to say one reason was because of the women coming in.

JOHNSON: Really.

DUKE: Yes. The women astronauts. I'll have to say that. It was a big problem during the Apollo years, women chasing after the guys. A big problem.

JOHNSON: These are just women in general.

DUKE: Women in general. A lot at the Cape [Canaveral, Florida], but just everywhere. The men were getting big heads, and they'd come home, help take the trash out, but they'd go off somewhere, and the women adored him. Thought he hung the Moon or whatever. There was just a lot of temptation, a lot of problems, during those years. I didn't know it was as bad as it was until later. But it was bad. Very bad.

To have now women come in [as astronauts], and they're going to be with your husband working with him all the time, traveling with him all the time, isn't that going to cause a problem? Yes, of course it's going to cause a problem. And it did cause problems. I don't know what you do. It would cause problems on ships when they brought women on ships. You can't put men and women together in close contact for situations without there being problems. It's going to be. So I was very glad to leave. Yes. We had enough problems, we didn't need that.

In fact he was asked to run for office in Washington, DC. I said, "I'm not for that." It would have ruined our marriage. I was a believer, but he wasn't.

JOHNSON: You said you didn't find out until later. How did you?

DUKE: All the stuff that was going on. I knew some of it. I remember Barbara Young [first wife of John Young] and Donn [F.] Eisele [first astronaut to divorce while active], those were coming out while we were there.

JOHNSON: Do you think you found out later because then people were okay with talking about it in later years?

DUKE: Probably more so. But there was some undercurrent.

JOHNSON: People were getting divorces.

DUKE: Yes. Once Donn got a divorce then [others followed]. Rumor was that if you got divorced you wouldn't fly. It wasn't until after they found out that you could divorce and still fly. It opened up the gates more.

JOHNSON: I know you said your marriage was having problems. Did you worry about that coming out and affecting his career?

DUKE: No. Everybody was probably having some problems. But not a divorce or anything like that. I didn't think about divorce until after he came back. I thought he'd come back and be ready to pay attention to his wife.

JOHNSON: We've heard that—from them and from people around them—they were just very focused individuals. They wouldn't have been test pilots if they weren't.

DUKE: Right. But you could still—Jack [R.] Lousma was a believer then. You can do it. I look at the ones since then. Nobody talked faith then. It was just religion was not a conversation at all among anybody as far as I know. You went to your church or whatever, but there was a feeling that you shouldn't even talk about it among the men. It might affect whether you got picked or not. That changed I guess with the Shuttle coming in, that group.

But you can still be focused on your job, but you can also show love and compassion to your wife.

JOHNSON: That's true. I think Jennifer might have a couple questions.

DUKE: Yes. You're going to write a book then?

JOHNSON: There's a book, it's being written by different people, like Jennifer, historians, and for NASA.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes. It's an anthology. There was a conference last year, and it's about NASA and the South.

JOHNSON: The effect it had on the cities it was in in the South.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Different looks at things. Sandra and I went to this conference, and there were different presenters. But they didn't like the fact that no one from Johnson was there, and no one from Johnson had presented anything. They said, "Hey, would you write a chapter?"

I said, "Sure."

They said, "We want you to write a chapter on why Houston was selected."

I said, "Everybody has written about why Houston was selected."

DUKE: LBJ [President Lyndon B. Johnson].

ROSS-NAZZAL: Exactly. One of the things we had been talking about was the community and how NASA really changed the community. That's really what I'm trying to focus on, is that community.

DUKE: But again that's not politically correct anymore, in a way. Almost all the people there, college-educated, very middle-, upper-class area.

JOHNSON: That's one of the reasons it's different, yes.

DUKE: Now they want instead to mix up and to bring high-rises or whatever in these wealthy areas. They want to bring other people that are very poor in there. That seems to be what they're trying to do. I don't think it's a good idea but that seems to be a politically correct thing now. Because if you've got people coming in that are all of the same level, education, money,

and everything, it's going to be very congenial, and it's going to be wonderful schools. Which was very nice, made it very very nice. It worked well, and so it's good.

JOHNSON: It was a unique area.

DUKE: It would be interesting, how that would go with the people that want to make everything all mixed up.

JOHNSON: This is history.

ROSS-NAZZAL: To me it seems like a very unique place at a very unique time.

DUKE: There are others, when you go out. The tech people, that's all in the same community, same idea there. They built that community.

JOHNSON: Silicon Valley [in California] and around Austin, it is different.

ROSS-NAZZAL: But to me what the interesting part is is that you moved to this area where there weren't a lot of people. There were small communities. There was Kemah, Seabrook, and Webster. But they were very small. Then all these new people came in with this new idea, we're going to the Moon, and everyone seemed to rally behind that. That's one of the things that I want to explore. Was everyone behind it, and why was everyone behind it, and what unified everyone? That's what I'm trying to look at. What were some of those threads?

DUKE: Beating the Russians. You can look north of Houston. Golf courses start getting built out there. The Woodlands. That developed a whole community out there. You can develop these around big cities, suburbs.

ROSS-NAZZAL: But were they unified by this one goal? Because that seems to be the major theme that unified. You've got these contractors. You've got civil servants. You've got spouses and kids. Everyone is in favor of this program.

DUKE: They all got jobs. It's a good place to work. The jobs were there.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Was the job the driver or was it something else?

DUKE: Oh, the jobs would have been the driver. If you didn't have jobs for the people, there they wouldn't have come. I would say the jobs. They built their buildings. Once NASA cut down, people left. The jobs weren't there. They didn't stay because it was a nice community. They had to leave because they didn't have a job. I'd say that that was really it. Then now it's gotten built up again because things are supposedly moving up again. Hopefully they are.

ROSS-NAZZAL: So many people moved in with young families like you. What impact do you think that had on the community? You mentioned some of these couples that you got to know very well and would swap babysitting duties with. What impact do you think that had on creating community in your neighborhood or in the Clear Lake area?

DUKE: You had to build schools, and you wanted to have sports, and you wanted to have a swimming pool. Everything that kids would want. I guess I don't look at it any different from a lot of places that people move to because of certain jobs.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You don't think that that community is unique, you think it's very similar to other communities?

DUKE: Yes.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I just had a couple other questions, one being we've talked a lot about your book and your experiences. I wonder when that book came out did you hear from the other astronaut wives? What was their response to the chapter?

DUKE: Not too much. No. Because a lot of them have written books. A lot of books are out, a lot of astronauts have written books. That part about the faith you mean? Is that the part you're talking about?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Your chapter, your experiences of feeling [depressed].

DUKE: That part of it. Not too much conversation. Some have brought it up, and given us a chance to witness, and to share and things like that. Some want to not get close to it, to discuss. It's been mixed among the group. Both wives and husbands.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did they express that they were also feeling a lot of those same things at the time but were afraid to talk about that, to share that?

DUKE: No, I think about it, I don't know if anybody has ever said that.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I was just thinking about it because when we spoke with JoAnn [P.] Carr, it was right after her novel came out. She said that she had read a chapter to your group at one of the reunions and she said it was dead quiet, that no one said anything, and she wondered what that meant, but that other people started coming up after and said, "You really captured what it was like to be an astronaut wife better than the other publications."

DUKE: Yes, I remember she told me about one person that said that. Yes.

ROSS-NAZZAL: The only other question I had. I was just intrigued at the beginning. We were talking about you building your home and how the builder quit. Charlie wasn't around much, and you obviously were doing a lot of the negotiating on things. Would you talk a little bit more about that? You were pregnant and you had a young child. What were some of the things that you had to negotiate and how seriously was this builder taking you?

DUKE: We had to pick the things out, choose all that stuff. I'm not good at that. But the places I went worked out okay. But negotiation. At that time, you could build a house, and he'd give

you the price that he wants you to pay him. They don't do that anymore. He had a set price he was going to build this on.

If he had to redo something he's losing. See? It's not that well, okay, so I just charge you a little bit more because I have to redo it.

JOHNSON: It wasn't cost-plus.

DUKE: Wasn't cost-plus. It was that set price. There wasn't really any negotiating. That was part of the bid I guess. When we put it out for bids. But they learned not to do that anymore. But you could do that then. It was a set price. I don't remember having to negotiate.

Now carpet or something, you would pick one, and you'd pick which price you liked on that. That was different. But it was just interesting, going over there, and we can move in.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I imagine. A lot of guys talk about how they were young when they were working at NASA. All of the things that were expected of them at such a young age. It seems like it was the same for you but in a different way, that you were expected to be very independent and carry the burden for your family in other ways.

DUKE: I'd say probably most of the wives were independent. Just had to learn to be that way through the time they were married. Maybe that's the kind of wife a person like that is looking for, I don't know. Could be.

JOHNSON: I was just wondering what you majored in in school, in college.

DUKE: Art. You want to know why?

JOHNSON: Why?

DUKE: Because my mother said I had talent and she wanted me to take art lessons all through high school, and I wouldn't do it. I told her, "Well, when I get to college, I'll take art." That's why I did it.

JOHNSON: You didn't have any expectations of a career or moving further?

DUKE: Oh, no, no, no, no, no. I like the art history part more than I like the applied art, even though I graduated in applied art. I like history more than anything now.

JOHNSON: That's interesting.

DUKE: Yes, it's funny, I can see how you're talking about the community and everything, but it was a good place to live at that time. It really was. I look back now and I'm glad we moved down there. But I didn't want to stay. I think most of the wives in our group, didn't most of them leave? I'm trying to think. JoAnn Carr stayed. I don't know if anybody else did.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I'd have to look through the list of names.

DUKE: I think the first groups were closer-knit than our group was. Maybe because there were more neighbors and people lived in different places, so many of the third group lived in Nassau Bay. The second group lived in Timber Cove, seemed like. Although we had both in our area too.

There must be a lot of areas like this. University towns, people come. People go where jobs are.

JOHNSON: That's true. Was there anything else that you wanted to add before we stop?

DUKE: No.

JOHNSON: Okay, and you'll have a chance to do that after you get your transcript back. But we appreciate you taking the time to talk to us today, we really do.

DUKE: Appreciate you letting me getting off on my love of the Lord.

JOHNSON: This is your oral history, and that played a big part in your life and helped you get through a hard time and got you through that hard time. That's what's important.

[End of interview]