

# **NASA JOHNSON SPACE CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

## **EDITED ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT**

KIRK GRIFFIN  
INTERVIEWED BY SANDRA JOHNSON  
HUNT, TEXAS – NOVEMBER 13, 2019

JOHNSON: Today is November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019. This interview with Kirk 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 for letting us come to your lovely home.

GRIFFIN: Thank you.

JOHNSON: I want to start by talking about when your family first moved to Houston. Do you have any specific memories of that time?

GRIFFIN: Very much so. We moved from Fort Worth to Houston in 1964, and I was five years old at the time. My sister was just over a year; she'd been born in March the year before. We moved in the summer of course because of school and everything else.

It was a new adventure. We trucked off to this place in Houston. My mother at that point thought it was godforsaken that anybody would live on the Gulf coast of Houston, because you went to Galveston to visit, and sweated. It was hot and sticky. Now we're moving there. But I always laughed later on, because when we moved there, people still talk about JSC as being in Houston, and there was a vast separation at that point between Houston and JSC.

It was an interesting place to move to. All of our dads, the small group of us that lived in [the Nassau Bay planned community]—we moved into Nassau Bay in 1964. Nassau Bay has

survived very well and aged very gracefully in almost 60 years, 55 years. We lived right up against the front of Nassau Bay. The roads weren't finished in the back part of Nassau Bay, we called it the back part. It was where the trees were. That whole area had been I think part of the [Colonel Raymond] Pearson [Spirit of 1776] Ranch. The old Pearson mansion—we called it a mansion, it was a big old wood two-story frame house, sits about where [Houston Methodist Clear Lake] Hospital is now, looked out over Clear Creek and that little bay in there.

Big oak trees, Spanish oak, looked like a Southern plantation kind of thing. Of course as a young kid later, growing up, the house was haunted. We spent a lot of time playing over there. Probably not all that smart, but we did.

But Houston and JSC were very separated, and later as I was growing up, and people would say, "Oh, you're from Houston."

"No, I'm from the Clear Lake area."

"Well, that's in Houston, right?"

You're like, "No, I'm from the Clear Lake." Because although Houston was close, it was a 30-mile jaunt, and you didn't do it unless you needed something. I don't remember going to Houston until the Astrodome was built. I remember going to ball games with my folks and whatnot later on.

But it was a big deal to go to Gulfgate to go shopping. Everything else was local in League [City]—there was nothing in Clear Lake. At that point Friendswood Development had built the golf course over in Clear Lake City. There were some surrounding buildings around it, a school, and they started building houses around. That was the first part of Clear Lake City that started developing. But there was nothing in between. It was flat, you could see all the way across.

Of course what used to be NASA Road 1, NASA Parkway now, I was thinking about it when you guys said you were coming up, I later went to elementary school and middle school in Webster. There was nothing between Clear Creek, the creek that is there behind where Frenchie's [Italian Restaurant] is, that creek, and there was nothing between there and the railroad tracks and Webster. There was one building on the south side of the road, and it was a bar and restaurant over, it was a dozen different things during its tenure, sat about where the Putt-Putt [FunHouse] golf course is, across the street from Mamacitas [Mexican Restaurant] and a little bit toward the Center.

Yes, it was remote. Literally when we moved into Nassau Bay, NASA Road 1 wasn't finished. It was two lanes, and I remember driving down gravel roads from Highway 3 to Nassau Bay. It was pretty rough. Everything was getting built. The Kings Inn hotel which sat across on the Space Center side of NASA Road 1, right across from Nassau Bay, had been built. There was a Holiday Inn on the Nassau Bay side, and there was the Crest Hotel which sat on the corner of [Point Lookout Drive] and NASA Road 1 that was across from the old main entrance, across from Space Center Houston now. That was the building that had the NBC studios up on top, that during the flights we'd see the guy, the Space Center behind him. Not Walter Cronkite, but Jim [James L.] Hartz and those guys would be in there.

We'd go over as kids and have elevator races in the Crest Hotel, it was seven stories tall, and we'd go over there and we'd each jump in an elevator and push the buttons, see who got to the top the fastest. Crazy things.

Then of course the shops in Nassau Bay. Most of those are gone now, but the old gingerbread style stuff, those shops were the first ones built. There was a Piggly Wiggly in

there, and my mother wouldn't shop in there, she shopped down in League City at the real grocery store [Thrifty Market] in League City, right by the railroad tracks.

It was remote when we first got there is really probably the best way to say it. NASA Road 1, after you got past the Center, kind of turned into a cow path. The folks that lived over—I had family friends that lived over in Clear Lake Forest area and Taylor Lake area. That was way out there. We're going to go see these guys. Oh, well, they live all the way over there. Some of my folks' best friends, the [Arnold D.] Aldriches, lived in Friendswood, so we spent a lot of time between Nassau Bay and Friendswood. Rod [T. Rodney] and Tina Loe, lived up near Almeda, so we went to their place.

It was neat. It really was its own little community though because it was remote, so it was fun. It was interesting. Of course the Center wasn't built when we first got here—they were in the process of building it. Steel structures, and you could see it all happening. But everybody's dad worked in rented spaces. My dad's office was up in town, or up off the Gulf Freeway. Every time we drove someplace to either come up here to see my grandmother, or to go to Fort Worth to see my dad's dad, it was like okay, there's Dad's office, and it was just a little warehouse building that they had overtaken while the Center was being built.

Those things are documented actually. I wish I had dug it up. If I find it, I'll send it to you. I found a book. I've always loved the history part of the Center because we were there at the beginning. But I found a book and pictures that shows all those office buildings and their locations. It was done early on. Evidently you walked in the door, you got your badge, you signed the papers that said you were going to work, got your insurance covered, and they handed you this book and said, "Okay, you're in this building, go to work."

JOHNSON: It'd be interesting to see that, yes.

GRIFFIN: I know where it is, it's over in my office in my shop. I'll dig it up and get it to you in this process.

JOHNSON: Okay. We'd appreciate it, yes.

GRIFFIN: It's really kind of neat. There were guys that were up near the medical center in town and everything. It was like where does your dad work, when you started comparing notes with your friends.

Then of course the buildings down in the Nassau Bay area started getting built, TRW, IBM, those kinds of things. In fact the IBM building is the building that was built right behind our house. We were right by where the Nassau Bay Baptist Church is, and the IBM building is still there. But that was an adventure, to have a commercial building being built over the wall from your house. Of course there was dirt and all kinds of stuff for boys to go explore and tear up and do things.

In '65 I remember a lot of construction. When we first moved down there that was really the biggest thing. There was nothing there, and so everything was getting built. I look back at it now, and being in the construction business now, it was crazy. Just absolutely nuts. You take a whole bunch of pastureland that's barely above sea level and say, "Okay, we're going to build houses and buildings and everybody's going to live here."

Now you go down there and you can't imagine it not being like that. That was neat, that was real neat.

JOHNSON: When your family first moved into that house—and like you said a lot of houses weren't built yet—but were there some other people living there?

GRIFFIN: When we moved onto our street, Nassau Bay of course has no through streets. Everything goes in and comes out [on one street]. Because the water is on one side, NASA Road 1 is on the other side, so everything goes in and comes out. Our street was a set of cul-de-sacs that were right up at the front.

The only people that ever drove down our road were the people that lived there, or people that were lost. You could always tell somebody lost because they're like, "Oh, how do I get out of here? I'm in this maze and I can't get out."

When my folks bought that house, there's was only a total of maybe 14, 15 houses on that whole complex of three cul-de-sacs, and maybe half of them were occupied, and the other half were all getting built. If you went two streets toward the creek from us, toward the lake at the back of Nassau Bay, there was no houses. Then you went about another—when they started paving the roads—then you got to the big old oak trees that are in the back of Nassau Bay that were beautiful. Our part of Nassau Bay had no trees. Now you drive in the front part of Nassau Bay and there's these huge, majestic trees but of course they're all 50 years old. My climbing tree was an inch and a half in diameter when it got that big. It was the typical tract home in South Texas. They built the house and they gave you a token tree. My mom, having come from this part of the world, she always wanted a pecan tree, so I remember my dad going out and dutifully planting a pecan tree for my mother. I promptly almost ran over it with the lawn

mower about a year and a half later and killed it, but it survives to this day, and it's finally a big tree, but it's 45 years old or even older, 50 something years old.

We were envious of the kids that lived in the back of Nassau Bay because they had trees that you could climb in. We were out in the prairie up at the front. That's what I notice about Nassau Bay now going back, is the subdivisions, they've aged so well, and nine-tenths of it is because of the trees. Big, beautiful trees now. Before it was just cow pastures. The charm in the community, you get over in Nassau Bay and El Lago and even over in Clear Lake City. Both my parents played golf, and I grew up working and cleaning clubs over at the golf course, and it was a prairie over there. It was a great long golf course distancewise, and they always said they'd have the Houston Open there if it had trees, because you got out on the back nine of the golf course and you could see Ellington [Field], there was nothing in between, there wasn't a stick, it was just flat. You could see all the hangars up at Ellington about four, five miles away.

That's the part that has really aged very well in our little piece of Nassau Bay there. I'm amazed at how well that subdivision has done. It's just crazy.

JOHNSON: Like you said, it was a barren prairie basically. A lot of the people that came to NASA came from Virginia and places like that, and this was like oh, my. They weren't used to it. Like your mother, coming from this area.

GRIFFIN: Coming from this area. But then you had guys like John [W.] Aaron, who came from Oklahoma, and thought it was great, because he had been in Oklahoma, and there's nothing in Oklahoma. Parts of Oklahoma, very nice, my wife's family is from Oklahoma, at least half of it is. But yes, I know exactly what you're saying.

But then what's funny though is a lot of the guys that got hired about the time that we showed up, after the initial crew came from Virginia out of [NASA] Langley [Research Center, Hampton], a lot of the guys that got hired were from Mississippi and East Texas. The Rod Loes of the world went to Lamar [University, Beaumont, Texas]. Born and raised in Southeast Texas. You look at guys like Bill [William] Moon and Dan [Daniel M.] Germany and those guys, and they're all from Mississippi, all went to Mississippi State. Jerry [C.] Bostick is a Mississippi guy.

A lot of those guys came from areas that weren't a whole lot different than what they found when they got to JSC. It was kind of out in the sticks. Why [President] Lyndon [B.] Johnson decided to build it there versus in Johnson City [Texas] or something we always wondered. But the price for the land was right, Rice [University, Houston] and Humble Oil were willing to make it happen, so it worked. It worked.

JOHNSON: Yes, and I think that access to the water had something to do with it too.

GRIFFIN: A little bit, a little bit. Although—yes.

JOHNSON: But it's interesting, you were talking about planting trees and everything, and I hadn't really thought about that, but one way NASA affected that area is actually transforming the way the landscape looked.

GRIFFIN: Yes. You still see it today. If you just go up the Gulf Freeway even from El Dorado [Boulevard], and the land on the right-hand side, there's still those blank areas in there that have



the pipelines, and the high-power lines are in there, everything looked like that. The scrub stuff wasn't even there.

As you go up Highway 3 toward Ellington and on the left-hand side it's just raw land, it was just that as far as you could see. Later on when I started my time down there in '83, our house that my wife and I bought, our first house was in a little subdivision off of 518 called The Landing, and literally it had been a little dirt strip airport. But when I was a kid on one occasion my dad knew somebody, and they knew somebody, and I was playing bird dog for my dad and Arnie Aldrich, and I think Rod Loe and a guy by the name of Gary Evans [phonetic], and I was the "go fetch the damn bird," I was the nine-year-old bird dog. Those were rice paddies, and we were hunting out in those old rice paddies, and later my house was sitting right there.

It is amazing. That South Shore Harbour area. South Shore Harbour was a former military base. It had runways. When I got to JSC in '83 you could fly over that area and still see the runway layout before they built the golf course at South Shore. It was flat, there wasn't a bush, there wasn't a tree, there wasn't anything. Yes. It would be interesting. I think that Clear Lake area, had the Center not been there, would have looked like the west side of Alvin. There's nothing between Alvin, going toward Angleton, there's nothing down that way. That's what it looked like when we moved in.

Then there were little spots of buildings and houses, and everybody was planting something to try to have something green and tall.

JOHNSON: Not so flat.

GRIFFIN: Yes.

JOHNSON: When you first moved there, and being five, six, seven years old during that time, talk about the neighbors that were there. As you met other kids in the neighborhood, did you realize that everybody worked for NASA at that point? Or was that something that you were aware of?

GRIFFIN: I didn't really realize it until we moved away in 1973 when my dad went to NASA Headquarters [Washington, DC]. From '64 to '73 I had grown up in that community, that was all I knew. I tell people this, and I say it kind of in jest, but it's the honest truth, that I thought everybody's dad wore short sleeve white shirts with ties and no sport coat and worked at NASA or worked for a contractor. Because everybody in the community's dad, and some moms, that's what they did. Everybody. They were either civil servants or they worked for TRW or IBM or UNIVAC or one of the contractors, Ford Aerospace, Philco at the time. A bunch of the people in Nassau Bay were Philco guys. All of your friends, the guys that you did scouts with, the guys you did swim team with, the guys that you rode bikes with and went and played in the creek with, was somehow associated with the Center. The whole area was that way though.

Like I said, I was 13 years old, we moved to Virginia, and I was like, "Wow. What does your dad do?"

"Oh, well, he does this."

You're like, "You don't work for NASA?" It was really one of those things where it was that oh wow, gee, okay, there's other things in the world other than NASA and the Space Center. That was all that was there. The only reason all that stuff was there during that time was because the Center was there. It's not that way anymore.

I know by the time that I left 20 years ago, very rarely did you run into somebody that worked at the Center. There were some of us down in League City, but it was a handful compared to the environment that I'd grown up with where everybody's parents somehow, everybody's well-being was tied to the Space Center.

I was in seventh grade, and I had a history teacher by the name of McDonnell [phonetic]. Seventh grade, this was 1970, '71 timeframe. I was at Webster Intermediate. The principal at the school, his last name was Puckett. At that time there was a band called Gary Puckett and Union Gap. We called them Mr. Puckett and the Generation Gap was the principal and the staff. It was still when kids could be kids.

But anyway, I had a history teacher named McDonnell and again I'm sitting in the classroom with kids, and these are people that I've gone to school with since kindergarten. It was that kind of environment. You knew everybody in the school because you guys had all been to school first, second, third, fourth. You switched every year the little groups, but during your tenure at Webster Elementary or Webster Intermediate you went to school with everybody.

We had this history teacher named McDonnell and this was after Apollo 13. One day we're sitting in class, and there's a little backstory, but he stated that we don't really go to the Moon, and it's all fake. He was one of those guys. Come to find out his dad was an evangelical preacher of some sort, and technology was evil and all this stuff. But to have a job in Webster, Texas, in the early 1970s when that's all that's happening there, it's either that or you're in the oil and gas business, and he said that. I stood up. Like I said, it was after Apollo 13. I stood up and I said, "Mr. McDonnell, you're lying. Because my dad wouldn't have been gone for three days if it wasn't for real."

I walked out of the classroom, and I walked straight into Mr. Puckett's door and I went tap, tap, tap. He says, "Yes, can I help you?"

I said, "I just told my teacher that he was a liar and I'm not going back to that class."

He said, "Well, have a seat. Let's talk about it." We talked about it, and the next fall, that guy wasn't a teacher there anymore. I don't know. But I went back the next day, nothing else was ever said, he was still the teacher. But to be in that environment and that setting, to have somebody say that really blew me out of the water, especially as a 12-, 13-year-old kid. Because everybody in there was associated with NASA at the time. Every one of those kids in there. Otherwise you wouldn't be in that area. There just weren't those other people there. It was crazy.

JOHNSON: That's interesting. Thinking about the schools and the influx of all these families, and they were all young, the average age in mission control was 26, so people were coming in with young families. The Webster schools were already there, the ones in Seabrook were already there. How do you think that changed the schools in the area, having all these kids come in all at once?

GRIFFIN: The old part of League City, later on when we went to Clear Creek High School. I moved the summer before. I started high school at Clear Creek, but I'd developed friends, and later on even in college I ran into guys that had grown up in Seabrook and went to Clear Lake High School. League City was its own entity by itself before the Space Center showed up, and it kind of stayed that. The elementary school and middle school down in League City. Some of

the League City kids came to Webster for intermediate school, so we started knowing them before we got to Creek.

We always thought the guys over in Clear Lake City were a little different. The Clear Lake City schools, because they were all brand-new, they had no influx of native kids. Webster had some native kids, because Webster was a community before the Space Center was built. We had some kids whose families had been in Webster, between there and Friendswood, forever, and they were just part of our—we'd grown up with them.

The kids in Clear Lake City were kind of isolated, because they were all NASA kids, and there was no influx from outside. Those schools had been built solely to support the subdivisions that were built in Clear Lake City and Clear Lake Forest.

There were some differences there. I talked about it. There's a guy that is actually just retired as a coach at Ingram High School. Coached my boys in cross-country when they were in school. Loren grew up in Clear Lake City, and his dad was a NASA contractor, and he said, "Yes, everybody that I went to school with, everybody, was somehow tied to the Space Center."

Webster was a little different. We had a little bit of mixture. Of course the League City guys. When we went to high school, they had just built Clear Lake two years before I would have started high school there, so they split Creek. That kind of continued to support that effort. Lake became the everybody wore Izods and the button-down shirts, the preppies. Then Clear Creek was all us guys that wore cowboy boots and jeans, because it was kind of a country school. That difference was in there and you could see it.

It was because Creek had the influx of the local community into it, whereas at Lake, everybody's folks were still associated with the Center. Loren Greenshield and I have talked

about that because of that. He says, “Oh yes, there’s no doubt.” His dad worked for TRW, I think. There’s definitely that in that community.

I got to know those guys in Clear Lake City between scouts and doing jamborees and campouts, and then playing golf. I played golf at Clear Lake Golf Course, and the Creek and the Lake guys practiced there, so we knew our counterparts at Lake. I got to know more and more of the kids that lived over in Clear Lake City. But there was a line there.

For a lot of years the Creek and Lake division did not go very smooth. It’s kind of funny. Now there’s six high schools in Clear Creek schools or something. It’s crazy, it’s nuts. But yes, and that was when they divided the first one, because there was only one high school.

JOHNSON: Since you were going to school with the natives as you described the people that had already been there, was there any difference when you were going to school? Did you feel like oh well, my father works for NASA, or my father doesn’t work for NASA? Any of that? Did you fit in really well with the kids?

GRIFFIN: The funny thing, because the world was so much different, nobody really thought anything about—it didn’t matter. The majority of my friends’ families were associated with the space business, but we had friends outside of it because of school activities. In fact some of my best friends later on were from Webster. I’m sure you guys were the same way. It’s amazing how as you get older your friends change and morph, and you find people that you have things in common with.

I was into coming up into this part of the world when I was that age, riding horses and herding sheep. Those guys, they lived on that. They had horses and cows and cleaned the stalls.

I did it all the time during the summer. As I got older, those were the guys that I also kind of hung out with.

Even later on when my dad went to California, when he was at [NASA] Dryden [Flight Research Center, now Armstrong Flight Research Center, California], all my friends in my senior year of high school—I only went to one year of high school out there—all my friends out there, they all had horses and goats and sheep. They were just like the guys here.

For me it was no big deal. Especially during that time it was not a big deal to work at NASA. Of course late '60s, early '70s, NASA hadn't really done a whole lot yet. Of course 1969 all that changed, and the world saw it for the first time. They'd been doing it for years, but nobody I don't think really paid attention.

I thought it was really kind of cool a couple years ago when *Mission Control: The Unsung Heroes* came out. I'd always thought that the guys in the Control Center kind of got a bum deal, because the astronauts of course are at the tip of the spear. The guys working in the trenches in the MOCR [Mission Operations Control Room], they were the unsung heroes. I thought it was cool when the movie came out because it told that side of the story. There's the unsung heroes at KSC [NASA Kennedy Space Center, Florida] and there's the unsung heroes at [NASA] Marshall [Space Flight Center, Huntsville, Alabama] and all that too, because [Wernher] von Braun's rocket wouldn't have worked without those big old motors on the bottom, and it wouldn't all come together if the guys at the Cape [Canaveral, Florida] couldn't figure out how to play with their big Tinkertoy sets that they had down there.

Each group had their unsung heroes. But I remember when the stuff started showing up on TV I was always frustrated because I didn't see my dad on TV. When he got to be a flight director, I did, because they would. "Gerry Griffin at the post briefing da da da da da says—"

You're like, "Hey, there's Dad, cool. Cool, I'm going to go outside, bye." It was cool that Dad was on TV, but then okay, there's trees to climb and things to do.

JOHNSON: Talk about that media interest. We've heard that because there were astronauts living in these different communities there was a media interest. Do you remember any of that in your neighborhood?

GRIFFIN: Oh yes. I grew up with the [James A.] McDivitts and the [Richard F.] Gordons and the [Michael] Collins lived in Nassau Bay, Kate and her brother. My sister was real good friends with Amy Bean [daughter of Alan L. Bean] and Tracy Cernan [daughter of Eugene A. Cernan] and they lived in Nassau Bay. [R. Walter] Cunninghams lived in Nassau Bay. Yes, we saw, and like I said earlier, Nassau Bay being such a one way in, one way out little town, we rode our bicycles everywhere. Get on your bike and go, come home when it's dark was really how we were. If a mission was going on or something, we'd ride our bikes down there to see all the news trucks and all that kind of hoopla and then we'd go do our normal thing.

We saw a lot of it in the kid involvement because when their dads were flying, they kind of pulled them out and kept them out of the focal point. They'd take them out of school during the mission. I don't know really why they did that. I was just talking with my dad the other day. When the [Apollo 1] fire happened, Sheryl Chaffee [daughter of Roger B. Chaffee] was in my class. I was in fourth grade. Third or fourth grade. I remember them coming and getting her out of school and then not long after that they moved. Fairly quickly after the accident happened.

It was very much the old military family style, is that everybody looked out for everybody else, and Nassau Bay had that feeling. So the press was present, but the community I



always thought kind of pushed them away and made sure that it didn't get out of hand. People would call the police and say, "There's a truck sitting in my yard and I don't like it being there," and make the police come get the press guys to move.

I think the press guys really figured out that ABC, NBC, and CBS can have a vehicle there, everybody else—of course there wasn't anything else. It wasn't this bigglom of people. There were 10, 15, 20 people if something was happening. A lot of us too, we were busy sitting at home watching it happen too, because our dads were involved, and our moms were involved. We didn't go around looking for it, but of course I remember going down. Mike Aldrin [son of Buzz Aldrin] was my [Cub Scout] den chief and they lived down toward the lake in Nassau Bay, and I remember during Apollo 11 being down in there by Mike's house.

But again it was one of those things, oh yes, well, that's Mike Aldrin's dad, okay, yes, cool, okay. Jim McDivitt and Dick Gordon, I didn't think, "That was Tommy's dad." You didn't think about him as he's an astronaut. Guys like Tommy Gordon. There were 13 McDivitt boys. No, not really, but it seemed like it. The McDivitts had five kids. There's [two] daughters and [three] boys, and the McDivitt boys were all hoodlums. They were forever getting us in trouble because they were in trouble. They lived right next to the Gordons and Tommy had a couple of brothers that were older, and Tommy was the youngest. Tommy was my age, so Tommy and I hung out together, and we were forever getting in trouble because of the older brother, hey, you guys need to do this, and we'd do it and we'd get in trouble. "Well, they." "No." Typical boys.

I think my mom told you the story. That was the one water-skiing down the street in Nassau Bay, and the cop goes, "Boys, you got to stop," and I'm just water-skiing. We had had a tropical storm, the streets were flooded, Nassau Bay went under when it rained hard. The storm

sewer system was not as good as it is today, and all the roads. I literally was skiing behind a 12-foot johnboat with a nine-horsepower Mercury on the back of it. The cop was standing there going, “Boys, you got to stop. You got to stop.” It was the McDivitt boys that got us to do that.

But you didn’t think about their dad being an astronaut. Brian Cunningham went to camp over here [in Hunt] at Camp La Junta with me one or two summers, and I had known Brian, he was younger than I was. But no big deal. It was one of those kind of experiences that we talked about a minute ago. Got to camp. All these guys are like, “Your dad is an astronaut?” Like, “So?” Okay, yes, his dad is an astronaut.” I didn’t think. You just didn’t. The whole community was all in the same line. When we got out of the community—we didn’t think it was anything different. Yes, he’s an astronaut, okay, cool.

JOHNSON: That’s one of the questions I wanted to ask you. At what point did you become aware that the rest of the world was watching what NASA was doing? Especially with Apollo. Like you said, you’d get away from it, and it’s no big deal to you, but it’s pretty impressive to everybody else.

GRIFFIN: In 1973 when we moved to Virginia was really that first experience. I started a new school that I didn’t know anybody. I was a freshman in high school. We moved up there before my freshman year in high school, and I was in an environment where a lot of government, a lot of civil servant kids, because of course we’re in Vienna, Virginia, which is 13, 14 miles out of DC.

But there’s Forest Service and everybody else’s kids. People talk. “Where are you from?” You tell them. “What does your dad do?”

“He works for NASA.”

“Oh, you know an astronaut?”

“Yes. No big deal.”

They’re like, “Really? You know somebody?” I was about 13. All of a sudden, you’re in a different part of the world that’s not 100 percent space business. Yes. That was about the time it hit me.

Virginia was very much that way. California was a little different, my senior year in high school, because of the Edwards Air Force Base and the Dryden Flight Research Center. Of course Palmdale is right there, and so they were building [Space] Shuttles. There was a lot of space business in the Antelope Valley. Again, it got to some locals, and then the aerospace business people. Probably 80 percent of the people I went to high school with, their parents were somehow in the aerospace business. I saw that there.

Then I came to school at [Texas] A&M [University] and my folks went to Florida when my dad went to KSC as the Deputy [Director]. Of course the Space Coast is ate up with it. The people that aren’t NASA folks paid attention to it, because it was so much of their community. When I would go to Florida to see my folks at Christmas and whatnot, it was always very interesting to me how in tune the locals in the Space Coast part of Florida are to the space business. The fact that the [*Florida*] *Today* paper had next launch in the top right-hand corner. Even people not associated with NASA or anything knew when the next launch was going to be because they’d all go outside to watch them.

It was like being back in Houston for me a little bit when I was visiting because everybody was in tune to what was happening up at the Kennedy Space Center.

JOHNSON: Do you feel like that same attention in the Houston area was paid to what was going on?

GRIFFIN: No. I've got friends that I grew up with at camp that I'm still friends with that grew up living, as you and I were talking about earlier before we started, that lived up Westview, that part of Houston, River Oaks, the Heights. Those guys didn't have a clue. I'd come up here to camp. Those guys didn't have a clue what was happening 30 miles away, not a clue. It was like really, guys, there's a big world out there. No. Houston at that point did not pay attention. I thought it was really cool this summer sitting here, I'm watching an Astros game, and the Johnson Space Center Center Director is sitting in the press box talking to the guys during the game, and they're making a big deal about it. Hey, I used to work with him.

Even to the point that when my dad was the [JSC] Center Director that kind of stuff didn't happen. It was after even his tenure as Center Director, and he left in '85, '86, right before *Challenger* [STS-51L accident]. I don't think Houston really paid attention probably until about the time we had *Challenger*, to be quite honest. Kind of a shame to say that. But all of a sudden everybody's, "Well, gosh, we need to help you guys." I don't want to give my dad all this credit. Ah, I'll give my dad all the credit in the world.

JOHNSON: Go ahead.

GRIFFIN: But when he left NASA in 1985, he went to work as the CEO of the Houston Chamber of Commerce. There had only been one other previous head of the Houston Chamber of Commerce, and that was Louie Welch, who was a strong politician in Houston. If you're from

that part of the world you knew who Louie Welch was, at least in my generation. He'd been mayor of Houston [1964-1973].

But the reason that the chamber guys came after my dad was because those guys in 1985 felt that they had to get away from the gas and oil business. They had to start attracting technology industries into Houston. The Greater Houston Partnership was formed at that point, and not just the aerospace business, but started pulling in technical aspects. When that started happening, everybody started claiming NASA, because it became not just oil and gas and NASA, it became all kinds of technology and oil and gas and NASA. You look at the Houston economy now, it's so diversified. It's still prominently oil and gas, but it has diversified a lot in the last 30 years, and that all started happening in the '80s.

Growing up in the Apollo era, the folks in Houston, they didn't know what was going on. Heck, I knew people that lived in Houston and swore, when they were watching an Apollo flight on their TV in Braeswood [neighborhood] or someplace in Houston, that those guys were sitting at the Kennedy Space Center in the Control Center. You're like, "Time-out, guys, wait. I'll throw the flag on that. It's happening here." I really did. I had friends from Houston and the surrounding areas that I spent time up here at camp with that oh, that all happens down at Kennedy. No, it doesn't. It happens all right here. No, it doesn't. Yes, it does.

Of course now, you still run into people though that think that a little bit every now and then. It's crazy, even after all the years, 50 plus years. I hadn't thought about that.

JOHNSON: You mentioned the activities you did and Boy Scouts and different things like that. Just talk about for a minute about those organizations, swim teams and golf or any kind of sports organizations. We know a lot of the mothers were taking big roles in that because of course a lot

of the fathers were very busy. But just talk about some of your memories maybe about the different parents and how they shaped some of the activities that you did.

GRIFFIN: Scouts was a great example. Cub Scouts was all moms, and I don't remember having a male scout leader till I got to Webelos and Boy Scouts. It was a friend of mine's dad, Dick [Richard] Shinkle, who was a TRW employee. Dick had been in scouting.

My dad was an Eagle Scout, and yet in all my time he was always over across the road in the Control Center. I had a funny thing happen to me about a year ago, or it was a little over a year ago because it was when my grandson was born. Somebody asked, "Oh, isn't it great that you got a grandson?"

I said, "Yes."

My dad had made a comment about he's going to be a great baseball player or something. My son played baseball and my dad was a baseball player. He said, "Yes, he's going to be a baseball player."

I said, "Yes, you don't even remember that I was a great baseball player because you never came to any of my baseball games." It wasn't a jab at my dad, it was just that was the way it was. Everybody's mom took them everywhere they needed to go. It was Mom's taxi and the moms in the community did that.

Granted, most of the moms didn't work. They were stay-at-home moms. But of course in that day and age that was still the norm. It was the Ozzie and Harriet bit [television sitcom, 1952-1966]. Yes. The moms ran the place. You didn't want to make the moms mad. All the kids knew that if you got in trouble you talked to Dad. Because Dad didn't have a clue as to what was going on.

JOHNSON: That's interesting.

GRIFFIN: When you were playing the mom and dad game, it was always like wait till—my mom never said that. I never got the wait till your dad gets home, because punishment was then. There's no waiting. You're in trouble now. It was funny though. I remember I must have been 8, 9, 10. My mom, she isn't but barely five-foot-tall. Fairly young, I was already getting to her size, and she quickly figured out that I really don't want to make him mad, because if he really turned around, he could probably hurt me. She told me that one day when I was about 16. She goes, "I quit worrying about punishing you when you were about 10 because you got bigger than me."

I didn't get in trouble that much. All things said and done, we had broken bones and we broke windows and did stupid things, but we were also just kids. We weren't doing anything malicious. I mentioned the Pearson mansion house. At that point in time when we were growing up it sat between Nassau Bay and El Lago, and it was just trees around, it was just a thicket of oak trees, and like I said, beautiful Spanish moss hanging off, it was just gorgeous. I look back at it now and go, "Man, that'd be cool." Then it was just this old creepy house.

I think it was the older McDivitt boys. It was a two-story frame house and you'd walk in, and there was this big staircase. Antebellum type house, with this big staircase that went up. Of course when you're eight years old and you walk in and there's a noose hanging from the ceiling and there's red stuff on the floor, it was haunted. It was all the McDivitt boys, and all the older boys. They would take all of us younger boys. We'd ride our bikes over there. Our Schwinn Sting-Rays with the big handlebars.

JOHNSON: The banana seats.

GRIFFIN: The banana seats, yes. We'd all ride our bikes over there, and they'd all be hiding upstairs and jump out and scare the crud out of us. It was a haunted house. That was the environment. It was kids playing pranks on kids. I got shot by a BB gun over there one time and stuff like that. It was nothing, just kids.

JOHNSON: Being kids.

GRIFFIN: Yes. Older kids and little kids. Older kids are always picking on the little kids. It just so happened that it was the McDivitts and the Gordons. The reason I know one of the McDivitt kids was a girl was because she T-boned my sailboat one day out in the lake at Nassau Bay. I had a little sailboat, and all my friends, we would go out there and go sailing. We spent more time upside down than right side up, but it was just something to do. My little boat was a little slow sailboat, and the McDivitts had a catamaran and it was really fast.

One day we were kind of playing chicken with each other and she T-boned me. I'll never forget. It was like oh my God, she's going to break my boat. She was driving the cat when it hit me. That's how come I know there's at least one McDivitt girl.

JOHNSON: Your mother mentioned that there was a lot of activity around the water. Even as a family you did water activities.



GRIFFIN: Oh yes. When we moved to Houston, we had a powerboat. My mom and dad had bought a boat and had it on Eagle Mountain Lake outside of Fort Worth, on the north side of Fort Worth. Moved to Houston, and had the boat, and one day the boat was gone. I was devastated. You sold the boat. We weren't using it. Dad was working too much, busy busy kind of stuff, and so decided to sell it, and that's cool. They later bought a little sailboat and we had it for a number of years, and then sold it because it wasn't getting any use. I had my little sailboat at that time.

My dad also started crewing for guys that had nicer sailboats on weekends. If he was sailing, he was racing. That's what got me involved in racing. I started racing sailboats when I was little and continued to do it. My oldest son did it all the way through college. He raced for the Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York, because Dad was a sailor.

JOHNSON: Talk about your father's schedule. I know a lot of your friends experienced the same things because their fathers would be gone for long hours. How did that affect your day-to-day life?

GRIFFIN: It didn't at all. We went to school and then came home. Most of the time they were home—heck, we lived across the street from the Center. He was home at 5:15. When they were prepping for a flight, when they were doing sims [flight simulations], they'd do some long duration simulations, and he'd be gone strange hours.

Really the only time his job affected my life was during missions. My bedroom was on the front of the house, and it was the quietest. It was off away from the family room and the kitchen. During a flight when they were on shift work, if he was on some sleep pattern where he

was sleeping when we were home, he slept in my bedroom. Any time that happened, I got kicked out of my bed and I had to go sleep with either my sister or on the couch. You didn't want to sleep with your baby sister, so you slept on the couch.

Literally during that time I'd sleep in a sleeping bag on the couch in the living room and didn't think twice. But it was because they were doing shift work during the flights. But shoot, what was that, six times? It's not like it was—six times for four, five days, six days. They had the dormitory over in that breezeway area between the office side of Building 30 and the MOCR side. But my dad was like, "Why do I want to sleep in a room with a bunch of guys when I can be home in five minutes and take a shower and sleep in at least a bed I own? Might not be my own bed but it's in my house."

During the missions we all knew what was going on. We were quiet and didn't have wild and crazy parties. The wild and crazy parties happened afterwards, the splashdown parties.

JOHNSON: Talk about your memories of that. Some of the neighborhoods had different traditions and had different things that they did. Just talk about some of your memories of those parties or events that you remember.

GRIFFIN: Clear Lake Forest and those, they had splashdown parties that were community parties. I think because of where Nassau Bay was and where the hotels were, and all the hotels had bars, Apollo 11, Apollo 12, Apollo 13 probably, those three, four flights right in there, the splashdown parties were—and of course I was a little bit older. We were out and about on bicycles and running around as preteens and teenagers, as young teens.

NASA Road 1 would shut down. It was a giant party between the Kings Inn, the Holiday Inn, and the Crest motels. Literally NASA Road 1 was just this little trickle of traffic because it was just a giant party out on the road. I'll never forget sitting at the Kings Inn. The Kings Inn had these golf carts that they used. It was one of those motels that was kind of spread out, and so they had golf carts to get you to your room, to take your bags and you to your room.

There was a group of NASA engineers with my dad's group, I know who they were. You know how the pools used to have a little coping stripe, and it was a little ramp up. They figured out if the golf cart weighed X pounds and they got it going fast enough that they could jump the swimming pool at the Kings Inn. Me and I think it was Jeff Shinkle and maybe Jim Martin, we were over there on our bicycles watching all the drunks, and about that time they clear off this path and here comes this golf cart. It hits the edge of the pool and promptly goes to the bottom of the pool and the guys come out sputtering, "Shit, that didn't work." We're all like, "Cool, this is what you do when you get to be an adult." You saw that. Then we'd ride our bike and go home.

As kids we'd ride around, it was cool because we could ride our bikes out on NASA 1 and nobody cared, because it was basically shut down. But it was a big party, yes. They worked hard and then they played real hard. I know this summer, I talked to you guys about John [S.] Llewellyn and whether or not you had had the opportunity to talk to John. The infamous riding his horse into the Singing Wheel [local bar in Webster] and riding his horse to work when Chris [Christopher C.] Kraft kicked him out of his parking place for the last time, and said, "You're banned from driving on the Center for 30 days." So John rode his horse and tied it to the pole in front of Chris's parking place outside of Building 30.

But the world was full of those characters then. I think I might have told you the first Corvette I ever rode in was Ed [Edward I.] Fendell's. Ed didn't get married till I was working at JSC, when he married Donna. Donna was a secretary in Building 1, she was Leonard [S.] Nicholson's secretary when Leonard was the head of the Shuttle Integration Office, and then later the Shuttle Program Office.

But yes. Ed was on my dad's team—they played fast-pitch softball together. I remember I rode to a game to watch my dad play with him. It happened to be on a Saturday, and I could go, and I got to do that. I got to ride from the ballgame back to Ed's house in his Corvette. First Corvette I ever rode in. That was cool. Not been in many others, but that was the first one.

We had a big group of us that camped a lot. The families all got together. We went to Dam B [East Texas] and to Lake Sam Rayburn and Lake Somerville. I swore that John Aaron was the best fisherman I ever met in my whole life. He could catch anything. I thought he was just the cat's meow. Because we'd go set trotlines and run trotlines and get up in the middle of the night with John. We'd go run trotlines. There'd be fish on it. How's that happen? That was the environment.

I'm going to leave him nameless, but another one of those great NASA engineers on a campout, I'll never forget, he had a Styrofoam cup and it had about that much whiskey in the bottom of it, and there had been quite a bunch of water-skiing, fishing, and alcohol consumed over the Saturday. I'll never forget, he was sitting there in this fold-up lawn chair looking at the fire, and he went over and he had whiskey in a Styrofoam cup. He set it in there, and he said, "If I figure it out right, it'll flash and burn in about 15 minutes." Doing all that calculation in their head. It didn't. It just melted and—but I'm not sure that's any different than anybody else, whether they worked for Ford building pickup trucks or whatever. That was just probably about

1968, '69, '70 timeframe. We were just out camping. It wasn't because they were NASA folks or anything, that was pretty normal probably in reality.

Other than the fact that we were kind of isolated for the most part, just communitywise, it was really pretty normal. In fact, if anything, we probably were less progressive in hindsight than the majority of the U.S. in a large city environment, because we were isolated.

JOHNSON: I wanted to ask you about that, because there's a lot happening in the '60s in the world and in this country, and early '70s. There were the civil rights movement, women's movement, Vietnam, all the things that were happening outside of NASA.

A lot of the men we've talked to were so focused on what they were doing, they felt like they weren't aware of what was happening outside the Center. Did you feel like you were insulated from that, being there?

GRIFFIN: To some extent yes. I saw it later on in '73 when we moved to Virginia. I grew up in that environment, and like I said, everybody's parents were associated with the aerospace business. It didn't matter whether you were Ricky Garcia, who was a great great friend of mine. I never thought about Ricky's dad being Hispanic. Ricky was a friend of mine and grew up and went to law school and is now a lawyer. We just never thought about it.

I didn't think about racial stuff. Of course 1968, Watts [riots, Los Angeles, California] happens, DC gets burned. We moved to Virginia in 1973, and there's parts of DC that are still gutted from the fires after Martin Luther King died. You're like, "Well, what caused all that?" That part of it I never saw. The Vietnam War stuff I did, because my dad's twin brother was flying in Vietnam. I experienced the Vietnam War through that. Because Larry's family moved

to Clear Lake City and my dad took care of them. We were taking care of Judy and the kids while Larry was in Vietnam. I saw that one firsthand.

But as far as racial stuff goes, never even thought about it. Get to Virginia, and one of my best friends ends up being a Black guy. He was star athlete at the high school that I went to. We just hit it off. But I had no predetermined—I had never thought about the fact that he was Black. He was just in an English class and we got to talking, and we became friends and we played basketball afterwards. He was on the varsity team, and I'd play pickup ball games with them. But it never even crossed my mind that it was any big deal, until I got mugged in high school. A bunch of Black kids jumped me. I was smaller then. I graduated from high school, I was 5(foot) 7(inches) and 115 pounds. So I was a little bitty blond-headed fair-skinned guy. I got mugged right in front of the high school, and Robert Preston found out about it and said, "If anybody ever touches him again, I will." Never had another issue.

But that was the first time. The only reason they mugged me was because I was white. Never had thought. I didn't think about it. We didn't have those issues. We didn't have the racial issues. That part of it we were isolated from. You saw it on the news, but as a 10-, 11-, 12-year-old, you don't pay attention. I'm sure my mother and my father knew it. But I never thought about it. Yes. That isolation I saw later on, the racial piece.

JOHNSON: You mentioned your one friend who was Hispanic. Was the school you were in—was it racially mixed at all?

GRIFFIN: Oh yes. But we were all just kids. Nobody ever thought about it.

JOHNSON: Because a lot of the schools prior to that, early '60s, things were just starting to be desegregated.

GRIFFIN: The Webster and League City natives. Texas City had Blacks. Dickinson had some. By the time you got up to League City, most of those kids were Hispanic, or most of them were white. Nassau Bay was predominantly white, because everybody's dad was an engineer, and they'd gone to college, and those guys hadn't gone to college and gotten out of school in the late '50s and early '60s yet, because they hadn't started doing that.

Like I said, Ricky Garcia's dad, they lived right around the corner from us. I never thought about the fact that his—his mother was from Mexico. She barely spoke English. But we never thought about it. It wasn't any big deal. It just didn't matter.

JOHNSON: That's interesting. As you mentioned, it was very rural and country when you moved there. There wasn't anything there. Just talk about for a minute some of the wildlife, because we do have a lot of wildlife down there. Being boys, I would imagine that you encountered that quite a bit.

JOHNSON: Oh yes. In some ways there's probably more wildlife now down there in the waterways than there was when I was there. In some other ways there's probably less. We used to do Scout jamborees over where Space Center [Houston] goes around the back side of the Center now. There's a road, I can't remember what it is. There's a water tower there. That was all part of the old West mansion property that Humble owned. We used to do Boy Scout camporees over there. They had alligators. We would see alligators and all kinds of stuff.

We used to go across the creek that runs behind Frenchie's between Nassau Bay and Egret Bay Boulevard. That was all ranchland still, there were cows on that. We would get across in a canoe or raft or something. There were of course snakes and turtles. A good friend of mine, Ken Wilson, lived a couple doors down from us. His dad [Woodrow W. Wilson] actually designed the manned maneuvering unit that they flew in Gemini, a little handheld thing that came out and had little jet thrusters. Ken was always collecting turtles. He had turtles, tortoises, and all kinds of crazy stuff. Yes, there was a lot of wildlife.

But I don't remember anybody getting bit or poked or hurt. We knew it was there. You gave it respect. But yes. Water snakes, cottonmouths, shoot, they were all there. The back part of Nassau Bay when we first moved in still had deer running on it. Of course the houses pushed them out and they basically went across over toward Egret Bay. But there were still a lot of deer running around when we first moved into Nassau Bay.

Like I said, the lack of trees, for the longest time there were a lack of birds.

JOHNSON: Other than waterbirds maybe.

GRIFFIN: Yes, you had the egrets that lived with the cows in the pastures, but you didn't have the songbirds and those kinds of birds that there are now, because we just didn't have any trees. There was no habitat for them. The back of Nassau Bay had squirrels. We had no squirrels. I'm sure Nassau Bay is covered in squirrels now. I remember going back and seeing the squirrels getting acorns and stuff out of the trees back in the back part.

Yes. A lot of wildlife. But again we all knew it was there. We just treated it with respect and pressed on. Snakes still scare me to death. The first time I ever saw a cottonmouth



was while we were hunting down in that area where my house was built in the '80s, and Arnie Aldrich was one of the guys hunting with us.

We're in a line, there's like four or five of the guys and me, and we're walking across this field. There's no birds, and all of a sudden, a shotgun goes off. It was like what the heck. Go over there, and Arnie had almost stepped on a cottonmouth. It had opened its mouth and he shot it and he blew his head totally off with a 12-gauge. But it was still sitting there like that.

That was the first time I ever saw a cottonmouth mouth, and it is cotton. It's white. From that day forward, any snake. Because it had the fangs and that white mouth. Those guys with no shoulders you just stay away from.

JOHNSON: That's good, no shoulders.

GRIFFIN: They don't have any.

JOHNSON: That's true, they don't.

GRIFFIN: So you just stay away from them. Doing the Scouting bit and camping down there, that was our biggest fear always, was snakes, because we were in unimproved areas. Back in essentially what's Armand Bayou now, Armand Bayou [Nature Center]. That's where we used to camp. We were camping in the swamp. Probably not the smartest thing in the world, but nobody got hurt, so it's all good.

JOHNSON: Yes, nobody died.

GRIFFIN: Yes, it's all good. In reality our biggest concern was when was the next time we could get a pair of shorts on and get in a boat and go do something. That was our biggest. We would spend hours crabbing. I remember going and stealing bacon from my mom so we could go crabbing. "Mom, I need some bacon."

"What are you doing?"

"Going crabbing." You go get four, five slices of bacon, tie it on a string, go plop it in the water and pull up blue crabs. We'd always throw them back. We weren't going to eat them or anything. We just wanted to catch them. I don't want to eat it. That was most of our days.

I had a little yellow two-man blow-up raft with oars. One summer Jim Martin and Jeff Shinkle, we rigged a sail on it. The raft wasn't much bigger than that table there. Maybe three-by-five- or three-by-six-foot raft. It had oarlocks on it. We built a wood frame across it with a bunch of scrap lumber and built a mast, and then went and got a sheet and made a square sail out of it and hauled it down to the creek and got in it. It ate up half of a summer. That was what we did. Pretty normal stuff in reality, I think. We weren't sheltered or anything, that was for sure. There were a lot of broken bones and cuts and bruises. I was forever between stitches and broken, I don't know any of my friends that did not at some point break an arm, break a nose, have stitches. Just normal. Normal kid stuff. Fights.

I mentioned the roads in Nassau Bay would flood if you had a sprinkle at that time. Me and all my buddies, every time that it would rain, especially during the summers and when the weather was warm, we'd all ride our bikes down there to the intersections that flooded, and somebody'd insist on driving through it and they'd get stalled and we'd push them out and

they'd give us 50 cents or something. We'd go down to the TG&Y [variety store] and buy gum and stupid things.

It's where I learned that VW bugs [Volkswagen Beetles] float, right there in front of the Catholic church in Nassau Bay on Upper Bay Road heading toward NASA Road 1. That intersection flooded. Probably still does. This lady in this VW bug comes driving in, and she had enough momentum that she was almost through. We were running in about that deep of water to go push her out, because the bottom of the VW, the old bugs were solid. They would float as long as you didn't open the door. She was about from here to the fireplace, 10 feet. We were just getting to it. We were going to push her. She opened up the door and it went poom poom and dropped about 18 inches of water. We were like, "Oh." That's what we did.

The Nassau Bay Fire Department at that time was on—what's that road now called? [Space Park Drive] It's the one that IBM sits on. It parallels NASA Road 1, first road to the south. The fire department was right there on that road originally. They had a phone system that if you called the operator, the operator would set off the siren at the fire department. This is before 911. If you called the operator and say, "I have a fire in Nassau Bay," she had the ability to set off the alarm. If anybody heard it, they'd head to the firehouse.

Me and a couple of my friends, we would jump the white wall that's up in the front of Nassau Bay and run over and open up. We got to know all the firemen. We would open the doors and get everything ready so that when the guys got there, they just had to gear up and go. I've been the president and the vice president and the secretary and the assistant chief of the Hunt Volunteer Fire Department. It probably started back in 1967 with us jumping over the fence and going and opening the doors so the guys could go fight the fires. It was just what we did. We didn't think about it. But it was small town stuff. Hadn't thought about that.

JOHNSON: It was small town activities. But you mentioned when they built the Astrodome. Did you go in for other events in Houston? Or do you remember any of the cultural events or anything? Or was it predominantly if it was something at the Astrodome or a game?

GRIFFIN: Did the [Houston] Livestock Show and Rodeos of course. My dad and—there's a gentleman by the name of "Bill Bailey" [Milton O. Stanley] who was a constable in Precinct 8 in just recent years. But before that he was a deejay on KIKK radio.

JOHNSON: I remember that.

GRIFFIN: In the mid '60s and early '70s he was the morning deejay, "Buffalo Bill Bailey," on KIKK radio. He was also their space guy, so my dad got to know Bill really well.

We would go to the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. Met characters like Jerry Lee Lewis, and then later met guys like Alabama [Southern Rock band] and all kinds of folks. It was neat, it was great to know Bill. But my dad is not a big cultural guy. Therefore I didn't do a lot of that. My mom is artistic. We refer to it as the artsy-fartsy. I got a lot of that in me. Fortunately my kids have a lot of that, and Debbie is very good at that, so my kids living in Houston now are near the Museum District and take their kids to the museums. It's neat.

But I remember going into town to go to—the rodeo was a big thing. I remember going to what is now, oh gosh, the old Alabama Theatre. Went up and saw *The Sound of Music* in 1968 or '69 at the Alabama.

JOHNSON: I did too. I did the same thing. That's funny.

GRIFFIN: Yes. What's really crazy is my oldest son's house before they just moved to Braeswood was right around the corner from there. Every time I passed that I went, "I saw *The Sound of Music* there."

JOHNSON: Oh, that's funny.

GRIFFIN: That was a big deal. That was a big deal. We did stuff like that. I remember mostly school field trips, going to Hermann Park, doing the observatory. There used to be an observatory. I don't even think it's there anymore.

The Battleship *Texas* [State Historic Site]. San Jacinto [Monument and Museum], doing all that kind of stuff. But of course you've got to remember too in the late '60s, early '70s downtown Houston, what it is now, it was pretty grim. Especially that area over where Minute Maid Park [Houston Astros baseball stadium] is and the George R. Brown [Convention Center]. You didn't want to be caught in that part of the world.

I love Houston now. Being in downtown Houston is great. It just wasn't that then. Most of our stuff, in the free time, we did a lot of family stuff, but we did camping. Gosh, in fact we still have it in my family. My kids and my wife, we took—in 1967 my dad bought a brand-new truck and we bought an Apache tent trailer, and we pulled that thing all over the United States going camping. We still have the tent trailer. Don't have that truck anymore, but still have the tent trailer. I loaded my kids up and we towed it to Grand Tetons and Yellowstone and Canada and South Dakota. But that's what we did for family vacations, was camping.

Big Bend [National Park]. Like I said, all the lakes in East Texas, because we could go do those on weekends, just go spend the weekend on some lake, just fishing or water-skiing or something. Then we did quite a bit of stuff on the beach. The FOD, Flight Ops [Operations] Directorate, guys used to have shrimp boils on the beach. We'd do them down at the west end down at the [San Luis] Pass.

I tell Bill Moon that he saved my life. Have you met Bill? Bill is a great guy. He was a flight controller. Just retired a couple years ago, was on my dad's flight control team at one point. Bill was a younger guy, born and raised in Mississippi, first generation American of Chinese descent. He went to Mississippi State [University]. There's five Moon boys and four of them ended up working for NASA at one point or another, all went to Mississippi State.

But I got hit by a Portuguese man-of-war, wrapped around my leg, and I thought I was dying. I was nine years old and came out [of the water], my leg was all swollen up. Bill had a bottle of vinegar and poured it on my leg and instantly the pain went away. I ran into Bill at the event this summer at Space Center Houston and somebody that I knew that didn't know Bill, I said, "Yes, Bill Moon saved my life when I was nine years old."

He's like, "Oh, gosh, no, I didn't."

I said, "Yes, you did," and I told that story.

He says, "I'd forgotten. I remember that."

There were a lot of work family activities that happened that the whole families did together. Going and having a shrimp boil on the beach, that kind of stuff, happened fairly regularly. It was not uncommon. That was a different group than the Nassau Bay group, because those guys lived all around. I think Bill lived, still does, in Friendswood. The Aldriches lived in Friendswood. There were all kinds of folks that lived over there.

A lot of our activities were with just NASA folks on weekends. My dad played a lot of golf, so if there wasn't a flight going on, he was hitting little bitty white golf balls. He did it really well, so I don't blame him doing it. Then my mom played golf forever.

JOHNSON: That's what she mentioned that she used golf when they moved to different communities as a way of meeting people.

GRIFFIN: Yes. When they went to Virginia and California she really did. Yes.

JOHNSON: You mentioned the field trips that you took into Houston. Of course now we see the buses come to Space Center Houston. Do you remember anybody coming to NASA for those type of events or field trips?

GRIFFIN: Rarely, but we did occasionally. It was kind of ho-hum for a lot of us, because we'd go from Webster to the Center. This is where Dad works. Okay.

To be quite honest, I had more fun with groups, especially by the time my dad got to be a flight director. I got to know how to—it was kind of funny because he would take me, especially if it was a low-key walk-through with people, so-and-so is coming, they want a tour of the Control Center, my dad is a flight director. Okay, can you take them in? Sure. A lot of times that happened on weekends and so my dad would take me with him to go do it. But then the old p-tube system [pneumatic tube] that is in the Control Center, I'd go down to the bottom row, and he'd send the p-tube, and I knew which buttons to push and send it back to him. Whoa, isn't that

cool? I remember doing those kinds of things with my dad on weekends, if he had to give a tour or something, I got to tag along sometimes, so that was cool.

What was really crazy was my first job with Ford Aerospace in 1983, 20 years later, was maintaining the hardware in the Control Center. Here I was maintaining the p-tube system that as a kid I used to play with.

JOHNSON: That's funny.

GRIFFIN: Twenty years later I'm taking care of the stupid thing. That was fun.

JOHNSON: We talked briefly. You said you remembered in Apollo 11 and being close to the neighbor's house and realizing that his dad was up there. But let's talk about some of those, because there was a lot of attention paid to Apollo 8 of course, because of the timing. Then Apollo 11. Just some of the memories of those, or highlights of those major missions that you remember.

GRIFFIN: It's funny. I remember the missions happening, and the reason that I remember them, it's because of so-and-so's dad was on that flight kind of thing. It wasn't what was happening on the flight. The fact that it was Apollo 8 or going to the Moon for the first time.

I knew Dave [David R.] Scott and he flew on Apollo 9. Dick Gordon, of course Tommy [Gordon's son] and I were friends, and he flew on Apollo 10. I remember them happening. I remember the names of the spacecraft, and I remember *Snoopy* and *Charlie Brown* were the names of the two spacecraft, and you had *Gumball*. Because I was kind of an art kind of guy, I



always loved the crew patches, and the fact that Apollo 15, the crew had their Corvettes and they were red, white, and blue just like the chevron on the patch. If you ever go back and look at pictures of the Apollo 15 crew, they always parked them red, white, and blue. They never parked them out of order. It was one of the things they just did. It was Dave Scott and [James B. “Jim”] Irwin, and they always parked them in that order.

I didn’t think about the science part till later, and the gee-whiz part. Bill [William A.] Anders on Apollo 8, I knew Bill Anders because my dad and Bill were a two-man crew flying F-89s and F-101s. They were in the same squadron. My dad was Bill Anders’ backseater when they transitioned to 101s, and Bill and my dad were the first crew to fly the 101s in their squadron in California, where I was born. I remembered those things of those missions.

Later on, Apollo 12 was probably the first one that I really paid a lot of attention to, because my dad was the lead prime flight director on Apollo 12. They used to make these 3-D plastic formed reliefs of the Moon for that section that they were landing. After the mission my dad brought them home. But Apollo 12 was the first one that I probably paid really good attention to because it was my dad’s first prime flight. Then because of the way the system worked, he ended up being the lead on a bunch after that, because of the way they started using the teams and the groups.

Also the fact that [Charles] Pete Conrad and my dad were good friends and had this wonderful banter between the two of them. They were always just picking at each other. But that was also Pete. But I remember it getting hit by lightning. Years later, when I went to work for NASA, I had the opportunity on reel-to-reel to listen to the flight director loop. Since then he’s got a copy of it. It’s kind of fun to listen to my dad on Apollo 12, because my dad’s voice never changes, my dad is one of those guys, I don’t know how much you’ve had the opportunity

to talk to him, but it's just real matter of fact, and that's my dad. That's why he was good as a flight director. That's why you look at the guys that are flight directors. The good ones are all like that. They're just real—stuff is going on out here and it's bouncing around and the world is going crazy and those guys are just—

JOHNSON: Even.

GRIFFIN: They have that ability to do that. Apollo 12 gets just clear of the tower, gets hit by lightning. Of course my dad's voice went up a little bit before launch because it was his first flight. He's going, "Okay, let's go around the room." I can hear a tightness in his voice. Then it gets hit by lightning. Then you hear the infamous John Aaron call about which switch to throw. But all that discussion is going on, and you can tell my dad is getting a little bit frustrated. Other than being frustrated with me as a parent—it was the first time I had ever heard him in a conversation where he was frustrated. The pucker factor was there. It was tense. It was tight. "Okay, are we okay, or do we need to abort? I need that call no," was what was coming across. You hear those dynamics.

I'd never really heard that in my dad other than if I did something as a 16-year-old and he said something to me. That's kind of funny too. But so Apollo 12 was really the first one that I really paid attention to. [Apollo] 14 happened, and there must have been something going on, but other than [Alan B.] Shepard hitting a golf ball [on the Moon] I really don't remember a bunch about 14. I probably remember that because I was a golfer.

[Apollo] 15, I knew two of the crew guys, I knew their families really well, Dave Scott who we were friends with later for years. Then 16 didn't have any—and then 17, knew Jack

[Harrison H.] Schmitt very well and of course Gene Cernan because Gene's daughter and my sister were best friends. We knew it was coming to an end, and so you were paying attention to what was going on, and I was older. I'm 14 years old at that point. At some point you hope you grow up and you start paying attention.

JOHNSON: It's always good.

GRIFFIN: I later got into looking at the science and what we did as a young adult, especially after I went back to work at NASA, because there was stuff that was happening then that affected what we did in the early Shuttle Program. I went to NASA. My first flight as an employee at NASA was STS-5, so I was there at the beginning.

The thing that still amazes me, it amazed me that last week I read an article that said that the guys back in the Lunar [Receiving] Lab last week opened up some samples that had not been opened before. I'm like, "Holy cow, 50 dang years, and we're just now getting there." But that's cool. As a construction structures guy, I also had the opportunity to play a little bit at A&M when I was going to school with the chemical makeup to make concrete out of lunar soil. That was cool.

JOHNSON: That's interesting. Yes.

GRIFFIN: Because of what had happened during the Apollo Program, seven years later, I'm at Texas A&M as a building construction major, and I'm playing with the chemical makeup, and we're studying stuff to make concrete. It says, "Well, if you do this with the lunar soil, we can

do this.” You’re sitting there, “Wow, that’s cool, my dad was there.” That was cool. Of course at that point in time I didn’t think I’d ever work for NASA, so that was really cool.

JOHNSON: Just talk about the community itself. From what we’ve read and the people we’ve talked to, it seems like so much of that community—and you mentioned it when you said that you didn’t want to make the moms mad. Because they were running things at that time. So much of that community, the wives were volunteering. They were volunteering at schools. They were doing Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts. They were the ones that were holding that community together. Do you feel that that’s a true statement, that it wouldn’t be what it was if it hadn’t been for the women?

GRIFFIN: Oh yes. Yes. But I think also it was that day and time in the U.S. Heck, I think a lot of communities were that way, where the husbands worked and the wives ran everything. Again, I don’t think it was so much different than anyplace else, because the PTAs [Parent Teacher Associations] and the garden clubs. When I was a Cub Scout and you’re supporting the Nassau Bay Garden Club doing something for some project, yadda yadda yadda, those are still the same today. It’s the same here in this little community. We’ve got a garden club that has 118 ladies in it. They do all kinds of stuff. They have this incredible garden over at the Hunt School. I don’t see that big difference. It’s probably more of a sign of our times in 1968, ’69, ’70 in the U.S. than anything else.

We didn’t even think about it, because the moms were the ones that got us to ball games or practices and this and that and dentists and doctors and all that. Nobody ever really thought anything otherwise. I’m not sure that it was anything terribly terribly unique. But they did. Of

course times have changed. I look at the city council in Nassau Bay, and it was all guys, because I knew most of those, they were dads of guys I knew. But moms have become a more important part of the workforce in 50 years.

JOHNSON: Definitely.

GRIFFIN: There's nothing wrong with that. I think it's just the times have changed. I said it earlier, and I hadn't thought about it before. But the Ozzie and Harriet [lifestyle], it really was. We were at the tail end of the Ozzie and Harriet and Ricky and Lucy [I Love Lucy television show].

JOHNSON: Generation.

GRIFFIN: Yes.

JOHNSON: You mentioned that you went, and of course your parents moved, and you finished your high school years in California. But then you came back. Your parents came back in '82, I think.

GRIFFIN: Yes, I beat them back. I graduated from high school in California. The next day I got in my car with my dad and I drove to here [Hunt] and worked at camp, and he went on to JSC and then flew back to California. I became a Texas resident again before my parents did, because I actually got my state residency to go to school as a resident, because my folks moved

from California to Florida that summer, and I never have lived in Florida. They allowed me to get my residency, so I saved \$36 a semester credit. A lot of money back then.

JOHNSON: It was.

GRIFFIN: It was always [the plan to] come back to Texas. Texas was always home. Houston, and still today and in this community, it's kind of funny. Nobody's from Hunt, Texas. Everybody's from Houston or Dallas. But most everybody up here went to camp here or something, had a family tie here, and had the opportunity then later to move here. When people ask me where I'm from I still say the Clear Lake area, because that's where I grew up.

JOHNSON: That's your formative years.

GRIFFIN: I went to high school in Virginia and California. But no, I grew up in the Clear Lake area.

JOHNSON: When you came back it had changed quite a bit from when you moved there the first time.

GRIFFIN: It had. There was already a large influx of people living in Clear Lake City in the early '80s that weren't aerospace-related. That's what I really noticed, "Wow, there's all these furriners in here."

But again, the economy of that piece of the world, you look at what's happened in Kemah and Seabrook and on the water in that whole area. It's just nuts. It wouldn't have happened had JSC not been there to start. It probably would have happened, it just would have taken probably longer, because there was no reason to go build houses in a swamp below sea level that floods and has hurricanes.

JOHNSON: You have to wonder about that sometimes.

GRIFFIN: I think when my folks bought the house originally in 1964 it was 27 feet above sea level in Nassau Bay. I think when they sold it it was 20 or 19 feet in '73.

JOHNSON: Oh, goodness.

GRIFFIN: The communities were using groundwater for drinking water, and they quickly learned that if you suck the water out from underneath all that clay, it all sinks. About 1970 they stopped pumping groundwater. All the water came out of Lake Houston, so it stopped. But still you're 20 feet above sea level. It's just living in Southeast Texas.

JOHNSON: It is, yes. Do you remember any hurricanes or anything during that time?

GRIFFIN: Knock on wood, we were really lucky.

JOHNSON: Yes, there weren't a lot during that time period.

GRIFFIN: We got there after [Hurricane] Carla. I remember going to Galveston and seeing the remnants from Carla. We had a lot of storms during our time there that went in Corpus, Victoria, so we were on the wet side. We did that, but we were very lucky. The first hurricane I really lived through was Alicia after I got back.

JOHNSON: I was going to say that was after you came back, it was in '83.

GRIFFIN: Yes. But yes, we were really fortunate. We didn't have any direct hits during that time. A lot of close misses.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was a long period there without hurricanes.

GRIFFIN: Yes. We were always waiting for the big one.

JOHNSON: We've had our share in the last few years.

GRIFFIN: Yes. My father-in-law worked for Rockwell. After we got up here, I've made trips with trailers full of plywood to board up. Either my in-laws or my sister's house. I would do that because the first time I loaded up two lifts of plywood on my trailer and went down, started boarding up stuff, and people are like, "Where'd you get that?"

I said, "I brought it from Kerrville."

They're like, "Will you sell it?"



“No, I need to use it.” But yes, we were very fortunate that we really didn’t have any major hits on us during my time down there. Especially during the Apollo days. Like I said, we were post Carla and Beulah and all those big storms that had hit the Gulf coast. But they didn’t hit our piece of the Gulf coast.

JOHNSON: I have one more question, and then we’ll see if Jennifer has any. But we touched on it, and you were talking about how you don’t feel like Houston was as aware, but the communities around NASA, do you feel like they were behind Apollo were rooting things on?

GRIFFIN: Oh yes. They really were. In fact I think Galveston [County] supported, it’s kind of funny with your ties there. I think Galveston supported NASA better to some extent, and tried to claim it a little bit, but it never took. Galveston was always looking for an identity for a lot of years during those years, I think. But Houston was the big brother up north and claimed them. But gosh, you look at Friendswood and Pasadena and Kemah and Seabrook and Dickinson and San Leon. All the little communities around there, everybody bought in.

I think part of it too as you look back at it, I think a lot of people didn’t know what was going to happen after Apollo. I think a lot of people probably went, a lot of those communities, “Well, we don’t want to buy into this because in 10 years it might be gone.” Because NASA had also always advertised, “Well, if we close it down, it becomes part of Rice University. The infrastructure will get used; it just won’t be a waste of taxpayer dollars.” Like the Center was going to go away.

But I remember thinking about well, why would you talk about that? You’re talking about your own demise at that point. But I think also nobody had ever been in a program like,

there had never been a NASA, and so everybody was a little bit more along the military lines that if the function of this base changes we'll just take all the people and move them to here, and this base will then do this. I think there were so many former military people in my dad's era that I think a lot of those guys thought along those same lines.

Maybe that's why the communities didn't buy in wholeheartedly. But shoot, the immediate ones around the Space Center, man, they bought in hard, because of course their communities were growing, their tax bases were growing, and it was benefiting.

JOHNSON: Their livelihoods depended on it.

GRIFFIN: Yes, and it was benefiting them greatly. Heck, Webster was a stoplight. There wasn't anything in Webster. The original Clear Creek High School was there. Web Intermediate School, it's a beautiful building, art deco. I could go into my architecture stuff. Art deco, built in 1930s, late '30s, early '40s. If you ever go look at the building, the front of the building of Webster Intermediate is beautiful.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It is.

GRIFFIN: Stucco. I really always thought it was cool. And then they built that ugly high school down in League City. It's actually nice, they've given it some face-lifts. When I was down there it was stark. It was over there on the other side, on that east side of League City.

JOHNSON: Nothing around it, yes. I remember that.

GRIFFIN: A little stark. The funny thing was that NASA has never to some extent—it does better at it now, I'll say. NASA has never blown its own horn. As programs went along, it never stopped and said, "Hey, look at us, because this is what we're doing," very well. It does it kind of. It's just what happened. Everybody was over at the Space Center working. Rockets go up, guys come home. Tee it up again, do it another day. Never a lot of hoopla and fanfare that you tend to have people wanting to do a little more of that type of stuff today. It just didn't happen.

The 50th celebration stuff, people would have had nothing to do with it 50 years ago if that kind of event had happened, just because that wasn't in the DNA.

JOHNSON: It was very muted though in that area. Compared to even some of the other Centers, what they were doing.

GRIFFIN: The people that were participating was very muted. But that's what I'm talking about.

JOHNSON: Yes, there was more of a celebration in Kerrville I think than there was down there almost.

GRIFFIN: Yes. What was really interesting about that thing is the number of people that came from Houston to here. That just blew me out of the water. Including you guys.

JOHNSON: Yes. It was something to do. Yes, including us.

GRIFFIN: That's what blew me out of the water. I was like, "Man." I figured it was just going to be a little stand around and talk. Think it got too long. But other than that.

JOHNSON: I was going to see if Jennifer had any questions that she wanted to ask.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I had a couple. You were talking about play so much. I was thinking about kids and how they like to play things, mimic what they see on TV, what they see their parents do. Did you guys ever play like space and astronauts?

GRIFFIN: We didn't do a lot of space and astronauts. We did [The] *Rifleman* [television show] and G.I. Joes [action figures]. Guns were still okay then. Guys had pickup trucks that had shotguns in the back window. That was still the norm. Heck, even when I went to high school, I had a gun rack in the back of my pickup truck. I went to high school in California and we'd go rabbit hunting after school and had rifles sitting in our pickup trucks, and nobody ever thought about it.

*Rifleman*, we played Batman and Robin. We played *Get Smart*. Kate Collins was Agent 99 and all the rest of the guys fought about being Maxwell Smart because we all wanted to be closer to Kate. As a 10-, 11-year-old kid you're like, "She's cute, yes, I want to be Max."

We built tree forts. We had slingshots. We were hoodlums, but we were nondestructive. I found it really funny when my dad did the *Apollo 13* movie as the technical adviser. He had a conversation with Tom Hanks and Tom and I are about the same age. Tom told him how he had built an Apollo replica in his basement out of cardboard boxes and he drew all the switches, and he would sit there and play with switches.

I'm sure there were guys that did that. We didn't want to be inside. I've got remnants of being at the dermatologist two weeks ago where he froze everything. Everybody ran around with a pair of cutoff shorts, no shirt, and a crew cut and no hats, so we're all now 60 dealing with basal cell carcinomas.

JOHNSON: And no sunscreen.

GRIFFIN: And no sunscreen. Yes. You put a fair white pasty white boy in the Texas Sun and he's going to get skin cancer. We were never inside if the weather allowed. Heck, we used to chase the mosquito guy as he was fogging on our bicycles sucking down DDT [insecticide].

JOHNSON: I did that too.

GRIFFIN: We don't glow in the dark still, but life was out on a bicycle or skateboard or something outside. That's where we were, and it really was the neighborhood that okay, be home at dark, and didn't worry about it until dark 30. If you weren't home at dark 30 you were in deep kimchi. Other than that it was out of the house and going and playing. Nassau Bay was a wonderful place to do that, because it was at the end of the street.

JOHNSON: It was isolated.

GRIFFIN: No through traffic. That was the best part about it. The only people driving around were either lost or lived there.

JOHNSON: I think Timber Cove was similar to you because they had that in and out, one road.

GRIFFIN: Timber Cove. They kind of all were. El Lago was the same. Clear Lake Forest was even the same. You get over in that old part of Clear Lake Forest, and there's roads that I still—I've got friends that lived over there. Oh man, I missed that turn.

JOHNSON: Just go around in circles. Try to find your way out.

GRIFFIN: They all look alike. Really our life, there weren't computers and there weren't Game Boys. We were still kids. We went and generated our own. There were trees and ropes and water and mud in the creek that deep. You quickly learned that you didn't go into the creek with shoes on because when you stepped in your shoe was going to stay there and you'd never find it again. Barefoot everywhere. Oyster shells. Parking lots were all oyster shells. The EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] won't let you use the oyster shells anymore for parking because it leaches something back into the soil.

JOHNSON: Everything was oyster shell.

GRIFFIN: Everything was oyster shells. Parking lots were all covered in oyster shells. I could walk across oyster shells barefoot and never thought about it. People are, "How do you do it?"

JOHNSON: Those were the good places because you walked on asphalt, it was hard in the heat.

GRIFFIN: Hot. Yes.

JOHNSON: Hot, and it would melt. The oyster shells were great.

GRIFFIN: Yes. Oyster shells are great, they're cool, they're white. Nassau Bay was very conducive to that kind of stuff. Kids in Nassau Bay, we grew up outside.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you guys have any playgrounds? Because I'm thinking about in Clear Lake City, they had that playground with a rocket.

GRIFFIN: That was a big deal to go to that, now you mention that, because in my sister's generation, I remember I was a little bit older by the time that playground got built, but it was over by the golf course and the library. My sister spent hours in that playground and there were kids that did. I was too old. By the time you get to be eight, nine, you can't be.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Right. Dignified at that point.

GRIFFIN: Yes.

JOHNSON: You were above that.

GRIFFIN: I was above that, there you go.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you ever spend a lot of time over at the rec [recreation] center? That's also in that same area. It seems to be a hub of community.

GRIFFIN: It was. I didn't do swim team, I had a bunch of friends that did, and of course they had an indoor pool over there, so especially in the winter guys were over at the rec. I was too busy trying to get on the golf course next door. I was going to be the next pro golfer; I loved the golf course. If I was in that part of town, I was trying to get on the golf course. Because the driving range was right next to the rec center there. The eighteenth hole of the old Clear Lake Golf Course was between the driving range and the rec center.

But I had friends that did swim team. Ken Borland [phonetic] and Gail Auden [phonetic], she was a swimmer. There were a bunch of Nassau Bay guys that were swimmers, and on weekends they were always over there swimming, especially in the winter months, because they had an indoor pool.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You guys had a membership there, is that what your mom told us?

GRIFFIN: We had a membership at the Nassau Bay pool. Little community pool. Oh, at the golf course, yes. But they had a pool at the golf course. They had a swim team at the golf course. I was too busy trying to hit little white golf balls. I don't know why you would go to the golf course to go swimming. My sister went to the golf course to eat. I don't know if you've met my sister.



JOHNSON: No.

GRIFFIN: She's five-foot-tall and 100 pounds.

JOHNSON: Like your mother.

GRIFFIN: Yes. But boy, could she eat. She had a hollow leg. The golf course that we belonged to in Virginia, it was owned by a bunch of Jewish families and the food was incredible, it was to die for. Had the best cheesecake in the world. My sister was on the swim team there and my dad, they got the bill one month in the summer, and it was like a \$45 charge at the little [food court] between the pool and the tennis courts. It was all cheesecake. Every day after Gwen swam, she'd go get a piece of cheesecake. She was still this little bitty tiny thing.

But also right there was Little League ballparks right by the rec center, the old NASA Area Little League. That's where I played baseball growing up, it was across the street. I think those are still there.

ROSS-NAZZAL: They're still here, yes, my son plays baseball there.

GRIFFIN: Yes. I remember Gwen going and playing while I was playing baseball. That's one of those things where you were talking about the moms and the dads. I remember it being a big deal for my dad to come to one of my ball games. But a lot of them he didn't make it either. Between sims. It was really funny because my dad is the baseball player, he played semipro ball when he was in the Air Force, he was good enough to do that.

We always put George Abbey [son of George W.S. Abbey] in the outfield. Where does George play? Right field. I haven't talked to George in years. They lived a couple streets over from us. We did scouts together, played baseball together.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I just have one other question for you, just because we've heard from other people. I'm curious about your thoughts. Because you moved away, you moved to Virginia. Some people who have moved away talked about how different that area was in terms of the community and friendliness, that Texas, Clear Lake itself, had a very different vibe, openness compared to areas that they moved to. I was wondering if you encountered that.

GRIFFIN: Where we moved to in northern Virginia, because of the federal city and the fact that you had so many semi-transient families, whatever agency you worked for, coming in and going out, it was kind of like being on a military base where the short term gig is a standard, three years and your next assignment.

My dad's time at NASA Headquarters, when he went up there, okay, you're going to be here a couple, three years, and then you're going to do something else. In my career at NASA Headquarters, I was there as a detailee for 364 days because if I stayed 365, I'd have to pay taxes in Virginia. That piece of northern Virginia where we lived was very transient because of that. Everybody just kind of went with the flow.

I could imagine that if you left Houston in 1973 and went to Iowa that you'd probably go, "Well, these people—" because all those people are used to those people. It's kind of like when I first came back to the [Texas] Hill Country. Until the local guys figured out that I was really kind of a semi-local guy and I knew about this area, they treated me as an outsider. All the guys

my age that my boys played sports with, I'd be standing there talking to them and we'd be talking. "How do you know that?"

"Man, I've been part of this area for my whole life." I was readily accepted after that. But I can imagine that if you move, like I said to Iowa or someplace, or if you moved to Kerrville, you're an outsider. Kerrville is only 25,000 people. There's only 50,000 people in all of Kerr County. I go to an Aggie football game and there's 104,000 people in Kyle Field. We couldn't even fill up half of Kyle Field with everybody that lives in Kerr County, and yet on any given Saturday there's 102,000 people in Kyle Field.

I can imagine. Fortunately for us, in the moves that we made while I was still living at home, they were both very very easy because of the communities we moved into. It was kind of a norm; it was kind of a standard practice. I had to laugh because when I moved to Virginia people said I talked funny, because I was from Texas. I was like, "I talk funny? Have you guys ever listened to you?"

Then I moved to California and they said, "You talk funny."

I'm like, "Okay." I came home as soon as I could, so I don't talk funny anymore. I probably do talk funny. In reality, and Gwen my sister talks about this too, I've heard her talk about it. We grew up accent-neutral especially because of the moving. You have a little bit of it, but you lose it quickly.

There were a couple things when I came back to the Hill Country after I got through at NASA. One of them was not to regress. Keep reading things, keep studying, keep doing that. Don't become a local yokel. I've had too many opportunities and traveling and living different places to let all that go out just so I can say, "I live in Texas Hill Country, we got goats and

sheeps.” Trust me, I know a bunch of guys just like that and I love them to death, but it was one of those things. No need for it. I did go to college. I did graduate too. They let me out.

The moves were actually really easy. But it’s funny. The time and whatnot in Southeast Texas and Clear Lake area and Nassau Bay, that’s home.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Thank you.

JOHNSON: Is there anything that you wanted to add that we haven’t talked about?

GRIFFIN: It was fun, first, thank you.

JOHNSON: Good.

GRIFFIN: I thank you for approaching me this summer at that [Kerrville] event. As I mentioned to you this summer, I’m probably in a small minority of the guys that were second generation guys. Joan Kranz [daughter of Eugene F. Kranz] and I started the same week at Ford Aerospace in January of ’83, and we had all the whispers. “Psst, Kranz’s daughter, psst, Gerry Griffin’s son.” It was funny. Joan did very well, and I think I did very well, or good enough to keep a job for 17 years. It was fun being the second generation.

Bryan Lunney [son of Glynn S. Lunney] and those guys started showing up later on. There’s a lot of second-generation guys now. Or there was more. But nobody had ever thought about it either, that somebody would follow their dad’s footsteps and go and play NASA stuff. Especially I had no intent on doing it. My degree is in building construction and structures. But

the building market was so flat. My first job, I went to work for Ford Aerospace taking care of control centers, doing heating, ventilation, and stuff in the Control Center, which is what my degree was in. Then I got hired in the Shuttle Program Office doing structural verification work, spacecraft structures and building structures. The math is all the same if you know what the properties of the materials are, so it all fit. Then you get into program management, and that's just program management. But anyway, I really appreciate you guys coming out and doing this.

JOHNSON: We appreciate you talking to us, we do.

GRIFFIN: Spending the day. Spending a couple hours.

JOHNSON: Yes.

[End of interview]