

NASA JOHNSON SPACE CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

EDITED ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

ESTELLA H. GILLETTE
INTERVIEWED BY REBECCA WRIGHT
HOUSTON, TEXAS – SEPTEMBER 12, 2012

WRIGHT: Today is September 12th, 2012. This interview with Dr. Estella Gillette is being conducted for the NASA Johnson Space Center Oral History Project in Houston, Texas. Interviewer is Rebecca Wright, assisted by Jennifer Ross-Nazzal. Thank you so much for coming in today and visiting with us. We'd like for you to begin by sharing with us how you started your career with NASA and why you chose the space agency.

GILLETTE: Actually when I was in high school, I didn't even know that NASA was out here, because that was 1963, when I graduated from high school. One of the things that happened while I was at school, I was senior class officer, I was treasurer, and the theme for our class was NASA. NASA wasn't out here physically, but I remember we had the NASA logo somewhere there in the picture. I still have my yearbook. The original seven astronauts were [inside] the front cover. The [class] officers took a picture in a convertible, and then on the side we had a sign that said "Space Age." I was in the convertible. So that was my initial introduction to NASA.

Then I went to work after high school. My sister was already working for the federal service, with immigration service, but I couldn't apply because I wasn't a citizen yet. I was born in Mexico, and you had to be 18 before you could be naturalized. I was still 17 when I graduated from high school, so I waited till the fall after I graduated, and then I went and got my citizenship. A few months later I decided to take the civil service exam. That was an interesting

experience, taking the exam, because I failed. My typewriter messed up. I had been practicing. I had been using a [IBM] Selectric where I was working, a very early Selectric. The typewriter that I used for the test was a manual—thinking well, that’s what I trained on, so it would be better. But that wasn’t. It screwed up and I could not pass the test.

So I waited a few weeks, months, and I took it again. This time I scored in the 90s. I was asked if I wanted to interview at NASA, so I thought yeah, sure. At that time I understand that you had to score a pretty good score before you could interview at NASA. I came out to Ellington [Air Force Base, Houston], got interviewed, and I really just enjoyed the interviews and the kind of people that I was talking to. They sent me up to [the] Manned Spacecraft Center, and I had three interviews. My favorite one was engineering. I went to the Structures and Mechanics Division.

I came in as a GS-4, permanent, or career-conditional, but it wasn’t like a temp [temporary employee] or anything like that. The reason I was hired, I was a clerk steno [stenographer], because I took shorthand. They liked that I took shorthand, although on the job I never used to. But that was a skill that I think was considered extra. So I came on and I worked in Building 13. The corner would be the southwest corner, second floor.

I came into the office. Actually I was held back for a couple of days in Building 1 in a pool. I remember the first time the phone rang, a lady named Mona [C.] Kazmierski, who was one of the experts there in HR [Human Resources], said to me, “Answer the phone.” So I said, “Okay.” What could I say? I wasn’t even told, “Answer it this way.” So she told me, and I answered it. I stayed there for a couple of days, and then they sent me to Building 13.

I get to Building 13 and it’s a two-secretary office. The first secretary had been out for six weeks with Mono [Mononucleosis viral infection], so I was there. The boss comes out and

greet me and just says, "Here's your desk." That was it. A few minutes later he came out, and he hands me a memo. He said, "Would you mind typing this?"

I said, "Of course not." [I knew I could] type it. [But the] format was different.

Then he said, "Oh, and don't forget the concurrences." I'm thinking is that something you eat, because I had no idea what a concurrence was. I was too embarrassed to ask him. I saw the memo, the draft, or whatever he had marked up. It said Maxime A. Faget. So I thought well, I'll just call Maxime and ask about that concurrence.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oh no.

GILLETTE: So I picked up the phonebook, which became my friend forever, the hard copy phonebook. I looked. It didn't say Ms. or Dr. or anything. So I thought, "Oh." Betty [M.] Ensley answered. I said, "Hi."

She said, "Dr. Faget's office."

I said, "Hi. Would she be in or he be in?" I can't remember if I said he or she.

She said, "Well, this is Betty Ensley, his secretary. May I help you?"

I said, "Well, I've got this memo." I explained what I needed. She explained about the concurrence.

So I was happy and I said, "Thank you." So I continued. A few minutes later, footsteps in the hallway, it's Marion [I.] Loveless, the division secretary.

She comes in. She said, "I understand you called Dr. Faget's office."

I said, "Yeah, and I talked to Betty Ensley. She was really nice."

She said, “In future you are not to call that office. That is the Director of Engineering.”
I’m like—

WRIGHT: Okay.

GILLETTE: Okay. So that was my intro to NASA. I tell that story because it stayed with me forever. It also affected my perspective as I went along in my career at NASA. I’ll tell you why later. Anyway, I was there in [Building] 13 for just a few months, then Building 49 opened. That was the Vibration and Acoustic Facility. Before I left for Building 49—because they shipped me over to 49—I was the first civil service secretary in 49 by the way. I came October 1964, was when I started. In January, first week of January, this young co-op [cooperative education student] comes in. He asks me for pencils. I’m typing away. I said, “It’s in the cabinet.”

He says, “Where?” I get up, show him. He comes back. “Do you have any tablets?” Get up. Well, I married that guy later. Both of us were moved over [to 49]. He was a co-op with Drexel, from Philadelphia [Pennsylvania]. He was on his co-op tour. I’m sure that story happened a lot of times at JSC.

So we moved over to 49. Brand-new facility. I had something like 21 guys. All guys. There were no women engineers that I worked with at that time. It was a great group. They were very caring, very considerate. I had my job, they had theirs, and there was no crossover like we see today, where they’re doing a lot of the administrative stuff that we used to do. You had a Selectric typewriter, but one of the old kind, not the fancier ones that came out later, a

phone with multiple buttons. No. Actually that phone had four buttons I remember, because they all shared the four buttons [lines].

I made the coffee every morning. That was just standard operating procedure. They would stand around and drink their coffee in front of me and talk, and sometimes curse. I'd just pretend I didn't hear the F word, a favorite one. But to me it didn't mean anything, and I just kept working.

At the time I was doing all of their travel orders, all of their memos, and everything was multiple copies, with all the carbons. They would draft things, give them to me. A couple of the bosses dictated a little bit, but not a whole lot. I would take dictation when they would tell me about travel and stuff like that. However, in the interim, I was living at home, and having been raised very Mexican, I wasn't able to get an apartment out here and move out from home, that wasn't an option. So about a year after I was there, my husband Pete and I [became friends]. He wasn't anything yet [other than a friend], but we started corresponding when he went back to school.

In the interim though my parents said they really didn't like my working out here because it was too far. Initially when I wanted to work out here they had said no, that it was too far, and what was I going to do with all those white men, because having been raised in the culture where I had been raised, I went to Jeff [Jefferson] Davis High School [Houston], where 50 percent were Hispanics, there were cliques of white kids, Hispanic kids. So my parents were very nervous about my coming into an environment where I was not going to be like the rest of them.

I had put my foot down that time, and that's how I got to NASA, because I rebelled a little bit. I still didn't get kicked out. In the interim though they [my parents] kept bugging me and bugging me. My sister that I said worked at immigration at 515 Rusk Avenue downtown in

the federal building, she told me about a job at the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, so I went and I interviewed.

One of the factors was they wanted someone who spoke Spanish, read, all of that, which I do, because Mom made us do that. So I left NASA. After a year I left NASA. They offered me GS-4, although I had been promoted to a 5 here already. I had to lose my 5 to go downtown, but I figured out that they always adjust your salary in the grades. I made a little more money, so that wasn't a big deal. Promotions were never a big deal. It was just that in a year I would be eligible for the next one. It was never about money. It was always just the eligibility for the next one.

So I went downtown and had a blast with the Federal Bureau of Narcotics. It was a fascinating era for me in my life, because there were a lot of life skills that I learned. In fact the first day on the job with Narcotics, I walked in to my new desk, which was the reception area, and there were 500 pounds of marijuana sitting on my desk, 21 kids had been busted. About halfway through the week my boss, who looked like Eliot Ness—handsome guy—said did I want to go with him to the arraignment? I did. Some of those kids I had gone to school with.

The leader of the gang was a nice boy at school. I had no idea what he was messing with. So that was all a very interesting experience for me. There were lots of times when I did undercover calls in Spanish, because the agents wanted to call. They would come in dressed for undercover work, all grody, and some of them had tattoos. Just lots of things. Another time I walked in and there were all these baggies sitting on my desk.

I picked one up and I said, "Whoa, this is really interesting." It was heroin.

They said, "What?"

I said, "Well, how did they put the heroin in those balloons?" They laughed.

They said, "Balloons?"

I said, "Yeah, aren't those balloons you blow up and you make puppies, doggies and poodles and stuff?" He said no, they were prophylactics. So it was that kind of life skill. It was like "What?" The guys had a wonderful sense of humor. They were always teasing. They were always putting on little skits for me, because I was the only girl. There were five narcotic agents.

Pete and I continued the correspondence, and long story short, we got married in July of '67. I stayed at Narcotics for a few more months, but we only had one car. It was becoming conflicting. He would drive by, wait for me two hours, because I was still working. Then he would be mad by the time we got back to the apartment.

So we moved to Clear Lake area. I got a job back at NASA. I had been promoted at Narcotics back to a 5. Came back to JSC, and they gave me a 4 again. But I got adjusted [salary], so that's okay. This time I went to work in [Flight] Safety [Reliability and Quality Assurance]. Marty [Martin L.] Raines was the Director. The guys that I worked for were Clarence Presswood and Lem [Lemuel S.] Menear [Special Assistant for Space Shuttle]. Clarence was the Exec [Executive Assistant], and then Menear, I remember he was working on the development of something that was going to be called like a Shuttle. It wasn't quite named yet. So when I got there, I went to work with Jean [T.] Tarpley, who I will always consider a top senior secretary. She actually had trained with that Betty Ensley. Jean was working for Aleck [C.] Bond.

I beg your pardon. Aleck Bond was there when I got there, and then a short time later he left, and that's when Marty Raines came in. I was the second girl in the program office, so it was your typical make coffee, take care of the guys kind of thing. Again, hardly any women other

than administrative types [in the office]. The finance people, maybe [there were] some women, but no technical women that I can remember.

A super place to work in, but I was still under the wire. I hadn't quite evolved. I was still just [working] in the office. I wasn't involved with other Center activities. I got my [GS-]6 there—I got my 5 back and my 6 back. My old boss, my old admin in Structures, called me and asked me if I wanted to come back to Structures for a 5, because remember, they gave me a 4 [in SR&QA]. I said I would go talk to him. So I did. We talked and he said, "I'll give you a 5 right away if you come back."

I said, "Oh, let me go talk to Mr. Presswood." Mr. Presswood told me that in 90 days he would consider a promotion if I was doing okay. So I go back. It was Les [Lester E.] Goodheart. I said, "Les, don't tell." I probably called them all Mr. at the time. I wasn't too comfortable with first names. I said, "Don't tell Mr. Presswood. I'm going to go talk to him about this, so let me talk to him first." He said, "Okay."

I get back and Mr. Presswood calls me in. "Where were you?" He already knew!

I said, "Well, you told me 90 days, and they had passed, and you didn't say anything."

"Well, I'll talk to Mr. Raines." By this time it was Mr. Raines.

Mr. Raines says, "What are you waiting for?" So I got my 5.

While I got my 5, same conversation, I said, "Mr. Presswood, you said that this was a GS-6 position, and because I've already served as a 5 more than a year, then I'm eligible for the 6. So what's the chance of getting a promotion?"

He said, "You're such a mercenary."

I said, "No, it's just that it's because [then] I'm eligible for the next one."

So he went in to Mr. Raines and Mr. Raines says, "What's the holdup? Give it to her." So I got my 6. Then I got pregnant, had my first son in June of '70 when the Apollo Program was over, when things were downsizing tremendously. I only took a leave of absence because I was concerned about my husband getting laid off since he was a last-in kind of guy, and he actually got a letter from the union that he was on the list. We waited until I think September before I actually left the rolls, and I resigned, because I was going to stay home and be a mom and live happily ever after taking care of my baby.

That lasted for about a year, and then I got all antsy. It was silly to stay home. The kid really didn't need me that much. He finally made it to nursery stage. Actually he was about 21 months by that time. They opened a brand-new childcare center. I came back to NASA and they said, "Well, we're in a freeze." This would have been around May of '72. So I went to interview—an employment agency. Actually I went to work with Kelly Services. Kelly sent me to all kinds of neat assignments. I got a job offer every place I went, but I just was holding out, hoping that NASA would call me back. Finally I went to an employment agency and they sent me to Tenneco in Deer Park and offered me \$500 a month when I had been earning \$700. I told the guy. He said, "You're not going to get that much."

I said, "Well, I was getting it at NASA."

He said, "Yeah but that's the government, they pay better." Back then. He said, "But let's test you. Let's see how you do." So, okay. I type 98 words a minute. I took shorthand at 80. My grammar test was great. So he said, "Oh, how about if we send you to this interview?" I said fine.

They offered me the \$500 and I said, "No, I'll just stay home, I'll wait till NASA calls me, and I'm working with Kelly Services."

So he said, "Well, how about if we give you \$525?"

I said, "No, I have to drive all the way over and my kid is right here." So I said no. He calls my husband that night to tell him that I had refused this wonderful offer.

My husband said, "I really don't want her to go back to work anyway." That's the way it was. Thank God not so much anymore.

So I waited and NASA calls me back. I took a job back in Engineering. It was an organization called the Urban Systems Project Office. It was run by Ted [Edward L.] Hays. Again it was about 20 guys, no women in the professional engineers. The contractor world I became more aware of, because having been at the directorate level the last job I had, I wasn't aware of the contractor world. But that's where I became aware that contractors worked side by side with the civil servants.

It was a temporary [position] even though I was eligible for permanent. There were no billets, but it was a temporary GS-2 step 1. The pay was a little less than the \$525, but it was closer [to home], all of that. So I took it, and had a great time. But it was one of those where the other administrative staff was not very nice. They would make little catty comments about where I'd been before. The guys would come tell me. I didn't hear them myself. They would come snitch on them. They liked me a lot because I always brought cakes and stuff for their birthdays. Then in turn they would take me to lunch. For my whole birthday month, I was taken to lunch. So I became very comfortable with the guys all the time. The women though, I guess women just weren't real good team players yet; still very divided. I really enjoyed working with the guys more than I did with the few administrative women that I had to work with. I didn't have any real friends yet in that world.

Eventually though a year later they made me a permanent [employee], and they gave me a GS-3 step one. Making progress. Then I got word of a job in the Earth Resources Program Office, and I applied, because now I was eligible to apply. Technically I was eligible for a GS-7 job. Now this job was a 6. I applied, and my boss where I was a GS-3 step 1 offered me a GS-3 step 10, so I took it. Then I still took the other job when I did get it. Is that bad? I was selected. But I took the 3 [step] 10 [increase]. Well, the boss hadn't actually offered it, he just gave me that raise.

Then I was working with the Earth Resources group. They said, "How about a GS-5?" I said, "Okay, that's fine." So I went over and I was working for John [G.] Zarcaro. I don't know if you guys know Rose Zarcaro. She's GeoControl [Systems, Inc.]. He still works with her, a super super nice guy. A very kind of a genius guy. He was an MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge]—and I think Princeton [University, Princeton, New Jersey]. Just a really genius guy. Test pilot. Navy guy.

He selected me, and so I went to work for him. He was the deputy. So the Director was Cliff [Clifford E.] Charlesworth, who was—Apollo 13 fame. All that. Now Mr. Charlesworth—and I really really loved him, but he was so hard to get to know. So John hires me. He's just as friendly as can be, playful. The guys were always very respectful. I have to say I never had an incident where I would say, "Oh no, they were coming on." They were always very respectful. Playful but respectful. Even back in Narcotics. They were very playful there, but they always took care of me. They were protective.

So John, he was a golf pro pretty much. One time one of the directors calls. I told him he was on the golf course. It was another one of those oops. It was like well tell me what to say, because what was wrong with that? He was on leave. But it was those kinds of little things that

you learn along the way. You start customizing what you do according to the person. So the more senior I became in my career, the more I realized, oh, wait a minute, you don't do it this way, that way.

But it's funny because nobody really tells you these things. It's, you make a little booboo, and it hurts enough, and you say, "Okay, I'm going to fix this so I don't have to go through that again."

I was working with John, and the senior secretary was Lois [M.] Bradshaw, who was in my opinion another one of those top-notch, don't make them like that anymore, kind of secretaries. Lois was super efficient. I think she wore white gloves. From that school, the white gloves; the Katharine Gibbs [Secretarial School] kind of school. Mr. Charlesworth, though, he would come in in the mornings and it was almost like he was wearing a red flag, leave me alone today. So I learned that if I noticed that—and he reminded me a lot of my dad, I think that helped me a lot. If he came in in a certain way, it was like, ooh, better not do anything today. I wasn't his direct secretary but I was still there.

He never called me by my name. It was "young lady." So one day Lois stepped out for a few minutes and Mr. Charlesworth—who I always called Mr. Charlesworth because he never said I could call him Cliff, okay—he was in a meeting in [Building] 966 and he came out. He hands me this piece of paper. He said, "I need this chart done right away." He had marked it all up. He said, "And I need 10 copies and I need it in 5 minutes." Lois was gone. It was a Graphics [office] thing. Back in the old days you went to Graphics. We didn't have our own computers that did all this. So I just took my Selectric and the big font, and I typed it up. There was pretty much white space, so it was not a lot of typing. Went down the hall, made copies, took it in to him, and came back. Lois came back in. I didn't even tell her.

After a while Mr. Charlesworth comes by. He stops at my desk. He says, “Young lady, that was a fine job. I want to thank you for that.”

I said, “You’re welcome.”

So Lois comes up. She said, “What was all that about?” I told her. She said, “In the future, you take it to Graphics, that’s what they are there for.”

I said, “You weren’t here. He wanted it in five minutes.” I said, “I did what I could.” But I think that kind of stuff registered with him, because five months later Lois applied for a promotion job. She had [previously] actually been affected by the RIF [reduction in force]. When you have a RIF people are laid off, but you can back in one of those jobs that are vacated so that you don’t get laid off. She had been affected that way. She was eligible for an admin type job. So her [secretarial] job became available like in April. This was April of ’73 probably.

She was leaving and the job was open. I said to my husband who’s always been extremely supportive with my career and my school and all that, I said, “Should I apply?” I said, “He scares the hell out of me.”

He said, “Well, if you don’t, you’ll never know if you would have gotten it.”

I said, “Well, I just don’t even think he knows my name. He always calls me young lady.”

So I applied. Well, there were 10 people that were interviewed, or however many. They were coming in for the interviews, and Lois would get up and walk them out to the hallway and she’d chat with them. Then finally one day he comes out and he says, “Young lady, you have a few minutes?” I said yes. “So, just come in here.” So, I get up, go in his office.

“Close the door.” He said, “You know me. I know you. I think that’s a good enough interview.” I said okay. I was dismissed. It was such a short time that Lois was on the other side of the door thinking the door popped open when I opened it, so we’re going back and forth.

I said, “He’s done.” I said, “Well, okay, I tried, what the heck.” Couple of days later he’s in the doorway.

He said, “Young lady, come in here.” You know where Natalie [V.] Saiz sits? Well, I was right in front of that door. The configuration was different, but where the receptionist is now is where I used to be. So he said to Lois—he called her “Sunshine,” he only called me young lady, but he called her Sunshine—he said, “Sunshine, get up.” So she stands up. He tells me, “Sit down.” So I sat down. He said, “Chair fits. You got the job.” That was it.

WRIGHT: That was it.

GILLETTE: That was it. So I got the job. That was a 7 finally, top of the rank there for secretaries. A very interesting assignment though, because John actually transitioned out eventually. Mary Yarbrough who became Dunseith later became his secretary. But then he [John] left and [William Eugene] Gene Rice came in. He was one of the interviewees I noticed you had. He became the deputy. Very interesting, because that’s about the point where it [the job] became a career. It was no longer just a job. I was really engrossed in what I did. I loved the information flow. That’s about the time when I realized that I didn’t have to ask too much. Information would just fall in my lap sometimes. One of the things I hated was the little yellow messages you take for people. Lois taught me this. I would keep a running list of his calls and then at the end of the day I would say, “Mr. Charlesworth, so-and-so called. You want me to call

him back or don't or tell him this?" I was the go-between, so I began to learn a lot about the organization. I became very involved with what was next and strategy and who we worked with.

It was a very interesting evolution for me because I think that's the point when I made the turn into I'm really now part—by now it was the Johnson Space Center—and I'm here to stay. One of those things. Mr. Charlesworth, like I said, was hard to get to know, but he would come at the end of the day and he would put his feet up on my desk. He'd say, "So what's going on with the petticoat mafia?" I'd quickly put things away and would start talking because that was my signal that he wanted to chat.

He would laugh, and I would make him laugh about who said what and stuff like that. I knew it was okay to talk like that. Other days, he'd say, "Do you think this is a country club or what?" Because everybody would come through then we'd be laughing and cutting up, and that day he didn't like that.

But he also was very thoughtful. One of the things about him, he was very dedicated to his wife. She had osteoporosis, and he never stayed past 5:30 because he had to go home. He didn't go to parties and socials. I only knew him historically, I didn't work with him during the Apollo era. In fact my Apollo era was very on the surface, because I wasn't career-minded enough to really have plugged in. One of the things when I was up there though, Bill [William R.] Pogue was given a detail [assignment]. I think he was transitioning after Skylab, so he came over [to Earth Resources Program Office]. That was my first real intro to working with an astronaut, and, wow, they were real people; astronauts were real people.

He and I became friends and later on when he wrote his book about how astronauts go to the bathroom in space, he asked me to review it and edit it, and then gave me a signed copy. We remained friends for a long time.

When Glynn [S.] Lunney was head of SPIDPO [Shuttle Payload Integration and Development Program Office] he was asked to go to [NASA] Headquarters [Washington, DC]. Dr. [Christopher C.] Kraft, who was the [Center] Director at the time, asked Mr. Charlesworth to go fill in for him. So I'm all set. I'm going to go with Mr. Charlesworth to this new job.

He wouldn't tell me, but I suspected something was going on this one day, and I had to go to a class. I said, "Is there anything you want to tell me?" By this time we were closer and we would chat that way. Jay F. Honeycutt told me once that I broke him. He became a "regular" guy.

He wouldn't tell me. He said, "If there were anything I would tell you."

I said, "Okay, I'm going to come back tomorrow and everything is going to be normal, right?"

Well, no, I'm in class, and I get the word that he's moved. I came back after class and just wanted to see him. He said, "When I'm told I can't tell, I don't tell." He said, "But you decide if you want to come with me, by the end of the week you tell me if you want to come with me."

I said, "I don't have to wait till the end of the week. I'll come with you."

He said, "No, I want you to think about it." I said okay. So, all week I'm moving a few of his little things, because that was the other thing. You were responsible for packing up the boss and making sure he had everything.

Finally the last day I go in and I said, "You're not going to ask me to come with you, are you?" I started to cry.

He said, "Shut the door." So I did. He said, "Young lady, you know, sometimes you can't do what you want to do." He said, "And I will not dislocate [a good secretary]." Or I

forget the word he used. But [something like] “I’m not going to disrupt somebody else’s life just because of what I want.” He said, “As much as I want you to come with me, I’m not going to bring you with me.”

I went upstairs. Gene Rice said, “What did he say? What did he say?” I started crying. Well, Gene was going to be acting [director]. So, he was happy.

The other thing Charlesworth said was, “You have the corporate memory of what goes on in the office. Gene needs that for transition, so you need to stay with him.” I was so brokenhearted, though. I was so loyal, and here he just left me. I had a great opportunity with Gene, though, because Gene was the kind of boss that let me do anything that would make my office run better. Charlesworth wasn’t that interested in the details. Gene was most interested. I could talk to him about the divisions and the “girls” and everything they were doing together. He was interested. Charlesworth was just like, “Just do it.” So, a big difference there.

In the meantime, though, a few months pass and Charlesworth came in one day and he says to Gene and me, “I want to talk to the two of you.” We went into his old office. He said, “Chris has just told me that Lunney is coming back and I will be his deputy.” He looks at me and said, “See, young lady? Now you would have had to make a decision to take a downgrade.” He said, “So that’s why I couldn’t bring you with me.”

I said, “Well, you could have just told me that, saved me all this suffering.” But it was just that they became confident and started to share those—what I considered big management kind of things. Talking to me about what Dr. Kraft was saying and all that.

I would venture to say that many of the secretaries of my era were in the same boat. We were mature enough, professional enough that we were part of that management team, and they [management] really relied on us to be part of that team, and not let them worry about those

kinds of things. I took care of who's going to cover what when the vacation time came around. Building a team with my coworker secretaries in Earth Resources was very key to me as far as leadership skills, because I saw myself as one of them. If I wasn't very busy, I would ask them, "Do you have anything you want me to do?" Now we had a deal that we did it their way. The formats were such, but there were still specifics that we would do our own way. So that was the deal we had.

[This was] a very respectful transition for me from having had the other women that I [had] worked with, who were very catty and not very nice, to this team of Earth Resources women. There were only four of us. We teamed up very well. For me that was the beginning of real leadership skills where I was also mimicking some of the skills that I saw in my male bosses. Well, we all had male bosses.

The other person in this era was Marilyn Bocking. Marilyn had come with Dr. George [M.] Low and was an executive secretary. A very professional woman. She was the supervisor admin for five program offices, including Earth Resources. At some point—because I wasn't at the time, maybe it's different now—but program office directorate level secretaries, you didn't have a lot to do. The office only had 35 people, Earth Resources, so we had the standard calendar, and everything was manual, but there wasn't a lot of typing and that kind of stuff. Correspondence was taken care of by the mailroom. They would open it, all that. So there were a lot of those manual tasks that weren't there.

I went to Marilyn and I said to her, "Is it okay if I do some of your manual labor, like HR requests for action, the 52s or moves, if I can coordinate the moves for my folks, all that."

She said, "Oh absolutely." She was like a [GS-]12 and I was like a 7.

I said to her, "It's not like I want your job or anything. It's just that I would like to have the skills so someday I can claim them." She was really super as a mentor. She was probably my first real female mentor and we both acknowledged that she was my mentor and I was her protege. The others I had just observed from the sideline.

I just brought her up because she was one of the few mentors that we females had, and the fact that she was important for me as far as learning skills that I would need eventually. So she and I had a very good relationship. Actually she left, went to California after the whole Apollo era was over. She had cancer, and she died. So, I asked if we could change the name of the Outstanding Secretary Award to Marilyn Bockting. For many years it had her name because she was very instrumental as a role model for most of us [secretaries] in that era.

Then Charlesworth left. I stayed with Gene. Gene was super. He gave me two Outstanding Performance Awards. For me it was one of the worst periods in my life, but he still gave me some awards, because he said, "In spite of that you were wonderful." I was like okay, whatever.

Then there was talk about reorganization, as always. There's always reorganization. One of the things I learned about reorganization, I thought I would leave the secretarial field because I was so tired of my career being decided upon by others through reorganizations. Well, guess what? It happens to everybody. I don't care what position you have. Reorganization comes and you're all affected, but I wasn't experienced enough to realize that at the time.

At that point, Space and Life Sciences, which was being run by Dick [Richard S.] Johnston at the time, merged with us. They swallowed Earth Resources up, so we were no longer Earth Resources. I think there was a remaining little branch or something.

At the time Dick Johnston talked to me—actually a couple of senior directors talked to me about moving over when that merger took place. They thought I was going to be left without a boss because Gene went over as a deputy. But Johnston asked me if I would be his secretary. So I became the directorate secretary for Space and Life Sciences. It was funny, though, because it was hard to work for him when Gene as his deputy, and Gene would still come to me and ask me to do stuff. There was this little line that I could tell that I wasn't supposed to be working for him anymore.

Then the habits that I had developed like with Gene—and I learned this from Lois also—when you go on travel you get an envelope, and there's your ticket, there's your agenda, where you're going to be staying, just something to clue you in. When Gene would go on travel I would hand him his envelope and he would know where to go first, then when he was on the plane he would look at the rest of it. After I wasn't his secretary anymore, his first trip he calls me. He said, "I got on the plane and I had no idea where I was going" [for the meeting]. He opened his envelope and there was nothing. Just the tickets. So it was just the kind of thing that I liked being a special assistant to these guys and making myself indispensable.

So, I go to Space and Life Sciences, but that's when this career thing had set in. Reorganizations always determine your career. One of the things I had done throughout the time was talk to my HR rep. Greg [Gregory W.] Hayes was my HR rep. He was this longhaired kid, who smoked [a sign of that time]. [He was] just a regular guy, and I enjoyed talking to him when he would talk to Mr. Charlesworth, because Mr. Charlesworth was busy. So Greg would come and sit down and we'd chat. So while we were chatting we exchanged a lot of I'd like to do this, I'd like to do that.

One day Greg comes to see me and he says, “Hey. I’ve just been asked to be head of the HR side of astronaut selection. How would you like to come be my assistant?”

I said, “Oh, absolutely.”

He said, “No promotion.”

“That’s fine.” I was a 7.

He said, “But I think you’d do real well.”

I said, “I’d love to do it.” So I went over.

Greg was another tough boss. I told him. I said he was a little Mr. Charlesworth. He was very tough. Maybe it was because we had been—not peers, but just buddies in a way. Now all of a sudden he was my boss. So, we had an operation out in [Building] 266 and it was 1979. I went over there and Greg and I shared an office about this size [gestures to room]. I was at the doorway and he was in the back. He didn’t ask us to do anything more than what he did. He was very dedicated to the effort, so we were constantly working. It was like just a humongous effort. I think we had 3,600 applicants, so the HR guys would come over and review the applications, but primarily Greg and I went through all those.

Back up a little bit. While I was working in Earth Resources, HR would ask me if I would be in the secretarial rating panels, little tasks, committees, the Federal Women’s Program Committee. I was asked to be on that. Marilyn was the one that picked me for that, but the secretarial rating panel provided me with some background on reviewing applications, looking for relevant things.

When I got to astronaut selections I just had to make that switch to engineers and what to look [for, instead of secretaries]. Greg was an excellent teacher in that respect. I always also had to write a lot of letters, and he would mercilessly take his red pen and mark through my

letters. I think today I'm a pretty good writer because of that. He was extremely critical, painful to a certain point, but very helpful in the long run.

One of the things that he would say to me was "Discipline, Ms. Gillette," because I had this problem focusing. Going through applications wasn't really my cup of tea, because as a secretary you're all over the place. Here I had to sit for hours reading and reading, so he would teach me [how to review the applications]. One year he gave me a T-shirt that said, "Discipline, Ms. Gillette." I still hear that. As I was writing my dissertation [recently], I'd tell myself, "Discipline, Ms. Gillette." Writing two pages, then, oh, I think I'll go do this, throw a load of wash in, that kind of stuff.

WRIGHT: Clean out a drawer.

GILLETTE: Yeah. Right, right. So I was very grateful, although it got to be a little stressful sometimes with him. The other thing that happened was my introduction to George [W. S.] Abbey and the [Astronaut Selections] Board. I'd heard about Mr. Abbey, so I was scared to death of him.

He was introverted. Of course Greg's job and my job were to serve this Board. They would come and go, and we had to make sure that all the files were in order, and there were drinks, that comfort kind of stuff. One day Greg comes in. I think we had like 500 highly qualified applicants. He said, "Mr. Abbey would like copies of every application made for the 12 members of the committee." However many. I think it was 12. It was 4:30 in the afternoon.

I said, "Okay."

He said, "By 8:00 in the morning."

I said, “Oh. Okay.”

He said, “Do you think you can do it?”

I said, “Yeah, we can do it.” So I called in the team of the women that were working with us. I said, “Okay, here’s the deal. We got to go A through Z, 500 applicants, what should we do?” That’s one of the things that I’ve always enjoyed, to get others to give me their ideas, too. I don’t have to know everything. Others have good ideas, too.

We came up with a strategy that we would divide it A through C, C through—there were enough of us. One would go to Building 1 second floor, first floor and use the copiers there. Then bring it all back. I think we worked to probably midnight that day, but when they came in in the morning, they were all in boxes. Did anybody say thank you? No. But it was one of those that we know they’re noticing, because when they left in the evening they [our files] were not there.

It was those kinds of challenges that George would put on us. The other thing is I became like the team captain or the morale captain. They were working so many hours that we didn’t do dinner and stuff like that, so I started keeping a drawer of cookies and licorice [candy]. The guys knew where the drawer was, so they would come and help themselves. Abbey would fill his pockets up with licorice. A couple of the applicants told me, “You don’t know how nerve-racking it is. He’s sitting there eating this licorice. You’re trying to be serious about an interview and he’s just munching away.”

Then I don’t know if you’ve heard this story, but the way the table is for the interviews, it’s like a T. The interviewee sits where the T meets in the corner. I finally asked Duane [L.] Ross—this was later—“Why is it that way? Shouldn’t the applicant be sitting at either end of the table?” Duane said it was because Mr. Abbey couldn’t be heard very well, because when he

talks he's so quiet, so the applicant couldn't hear him. So that's why they put the applicant there, where the rest of us had to really stretch to listen. But it's still that way just out of tradition.

The selection that Greg and I went through was the one that had Jerry [L.] Ross and Franklin [R.] Chang-Diaz and Jim [James P.] Bagian and Mary [L.] Cleave. It was a really cool group. A little story there. When it came time for Charlie [Charles F.] Bolden to have his interview, I was responsible for collecting their essay. I don't remember if it was 500 or 1,000 words, but they had an essay they had to submit. When he walked in for his interview, I said, "Do you have your essay?"

He said, "Oh, I forgot." He opens up his briefcase. He takes out the Holiday Inn letterhead and starts to write and gives it to me. He said, "Do you think this will do?" I read it. I got teary-eyed because it was a letter to his mom. It read something like, "Dear Mom, Dad said I could accomplish whatever [I set out to do]." I think his dad had died by then. "Today I'm doing something I always wanted to do."

I said, "You know what? You're every mom's dream kid."

So I think Duane must have rescued that. That letter must have been rescued probably in the file somewhere because I saw Mrs. Bolden, Sr., at the launch for STS-35. I just had to go up to her. I told her the story. She said, "Well, that letter is in a museum now."

WRIGHT: Oh, good.

GILLETTE: If I'm not mistaken that's what happened to that letter. So, I was like, "Oh, I was the first one to touch that. Look at Charlie now." So the other little story with that was Franklin Chang-Diaz. I was also supposed to be sure that they were all there at the initial meeting for the

interviews, the kickoff meeting. I kept looking for a [Chang]. There was no [Diaz] in his name yet. Or he wasn't using it for that. I couldn't see a Chang. So finally I see one lone person. I went up to him. I said, "Are you Franklin Chang?"

He says, "Yes. Franklin Chang-Diaz."

I said, "Oh." I almost didn't count him because he didn't look like I thought he should. But it was a great experience. Also during that selection process, when we first started that process, I had just been in that job for a couple of months. Mr. Abbey told me I was going to Minnesota to recruit.

I said, "Recruit?"

He said, "Yeah. Recruit Hispanics."

I said, "What are there, like eight of them there?"

He said, "No. You'll see. There's quite a few Hispanics."

I said, "Okay."

He said, "And you're going with Pinky [George D.] Nelson."

I said, "Who's Pinky?"

He said, "You don't know Pinky Nelson?"

I said, "No, I'm sorry. I don't."

So he says, "Well, find out." So I found out he was an astronaut.

He's from Minnesota, so we're going to meet [there]. I talked to Pinky on the phone. We made plans about where to stay, The Curtis Hotel. It was my very first official travel, so I remember it was Halloween. I took an early flight so that I would not have to deal with nighttime and not knowing where I was. The plane broke in Houston, so we didn't get out till late afternoon.

I get to Minneapolis. It's snowing and it's dark. I get to the hotel and I check in. I said, "Has Dr. Nelson checked in?"

He said, "Oh, he just canceled out."

I said, "Did he say where he is?" He said no. So, I go up to my room and I called Greg and I said, "I'm coming home. I'm not doing this." Because we were going on TV. I said, "I'm not doing this."

He said, "Oh, yes, you are. You just get yourself ready."

I said, "Greg, I've had the job for two months." I had brought all this literature. All the brochures. I put them on the bed and I'm reading and reading and reading.

I got up in the morning all set. Okay, this is what I'll do. Phone rings. He's [Pinky] downstairs. "Where the hell have you been?" I said to him. I didn't know who he was. But we had a wonderful time. He was so super. The interview was all about him. All I did was recite the qualifications, but the interview was all about him.

Then he took me to lunch, and as he was paying, I said to the cashier, "Do you know that he's a world-famous astronaut?"

He said, "Estella, stop."

She said, "Oh, yeah, sure he is." She's punching the cash register. He pulls out his Visa [credit card].

I said, "See, if you'd had an American Express [credit card] they would have known who you were." You know that commercial. So, we had a really good time and got to be good friends.

The whole career is all about good friends, maybe a couple of people that I displeased along the way or vice versa, but not significant enough to have made a difference. After the

selection, I was a staffing specialist. Technically I was a staffing specialist, but a critical thing after the selection, I was about 35 years old. No degree. After going through the process of the applications, with all these young people who had masters', PhDs, and here I am 35 years old and no degree. I had about 30 credits of night school.

At that point I thought I need to do it. I had taken Spanish to get back to college. I actually had to get a special book because the text that they used was not enough for me, but that was about all I had done from the time that I had gone to night school for three years after I graduated [from high school]. I went to night school, but I just wasn't interested. Now I'm thinking, "Okay it's time."

I went to San Jac [San Jacinto College, Houston], recovered my credits from U of H [University of Houston] downtown, and sat down with San Jac. I said, "Okay, this is what I have. This is what I'd like, a two-year degree in business. Then I want to go talk to U of H Clear Lake about a bachelor's." At that point it was easier for me to just say okay, this is how many credits you need. Split it up by semester how many hours you're going to get. I said to myself, "You'll have a bachelor's by age 40." I just told myself, because I had to make myself a timeframe. Otherwise, I was going to wander forever.

I went and I did my San Jac thing and then got to U of H Clear Lake. By this time jobwise I had gone to HR to be the staffing specialist with Greg. I got involved with other kinds of evaluating qualifications for engineers, for other kinds of jobs besides astronauts.

[The HR experience was] very useful for me later when I became EO [Equal Opportunity] Director because I had a really solid background in HR, I thought. This was in Building 45. I went to the staffing office after we were done with the astronaut selections. One of the cool things that happened was I was sitting there, and a lot of people would come by and

ask about astronaut selections, even though we had moved to 45 instead of 266. One day I get this visitor. The name was David [A.] Wolf. He was a medical intern, and he was there for the summer. We hit it off beautifully. We talked and I told him all about what he should know about becoming an astronaut. We found out our birthdays were the same day except he's 11 years younger, so we have celebrated our birthdays sometime for all those years since then.

Another thing I got to do was I was on TV for "Good Morning America" [ABC morning news show] over in [Building] 9. They had the setup, and it was during one of the launches. They interviewed me, and it was Joan Lunden. She was talking to me, but I know I must have looked like this because I had the phone in my ear and she was talking to me. It was a short interview but it was a comfortable interview because she asked me questions that I knew the answers to and it was all about how to be an astronaut, which was what I got good at saying. Dave [Wolf] contacted me later and he said that he had taped that interview because I never saw it because, to my knowledge, nobody taped it here, and then he taped over it later, inadvertently taped over. So I never saw it. It must have been good.

Anyway, so I'm now in HR. Then I see an announcement for the Federal Women's Program Manager [position] in EO. Remember, I had been on that committee, so I had developed an interest in EO. So I applied for that job, and I'd gotten my [GS-] 9 now with Greg, but the job was an 11, so I applied for it, and I got it. I worked with Dr. Joseph [D.] Atkinson, Jr., who was a true inspiration for me in many, many ways. In fact, he probably planted the doctorate seed because he was working on one of those NASA-sponsored programs when he got his doctorate. He and I would talk a lot, philosophically. He loved to philosophize, but I understood a lot about the racial issues, the perceptions of inequality, the backgrounds. He was a

Morehouse [College, Atlanta, Georgia] man, and he had known Martin Luther King. So he provided a history for me that I would not have had.

Plus he told the story in a very nice way, and why things were the way they were. There wasn't any controversy or hate or anything like that, so I loved talking to him. I went to work for Joe and he had been on the selection board when I had been on the HR side. One day I get a call from George Abbey. He said, "Estella, I understand you just made a move, but I wanted to see if you'd like to make another move."

I said, "What's that?"

He said, "Would you like to come be the admin in the Astronaut Office?" Because Cy [Cyril E.] Baker had just died. He was a longtime admin there.

I said, "Oh, Mr. Abbey, I'm so flattered you called me. But I just made this move, and I just couldn't leave Dr. Atkinson. It wouldn't be very nice."

He said, "Well, in CB [Astronaut Office organization code] it's all women administrative group. They've had some major issues. They just need somebody that would put it all together." I'm very resistant about it. He still scared me quite frankly, so I wasn't too sure I wanted to go there. So he said, "Well, think about it."

Next day John [W.] Young calls me. "Ma'am, I hear tell you might be coming over to the Astronaut Office."

I said, "Well, actually, Captain Young." I knew him from the selection process, too, I said, "Mr. Abbey called me and I'm very flattered. I'm so flattered you're calling me now. But like I said to him I just came over [to EO]. I just got a promotion, and it just wouldn't be right."

He said, "Well, ma'am, we got a lot of female problems over here. It'd sure be good if a woman could come over and handle them." Talk about—that's just basics. That's just the way

it was. It was about 30 administrative women, about half contractor, half civil servant. Then one of the HR guys had told me, good friend of mine.

He said, “Estella, if you go over there, it’s a tough area. Think about it.”

I said, “Well, no, I’m really not thinking about it. I’m happy here with Dr. A.”

George calls me the next day. “So, did John Young call you?”

I said, “Absolutely. I cannot tell you how flattered I am. This is incredible. Jeez, I’m so sorry, but I really just can’t leave Dr. Atkinson.”

He said, “What if I make it a supervisory admin?”

I said, “So when did you want me to come?” Because former secretary, no degree yet, where else was I going to get that kind of experience? Like I said, a while back I had decided it was going to be a career. So I transitioned over about a three-month [period] where I was doing both jobs. This was around October, November, so in January I went over there full-time.

WRIGHT: He also gave you some authority along with that.

GILLETTE: Yes, free authority to do whatever I thought needed to be done. Talk about a challenge. Some of the people were very resentful of my being there, some of the people I was going to supervise. There were all kinds of rumors about how I got it, if you know what I mean.

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah.

GILLETTE: Yeah. There was all kinds of speculation about I was a George spy among the astronauts. They were concerned that I was a George spy. John Young was super to work with.

I absolutely adored working with him, because as technical as he was, he was also very people-oriented. I had to laugh at him sometimes, because he was so caring about—well, for example, the award money that HR gives to civil servants. [HR] gives so much to each organization. John and George said, “No, astronauts don’t need any of that. They get perks through the year. Give it to your admin ladies.” So I would take the full amount and split it among my ladies, because that’s how they [George and John] felt, that they were the net that kept them [the astronauts] going, and so they deserved more. But, when I got there, it was absolute chaos.

Part of the problem was that when they formed a crew, they take astronauts from all kinds of places and form a crew, and then now they have to put them together. Building 4 North, the old building, wasn’t configured [as it is today]. It was just great big offices. And the corps was growing. We had hired the TFNG [Thirty-five New Guys] in ’78 and so they were filling up faster. There was also the growth of the contractor support that had to be on site. There was also the beginning of the payload specialists, so they were coming in. There was a lot of resistance among the astronauts about who should be there. There was actually a Payload Specialist Office in that area.

But as the crews would be formed it just made sense to put everybody together regardless of what their status was in the astronaut world. So, one of the main issues that I had was the space. It’s still a big issue I think. The first thing I did. Building 4 was pretty much a square, I think. It had all the outer offices and then you had what the guys called the snake pit, because it was in the middle, it was the core. At the time I probably had about maybe 80 astronauts and about maybe 9 secretaries. I had to somehow balance out the support. I don’t know how I came up with this, because I didn’t have any prior experience and certainly didn’t have the formal education yet, but it made sense to me to move all the astronauts out from the core area, put them

out. They all wanted windows, so stuff them in the window areas. They also didn't want modular stuff. They wanted regular desks and said, "Well, these are modular," but they wanted what they called real desks. They didn't have any computers. Neither did the secretaries. So for me it was easier to make the workflow for the admins a little bit more defined.

One of the challenging things I found was [Astronaut] Appearances. I think they had 4,000 requests a year for Appearances at that point. This was 1983, '84. We had a staff of about maybe three civil servants and maybe another three or four contractors. The travel was all done by one lady for the Appearances. That one lady civil servant would call the Travel Office and then they'd put her on hold. She'd get the information, eventually get to the astronaut, and the astronaut would say, "No, I don't want that [travel arrangement], go back." So she was on the phone constantly. One of the things I decided was why can't she have one of those SABRE [Semi-Automatic Business Research Environment] computers so she can look up the information and just queue it up to a point, but she can play with it the whole time. She doesn't have to be on the phone. I went to Mr. Abbey. He said, "How much?"

I said, "\$5,000 a year."

"Get it."

Well, then I ran into, "It's not CB's area." Everybody was always fighting with the Astronaut Office because they [the Astronaut Office] were always trying to do stuff without going through the channels. So I made a deal with Center Ops [Operations], because it was Center Ops at the time, that we would not cut any tickets. We only wanted to queue it [the ticket] up. Then we'd release it to the Travel Office, to the real travel people, so that they could take care of it. They agreed. So, now we get this computer. Well, the lady who was in charge [in CB] didn't want to use the computer. It's like well, that's the job. Well, how about if you go

to training? It's in Dallas. Well, I don't fly. How about if you drive? Well, but I still don't want to use the computer. Well, how about—you want to say, "How about if you leave?" But you can't because she was an old-timer—and she was a good employee. It's just that she couldn't make this transition. So, what we did was we gave it to one of the contractors, and then the civil servant would overlook all of that, because she knew what to look for. She just didn't know how to use the computer.

Then we had the issue of no computers. MOD [Mission Operations Directorate] was going to the Star computer. That was the Xerox Star. The few computers that were there were for the astronauts, who had gotten them probably through their contractors, because Mr. Abbey, when I told him that the astronauts wanted computers, he said, "If I wanted typists I would have hired typists."

One day John Young said, "Well, what's wrong with flags if you want to communicate? [Like in the Navy] They could stand in the corner of Building 1." They would get so silly. I asked Mr. Abbey if I could have computers.

He said, "Well, how many would you need?"

I said, "Well, one per person, and I got 30."

"Oh. Well, you're going to have to show me that they really need them."

So, I put together a presentation. I went forth. He gave me two computers, so what I did was there were nine secretaries, there were nine people in Appearances, and then the other people were other kinds of people. I worried about those two groups first, and I gave one computer to the secretaries. I had an office. My office was about this big [hand gesture], so I cut one third of it off, made an entrance into this little room, put all kinds of acoustic stuff in [for soundproofing], set up the computer there. We had a [sign-in] board. I said to every secretary,

“You get 5 hours a week. There are 9 of you. That’s 45 hours. If you want 2 hours in a row, you guys negotiate. I’m not going to get into that.” So they did that. Then the astronauts wanted to know when it was their turn. I said, “When they’re done at 6:00 then it’s your turn.” Was that silly or what? It was so basic.

For the other computer, I gave it to the Astronaut Appearances [office], because remember they got a lot of work. I call in that team and they said to me, “We don’t need any computers, we need more people.”

I said, “Well, we’re not going to get more people. So we have to figure out how to do this with other things.”

“Don’t want any computers. We want more people.”

There was a lady who was probably—she was probably my age now. She said, “I’ll take it. Put it at my desk.”

I said, “Oh. Thank you. Thank you.” So we put it at her desk. Now we’ve taken care of that for a little bit. The one with the secretaries seemed to be working. They were cooperating with one another. The one in Appearances, after a few days I go over, and I said, “Alice [Martin], so how are you doing with the computer?”

She said, “Well, girl, it’s working out so good. The only thing is I haven’t figured out where I roll in the paper.”

WRIGHT: Oh, gosh.

GILLETTE: For every file she had a little icon across the top, across the screen, because she hadn’t figured out how to [print], but we muddled through all of that. A few months later, the

ladies from Appearances who had said we needed more people came in irate that if they didn't have computers they were quitting. I thought, "Here's the blue form. Read and sign it." That's how I felt. Eventually Mr. Abbey gave me one for everybody, but that was a struggle just to set up some efficiency.

The other thing was the middle area [in building 4]. I made it entirely administrative support. The corners of that middle area I made two secretaries per corner. You're going to work 7:30 to 5:00. You guys decide which shift you want. I do not want to get into that. You guys decide who's going to go to lunch when or if you have a kid's appointment or something. You guys decide who's going to cover, because constantly it was, "Well, I was going at 11:30, and then she beat me and went at 11:15." That was the kind of stuff. Remember, I said I worked much better with the guys. Well, then God punished me and I get 30 [women]!

WRIGHT: Challenged you.

GILLETTE: I gave them some decisions to make on their own, and that seemed to help. Then with the middle section I gutted all the walls and put cubbyholes in. I thought I was going to get killed, but I managed. Then we got computers, so it all started to work out. The workflow was such that everybody walked out into the hallway from their offices before, so pieces of paper—of course it was all paper then—would not get to the next place. They'd stay in a basket, and an appearance [request] wasn't finished because somebody didn't pick up that piece of paper. Of course, computers started to make it a lot more efficient. I have no idea what it's like now, but at that point it [the new layout] started to help.

The other thing was the coffeepot. Everybody had coffee. A couple of the ladies would go to Weingarten's or whatever was there at the time [across the street], cart the coffee back to the office, get a basket, carry it upstairs. I'm like, we're not going to be doing that, so I got a coffee service, and they delivered the coffee. I would charge the astronauts \$20 every 6 months for coffee. If you didn't drink coffee, you still got an assessment of \$15 because your guests would drink coffee. Well, you should have heard some of the resistance I had for that one. But the bosses were behind me, because it was just more efficient to do that and not worry about do we have enough money to buy coffee.

From that \$20 or \$25 every 6 months I also had money to buy cards, flowers, and I opened an account at the bank, so we had interest that it was earning. Plus if you've seen those medallions, silver and gold, only the astronauts could buy them. This was personal stuff and it had nothing to do [with work], which I had to clear with Legal, that I could not do it on the job. When you ordered them, it was [from] a manufacturer in Massachusetts. Initially he would finish them, and then they would fly that way, those that flew. After a while, the flights started to be so close together that they couldn't keep up the pace, so they were sending slugs instead. I wanted the money up front so that when the bill came for the finished ones I had it, so I started to collect money up front. [There was] some resistance. "Why should I give it to you when I could be earning money on it?"

I said, "Yeah, but I could be earning money on it too, because it goes to the astronaut fund for flowers and all that." At one point I had \$25,000. It was making money.

I was still collecting the \$25 because the money was for the medallions, because I didn't want to be in debt with the medallion company. You just couldn't do that. Even if it was personal stuff, somebody had to be responsible. The one thing that I always had though was

management support, but I always would go and explain. Okay, if I do this and this and that, including if I gut the office and put in modular furniture. I always had their support. John was extremely supportive. George was “Just tell me what you’re doing and how much you need.” Because they really trusted me, and I just loved that there was this trust.

It took me about two years though. There’s this real tight clique there. Some of the women that I supervised had been there for a long time, so I had to break through that. But I remember it was the [STS-] 51C flight. The crew was Loren [J.] Shriver and Ellison [S.] Onizuka. They were the first crew that was nice to me. They would come in and tease me and harass me, so they started to make me feel comfortable. I had all these issues with the women going on, but that’s why I had gone there, because there were some significant issues, mostly caused by lack of defined roles and responsibilities.

The coffee pot was in a corner outside of that core area, so invariably it was left on. The pot burnt. The money got stolen. The coffee got stolen. In that middle area that became the mailroom part—oh, the other thing, the mailroom had shelves in the middle that took up all this room, but the shelves only had this much [hand gesture] stuff in them from the mail that would come in and they’d sort it there. It wasn’t necessary to have so much shelf space, so I moved all of that to the wall. Configured stuff. I worked closely with the Center Ops people. They gave me all kinds of ideas of what they could do. Put in a sink, and put the coffee service inside. Now you could only get in with a keypad. We put all the servers for the computers in there so everything was efficient. We put everything in one area so that the flow was much better. The secretaries’ work areas were flowing better.

Then came the [Space Shuttle] *Challenger* [accident]. By this time I was well into the organization, and we ran the gym, we ran the patches, and the logos, everything that we

supported in my organization. I had a super team of women. Some of them are still part of my women's team; we get together if we have a project. I can always call on them and get things done. Just a super group of women. So *Challenger* came. I was in my last semester of school for the bachelor's. January of '86 I had signed up for my last nine hours for that semester. Very ambitious. I was going to graduate. Well, we had the accident. I said to my husband, "I don't even want to go home." It was one of those where you just felt like you had to stay there. The day that it happened—there are some people that you just never forget what they do [for you].

I'll never forget Jack [John R.] Garman was sitting next to me in Building 1 in their conference room. We were watching the launch in a meeting. He said, "It exploded."

I said, "No it didn't."

He said, "Yeah, it did." So I got up and I went into Ron [Ronald L.] Berry's office because I wasn't sure what I was going to do.

He said, "Yeah, it exploded." Then I went to the elevators and Chris [C.] Critzos was standing there. He's died now.

He said, "We lost it." It was just one of those things that couldn't have happened. I was around for the Apollo [1] fire, but it wasn't the same impact. Then I walked over to Building 4 and everybody was sitting in John's [Young] office. We didn't have the multiple TVs all over the place. Everybody was sitting in John's office, and some in the conference room. Very quiet, everybody was fixated on this.

Brewster [H.] Shaw came up the hall and he gave me a hug and he said, "Are you okay?"

I said, "Yeah."

He said, "Well, I'm going to go talk to my wife at school and then when I come back, if you need anything you let me know." How thoughtful, but he was going to talk to his wife so

she would know firsthand what happened. Mary Lee Meider—Thompson now, she worked in the mailroom, she was my lead for the mailroom—we're sitting in my office and we're both just boohooing away because we don't know what else to do. Nobody had told us, "Do this."

So I said, "You know what? People are going to get hungry." It happened around 10:30 [a.m.].

She said, "You want me to get some food?"

I said, "Yeah."

She said, "I'll just go to the cafeteria."

I said, "Yeah, see what they can do for you. Just tell them you want something and they'll bring it into the conference room." Within minutes they had cold cuts and bread and chips and punch. They put it in the conference room. Well, for a while nobody came. I think Joe Henry Engle was the only one who came in. He's eating away like nothing had happened. Mary Lee and I were [thinking] what's wrong with this man. Well, he'd been [through] quite a few [similar experiences], being an X-15 guy.

After a while everybody started coming, took their plate. It was just one of those things. You want to think of something to do. After a while, we started getting telegrams and then flowers. They just started trickling in. After a while in the afternoon they really started coming. So, there we are again, Mary Lee and I are sitting there. I said, "We're going to have to acknowledge this somehow. We should come up with something." So I said, "How about maybe just a card?"

She said, "Hey, you know what? I just had the astronaut symbol done in graphics," because, again, we couldn't do that ourselves. She said, "I have it in all sizes."

“Bring it in, let’s work on that.” So we came up with a card that fits in a legal size envelope. [We] put the logo [on it], and “With grateful appreciation for your—” acknowledgment. Then we had John Young sign it.

By the next morning we had 1,000 printed by the print shop, all cut. We gave it to the secretaries, who were all sitting around like we had been, wondering what do we do next. The secretaries would take a pile. Then whatever was coming in, the mail cards—we had cards, we had origami birds, we had—oh, one card came in that somebody had watercolored. It’s a couple looking up at the sky with real pretty words. I really, really liked that card. I think it was one of the first that came in. So, immediately we had a collage done for the families with that card and the last picture of the crew [leaving out of Ellington Field]. [It’s] only partial crew, because the payload specialists had gone ahead, Christa [McAuliffe] and Greg [Gregory B. Jarvis], but it’s the NASA crew and then the logo. So it’s a collage that we had done.

That picture was from the same guy at Ellington who always took their picture. He had sent it to us. So we put that collage together and gave one to the families right away. Graphics, our people did it. By the next day we’re getting individual cards for the [Francis R. “Dick”] Scobee family, for the Onizuka family. So we had the same card made [the one Young had signed], and took the card over to the surviving spouses [to sign] and did the same thing with the cards. [We] gave them to the family so that they could have friends fill them out. It kept us busy and it kept us from floundering.

P. J. Weitz eventually told the rest of the astronauts to deploy and go do this. They started naming the casualty assistance officers. Then the memorials started to jell and the ninth floor was involved. I remember the day of the accident I went to Ellington, truthfully, because I just didn’t want to go home. I just wanted to stay there [at JSC]. There are a lot of people who

were hanging out. They didn't know what to do. I went to Ellington. Abbey and [Carolyn L.] Huntoon were coming in on a plane. I'll never forget they got off the plane and it was like the big brother and little sister holding hands getting off the plane. It was so sad. So sad.

For Mr. Abbey I know it had to be devastating, because he was so tied to those crew members. Plus they had all been part of his selection groups. They were all special. But for the memorial, the ninth floor directed it. Frances [M.] Smith was still there. It came together very, very beautifully. Then we were told that every astronaut could get a ticket for himself or herself and then a spouse. The night before the memorial Mary Lee says to me—she comes into my office crying, and she said, “It's not fair. We were not included in the memorial.”

I said, “That's because only the astronauts get to go.”

She said, “Yeah but it's not fair because we're part of this. It's hurting us just as much.”

I said, “I understand. But what can I do?”

So I went in to P. J. and I said, “It's not fair, P. J. We're part of this just as much as anybody else. Our ladies are in just as much pain. They did all this stuff, the patches, everything, the crew stuff.”

He said, “What do you want me to do?”

I said, “Is it okay with you if I talk to John?”

He said, “Sure. I'm not sure what he can do.”

So I went in to Captain Young and I said, “Okay.” I told him.

He said, “You can have my tickets.”

I said, “No, that's not what I want. But I would like to ask you, because I know a lot of the spouses are not going to come. So, if I have Mary Lee issue those as the astronauts come in, can I have any extra tickets that are left over?” We had exactly the number we needed.

WRIGHT: Oh, wasn't that nice?

GILLETTE: Then I had to tell my ladies, "You do not sit next to President [Ronald] Reagan, okay?" Because some of them would have! I said, "You sit to the back." So, we all went over and we all got to sit in that memorial group. But it was always if you have an idea, tell it, because maybe they'll accept it. I learned that it's not good to just stay quiet about it. I could have just told Mary Lee, "Sorry, we can't do anything about it." But, I did ask permission, if I could go in to John, because I didn't want to be pushing on him. But it all worked out very nicely.

Then the memorials out of town started happening. Because I had met Lorna Onizuka just shortly before they [the 51L crew] took off, I felt responsible for her somehow. Loren [Shriver] had volunteered to be the CAO. I asked Loren Shriver, "Hey, are you going to need help taking her back to Hawaii?"

He said, "Well, I think so. It's her parents," who were already not elderly, elderly but older, and then her two little girls. He said, "I could use some help."

I said, "So will you ask Mr. Abbey if I can go?"

He said, "Okay."

We went up to see Mr. Abbey. I waited outside. Loren comes out and I said, "Did you ask him?"

He said, "No, I couldn't. I just couldn't get around to it."

I said, "Okay, I'll go in." So I said, "Mr. Abbey, Loren is going to go. He's leaving tomorrow."

He said, "So he needs your help."

I said, "Yeah, he thinks he does. I'm not sure what I would do."

He said, "Go." So, I got to go. I escorted Lorna and the girls and then Loren could take care of other things that were going on. We flew across together. We got to Hawaii. This community of Ellison's was there, and people were thanking me, just hugging me and loving me because I had volunteered to do this. I felt like I was a little bit on a boondoggle, but I really did want to go. But, going to Hawaii was just, oh, wow!

The whole Hawaiian community was just so special. The mayor's wife, the governor's wife, I think, was there. They all were so grateful that I had made this effort to go to Hawaii. Then we flew into Oahu and then flew to Hawaii Island. That was home for [Onizuka], so the community was just very sad, but they were really honoring him. So, then with Lorna, her girls were little. Lorna was really trying to stay brave, but I became her assistant. I would vet her calls. I noticed there were no newspaper reporters. I said to her, "It's funny that you have no newspaper reporters."

She said, "Well, that's because Mr. Fujimoto had told them not to [call]." Mr. Fujimoto was sort of like the George Abbey of Hawaii. He was passing out the word you will not bother her.

I got to know Lorna very, very well and the Hawaii family, his parents. We went to his childhood home, just very basic kind of guy that he was. That was the first trip. This was in February.

We went again in May I think when we did the actual burial. That time we went in one of the planes that they use for the President and Vice President. Not the big one, but like a KC-135. They had the casket there, and Loren wore his Air Force blues. My job then became to

look after him, because a lot of times he was sweating, and I was getting him water. It was just whatever I could do, again Lorna's girls and all that. But it was such a sad time that you don't know how to act or what to do. That time there were several other NASA people who went on that plane. Treated royally. The Hawaiians all knew who NASA was. That was '86.

By that time I was almost finished with my degree. Since I dropped one course—I had started with nine [credits] and I dropped one—I actually aced the two courses. My husband, when I told him I was going to drop the whole semester, he said, “No, talk to your teachers, they'll understand. Tell them what's going on.” Sure enough, I think I missed five classes that semester but the [teachers] understood and I made up my work and I aced the two courses. Then in the summer I took my last course. I told Abbey that I was going to be taking a daytime course through the middle of the day, my last one. I told P. J. No problem. HR wouldn't let me officially extend the day so that I wouldn't have taken a leave. I left at 10:30, counted my lunch break, and would come back at 1:00, and then stay later, which I always did anyway.

Then one day P. J. says, “Did you tell George you were going to take this class?” I said, “Yeah.”

He said, “Great.”

I said, “Why?”

He said, “Well, he's acting like you didn't.” So I had to go [talk to him].

I said, “Mr. Abbey, it's my last class, it's the only time I could take it.” It was one of those mandatory senior classes.

He said, “Are you going to do any more?”

I said, “No, I will not do any more.”

“Well, okay. Just don’t want you to neglect the office.” So I finished and graduated in August of ’86. I was two weeks from being 41. So I was still 40.

WRIGHT: Made that goal.

GILLETTE: Yeah. Then John got moved, and politics set in. He was moved to the ninth floor right across from the men’s room. There were three offices there; one was a middle office and then two side offices.

So, I went in and I said, “Captain Young, I’ll find you the office. I’ll move you. I’ll let you keep your same phone. I’ll get you a secretary.”

He said, “Okay, ma’am, whatever.” It was like I was so brokenhearted because he really just wanted to be an astronaut, but politics set in.

Then rumor was that the other office was for George. I went ahead and made up three offices. I was working with the ninth floor, so I had a secretary. I did get a secretary for the middle [office], and then John to the right if you’re looking at the [three offices]. Then the other one was empty. A few months later I think George was moved to that spot, so the prediction was right.

He didn’t stay long because one day I get a call out of Ellington, and it was Abbey calling but he missed me, or I missed him. He was on his way to Headquarters, and he didn’t come back for a while. That must have been when he eventually got involved with Dan [James Danforth] Quayle and the National Space Council. Something very, very admirable about Mr. Abbey – there is no relationship lost. Everybody counts. I teased him one time that he must have made friends with the [other] babies in the nursery. Every relationship counts, from the little guy to

the big guy. Yeah, some of them were probably x-ed out along the way, but when he went to Headquarters I think he was gone from here, that's all there was to it. He was moved out for whatever reason.

I said to Mr. Abbey that one observation I made about him was that he would set out to do what he thought was necessary for the mission, whether it's NASA, whether it's the office. He would do it fast enough and hard enough because he knew that others would catch up with him and make him stop eventually. That was his technique, in my observation. He just would start doing stuff, and people weren't quite sure what he was doing for a while, and then they'd figure it out, and then they'd come after him, and then it would stop. But I have to say that of all the guys, the people that I worked with, the bosses that I had, I learned the most from him. From Charlesworth I learned an awful lot, but with Abbey—and I have to say that I never knew a boss who cared more about the mission than he did. Whatever he did, whether he got credit for it or not, he did it because he thought that's what he needed to do for the mission.

He started the open house/ballunar thing. Through my whole career working at NASA, there's always been this objective of getting the public involved, to like us. It's a very fickle public. You're the favorite today, and tomorrow, well, within half an hour you're no longer the favorite. He was willing to open the gates up to let people in to see what these rocket scientists were doing behind this gate. He was able to bring in the Industry Day that we had; open it up to make the commercialization relationships happen.

The safety thing, I think he was probably the most responsible for institutionalizing it. I've fast-forwarded outside of the Astronaut Office, but I remember by this time I was the EO Director. We were on the NASA plane to Austin [Texas] to visit with the governor, [George W.] Bush at the time. We had that leak, that tetrachloride; very, very scary. Abbey was on the phone

constantly. I think [James D.] Wetherbee was back here [at JSC]. I don't know this but I'm just thinking he was reminiscing shades of *Challenger* and people dying. How could we let this happen here? This cloud of dangerous stuff moving to the community. I believe that it was around that time that he said [something like], "All right, we're planting this seed of institutional safety and it's going to stay." Now everything you see is safety, safety. Maybe a little too much, but wonderful, wonderful teachers that I had.

Now back to—okay, I graduated. Then George and John were moved. Then Don [Donald R.] Puddy came in as the Director of Flight Crew [Operations]. I didn't know Don very well. I knew who he was, but by that time I was doing the CB admin job, I was doing the directorate admin job, and I also had Ellington to worry about administratively. George had made me chief of all administrative activities for all of Flight Crew, not just the Astronaut Office. He also had promoted me to a 12. So, all that was working.

When Puddy came in it was a night and day difference. I had said that I was trusted, I was left alone to make decisions because I knew what was best in their opinion. You get a new boss and he doesn't really yet know the ropes. So, there were constantly questions about well, why don't we do it this way. It's like, well, we already tried to do it and it didn't work. Well, why didn't you do it this other way—so I was not happy. One of the differences with George was that when I had an admin status with him, I would spend hours with him, because business would continue, and I'd be on item two, but he'd take another phone call. I was privileged to be able to listen to what was going on, so that was another way of my knowing what was going on in the big picture and think that I was a part of it.

With Don, when I would finally get in to see him, he'd say stuff like "What *administrivia* do you have today?" Maybe he didn't mean anything by that, but to me it was just a big night

and day difference. He was perfectly fine when he was a flight director, but it was just a difference in management style that I just couldn't get used to. So, I made myself a promise that I would stay to Return to Flight [STS-26], then I would seek another position. By that time I also was thinking, well, if things don't work out maybe I'll just leave, go get my master's now that I know all about school, and then go teach.

So, it wasn't too long. I stayed in CB, and I muddled through with Puddy. He wasn't a bad guy. It's just that his style was different. Finally, I said to myself come Return to Flight, that's it. Well, Return to Flight day I get a phone call—I hadn't told anybody this—it was Harvey [L.] Hartman. Now that I had my degree, how would I like to go back to HR and lead up the secretarial development and communication skills and human resource development? I said I would love to. Would love to.

So, I go to Don. I said, "You have say-so here," because it was only a lateral.

He said, "Well, let's think about how we can counter that."

I said, "I really want to go."

He said, "You've made up your mind?"

I said, "Yeah, I made up my mind. But it's your choice because it's only a lateral. So you have to make the approval."

He said, "Well, so be it." So, I don't think I left on a very positive note with him. But there wasn't animosity or anything. He just said okay.

I go over to training [Human Resource Development], and I had a really good time with that. It was setting up. I had always had a lot of training as a secretary. Training was very active back then. But in the short time it had diminished a little bit. Freda [M.] Lowe had been in training as well but she had moved over to be the Federal Women's Program Manager when I

had left, so she was no longer there either. When I went over I wanted to have level training for level one, level two, level three [for the secretaries]. I wanted to be able to prepare them for the transition to admin [assistant and/or officer].

Back when I was an executive secretary we vacated that level of executive secretaries; promoted us to nicer jobs. It actually was a program called Upward Mobility. A lot of former secretaries, no degrees, were promoted that way. A lot of us went and got degrees so a lot of the upward mobility got into a real path. Then there was the Certified Professional Secretary [CPS], which is the cream of the crop to get one of those [for a secretary]. I actually had tried to be a certified secretary back when I was a secretary and I took the exam three times and I kept flunking it. There were six parts and I kept flunking accounting. I finally gave up. But then when I came back to training, I thought, how can I sell this to others if I don't have one myself? So I quietly went, took the exam, and this time I passed all six parts.

We started to promote the program. When I started that we had like maybe 6 CPSs at JSC, and by the time I left it was like 60. We celebrated the occasion because whenever we had the handful that would get their CPSs I would have a luncheon and invite the bosses and I would give them a little exam with one question from each section. I think it was Aaron Cohen who said he had no idea that secretaries had it so hard. I would have a breakfast with just the boss and the secretary for Secretaries Day because I felt it was important to build the team of the secretary and the boss, like I had had the opportunity to do.

The [secretarial] training I tried to make so that it would build one on the other. It took a while. The other piece that I had [in HR] was communication skills. For that, it was your basic presentation skills, your writing. I started getting calls about foreign-born professionals and how could we help get them more comfortable with presentation? So rather than put out the word and

say, “Hey, if you are foreign-born, you want to come take this workshop,” I had a guy that I was working with, a vendor who brought the presentation skills. I asked him, “Can I work with you and can we come up with a presentation skills for foreign-born professionals workshop?” He said sure. Same material but keeping the foreign-born part. So I was one of the participants. For my presentation [during the workshop], I pretended that I was putting together workshops for foreign-born professionals in English enhancement, speech enhancement and writing enhancement, I think it was. I presented that to the other participants who were all foreign-born. While I’m doing the presentation, they all start saying, “Well, I would come to a class like that. I would come to a class like that.” So it worked very well. They could only be small classes, but we had them pretty full for maybe a couple years.

I don’t know what happened, but it was also a way to get coaches for those who needed coaches. Plus there was that self-esteem part that they didn’t have to be concerned about their presentations when there were others who were going to present who might have the same types of issues. [Being foreign-born myself, I understood that.]

I had a lot of fun with all of that. I really, really did. I also started to pick up a lot of train-the-trainer kinds of classes because I was interested in learning about training. I had taken a couple of classes in my undergraduate [classes] that made me interested in training and development. Eventually, though, I get a call one day from Mary [F.] Lopez. She’s Mr. Abbey’s former secretary, because he’s gone to Headquarters now, working with Dan [Daniel S.] Goldin. Abbey called Mary on a Thursday morning. I was still at home. She calls me at home. She said, “Mr. Abbey says that if you want to come work at Headquarters you have to be there on Monday.”

I said, “Did he say what for?”

She said, “No.”

“Did he say what job?” No. “How long?” No.

So I told Susan [A.] Braymer, who was my boss by then. I’ll always be grateful to her. When I told my husband that George wanted me to go to Headquarters, first thing he says is “Who’s paying for the trip?”

I said, “I’ll pay for it, I don’t care, I’ve always wanted to go.” So, I told Susan.

She said, “Oh, no doubt we’ll pay for it. If he wants you to go it’s not a problem.”

So I called George on Saturday and I said, “Okay. Could you tell me a little bit more? Like who would I be working with?”

He said, “Well, there’s a couple of choices.”

“Well, should I pack like for two days? Three days?”

He said, “Well, if you want to wear the same outfit for several days. You might want to pack more.” He just wouldn’t tell me anything. So, I get up there on Monday. It was two positions. One was in the EO Office working with the Associate Administrator. The other one was working for a brand-new guy who was heading up the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business. Ralph [C.] Thomas. I knew I wanted to apply for the EO deputy job someday. So I thought I better not mess it up and go work in the EO Office. I’ll take my chances and work with Ralph. Great decision.

Ralph was one of the funniest guys to work with. He was super smart on his work, but the best thing was [his approach to] performance appraisal, performance plan. About the second day he told me, “Okay, this is what I want you to do while you’re here.” I was there for 120 days. Actually Jack [John R.] Dailey signed my travel orders, so I had an interview with him, too. Jack told me that he wanted me to help Ralph get his office started. He needed everything

from secretarial support to logistics to furniture to computers. He had nothing. He had people, but he had nothing to set him up.

When I talked to Ralph, Ralph said that I was actually birthed in the executive dining room at Headquarters because he had been at lunch talking to a bunch of people and George was there. George said, “Oh, I have just the person for you.” I think George was thinking of when I was in CB when I had come in and done all that.

So when I was talking to Ralph he says, “These are the four things I want you to do, so can you do them?”

I said, “Yeah I think so. I can do that easily. This one over here might take a little longer. But I got 120 days.”

He said, “So, if you do all of them what would you like from me?”

I said, “I’d like a Silver Snoopy [Award].”

He said, “What’s that?”

So, I said, “Never mind. Just give me whatever. I appreciate the opportunity. Plus it was \$100 a day per diem, all expenses paid for travel, and I got a temporary 13. So it’s like hmm, not a bad deal. So I told Ralph, yes, I could do that.

About every two weeks he would sit down with me and say, “Okay, how are we doing on that list?”

Then I’d say, “Yeah. But look, you stuck in number four and a half and number one and a half. Now I’m going off to all the Centers with you for the MBRAC meetings—” I was playing secretary for this board that he was a member of, so that delayed finishing the original four tasks. But we had just a really wonderful relationship. I learned a lot about small business. A lot of people that I now see in the contractor world were visiting him because they were trying

to find out how to do business with NASA. It was the day when NASA had to do 8 percent business with the small businesses. It was rooting a lot of stuff then. He was very professional, the staff was very professional. The administrative staff was a little tougher. I had to really work hard with them, but I won their trust by buying pizza and having lunch with them in the office when Ralph was on travel.

Talking over with them, okay, how would you do this, how would you do that? They came around very, very well. I really enjoyed the assignment at Headquarters. When it was time for me to leave [JSC]—well, in the interim, before I left to go do the assignment, I went to see Joe [Joseph D.] Atkinson. Once before the job for deputy had come up and I didn't get it. It was one of the worst days of my life. I applied and I didn't get it. I had actually been encouraged by some people to go apply. Part of the reason I wanted the degree was so that I would have no excuses when I did apply. Somewhere along the line I had written in one of my workbooks in a class, "I want to be Director of EO." I don't know why. I just wrote it. So, the things that I was doing were to go that route.

Well, when the deputy job came open, Freda got it, she was there already, but I was very devastated. So, this second time [the EO deputy job came open], George was already at Headquarters. He was in the midst of lots of changes here because he became Goldin's [right-hand man]—I heard him called the axman because he was doing so many things for Goldin. There was also that perspective that he gained and I think those of us people that eventually went to Headquarters, because he pulled them up there, [realized] that Headquarters has a very different culture from the NASA culture here [at JSC]. I learned that there was an extreme influence by the Congressional activities that go on every single day. I was there when we were making phone calls and the [Space] Station survived by one vote. All of our folks were making

phone calls in Ralph's office to the constituents, the small businesses that we worked with. So it's a very different perspective from what I had here [at JSC]. My viewpoint of Headquarters was very different after that.

Also, the culture I saw was people here were very rooted into JSC. We've all been around a while. It's a big family. Maybe that came because of the move from Virginia to here and the task force that came originally. There was no other family, so we rooted as a family. But at Headquarters it was very different; 4:30 came around and people were leaving because they had to catch the ride, the car pool or their metro that comes at a certain time. The other thing I saw was leadership doesn't stay in place very long. It's not as constant as it is here. What I gathered was, so why would I become faithful and loyal and move myself for one leader when I know they're going to be gone?

The depth of dedication was different there from here. I'm not saying they didn't do their job but it was just a different perspective altogether from what I had learned here. When I went to Headquarters I thought, no problem, I know how to do this, got it down pat. But in six weeks I had to come home for a JSC injection because I was going to have a nervous breakdown, it was so different. When I called here, and you know everybody and you chat a little bit about personal stuff, and then go on to the business. There it seemed like, "What do you want?"

Then I heard I was called a loose cannon by some people up there. I finally told one young lady who was helping me with logistics, "You know, you have not helped me one bit. I have 120 days. I'm already halfway through. I have not accomplished this because you are holding me up. If I have to, I'm going to tell Mr. Thomas. You know, General Dailey has signed my travel orders, and I have to give him a status too." I don't [normally] play those tactics, but it was one of those that I had to try something that would work.

Well, she told Ralph that I had talked to her that way. He told her, “Well, she has a reason for that, so you better listen to her.” Funny thing is about a year later she asked me for a reference to come to JSC. So you just never know. I was nice. I got over it.

It was just that you had to pull a little bit harder. I think it was mostly because the roots were just not as—it’s like a tallow [tree] versus an oak tree, the roots are different. On a daily basis we would have a Congressional inquiry of some kind. So, you drop what you were doing yesterday and minimize that a little bit to take care of today’s problem. I think everybody should do a NASA Headquarters assignment just so that you have an appreciation for what people do there. Priorities shift constantly, where here maybe they’re not as shifting.

I was in HRD [Human Resource Development] when I went to Headquarters. That was in ’93, so I was there for four months. Then right after I left JSC, the job for the EO deputy came open again. In fact I had gone to see Dr. Atkinson, and I said to him, “Okay, if this job opens while I’m gone I want you to know I’m going to apply for it again. I figured out what I did wrong the last time.” He would always laugh when I would talk to him. I said, “I should have come back to you to give you an update on what I had been doing since when I had worked for you. I just assumed that you had kept up with me. Freda being here for two years before the job came open, it’s natural that you would give it to her.” So we had that conversation before I left.

He said, “Stell, don’t worry about it, I won’t advertise till you get back.” Well, the end of the week that I got there it hits the street. So I called him.

I said, “Was this a hint?”

So I went through the whole motions [of applying from Headquarters]. But I didn’t tell Mr. Abbey because for some reason I decided I’d better not tell him. Well, just as I was

leaving—and I already knew I had gotten the job—I went to see Mr. Abbey. He said, “You really need to stay here. You’ll get your 15.”

I said, “Oh, man.”

He said, “And Ralph really likes you and he needs you.”

I said, “But I really need to get home.” I [told him] my dad had recently died, my mom, although there were other children, she was missing me. My son was graduating from high school, my younger boy. I said, “I really need to get home.”

He said, “Well, you’re going to regret it.” I thought that’s it, I just cut myself, put myself on his bad list. So, I get back. Not too long after that he comes back. Then Huntoon takes over. Joe in the meantime was moved to education, which was in Public Affairs [Office] at the time. He and I talked. It was a political move and we understood. Then, I was named the Director. I think I applied, or maybe it was just a lateral and they could just promote me.

But it was one of those that I felt bad because Joe had been my mentor. But we had a talk and he said, “Stell, I had the job for 20 years. It’s time.” The thing about Joe was that he had the job during a very tumultuous era when affirmative action came in. There was still resentment on both sides, the minority and the nonminority side about affirmative action. One says it’s not working, the other one says it’s working too well. So, he went off to education. He took with him the minority university piece, which was his favorite, anyway.

I came in and I had eight people, counting me. We started with the buyouts. There were a couple of people that I thought were ready to go, so I talked to them about the buyout and they were ready to go, they took it. Then it was what can I do differently, because, to some, the program hadn’t been working too well. When I came in in ’64 there was no affirmative action for the government sector. It started in ’72 for the government. It’s very natural to reach out to

what you're familiar with, so, in my mind I think the "white guys" were in charge. It was like with the secretaries, it was an era of really powerful skills that they came with. I think accomplishing going to the Moon was spectacular with the people that we had.

The country really geared itself up for this kind of thing. Then NASA was extremely responsive with the people that it hired to do the job. It was just so cool to remember the Apollo era and the young faces that were all around. Then things get complex and chaotic, so you're not in so much control. There's always going to be the factor of the Congressional decisions that are made, that's going to be forever. I'm not sure how we will ever overcome that if we survive that long.

For me the era, coming into EO, it was a good time to come in, because people were already in place. We had minorities and women in good places. Goldin, right along, he had gone to some great efforts to diversify. By then of course the astronaut corps was very diversified. By being the EO Director, I gained a seat on the Astronaut Board. It was interesting that my career had taken me from the astronaut selection [in HR] to the Astronaut Office, Flight Crew, and now on the Board too. It was a really cool evolution there.

Being on the selection Board also gave me a perspective. We look at applicants who are minorities. In their bachelor's they might have—and this wasn't all of them—but often they might have, say, a 2.3, but then in their master's they would have a 3.9. It indicated to me that given an opportunity people can learn and excel. We don't all get to start at the same starting line, so I could see this happening at JSC too.

Now we have a lot of development, we have a lot of training, and we have a lot of opportunities. But a lot of those opportunities don't come until you get to a certain level. You have this layer of people that may never get there, so they will never derive the opportunities

like, that I had for example. I got to go to Harvard [University, Cambridge, Massachusetts]. I got to go to Penn [[Pennsylvania] State [University, University Park]. I got to go to Simmons [College, Boston, Massachusetts] Graduate School for women. I tell people maybe I was a throw-down. But, hey, whatever. I happened to be there, and they happened to send certain people, but I certainly derived a lot of benefit from that. At some point you've got to have the same opportunity for everybody to see how well they do. Sometimes that opportunity doesn't come for a while.

The reason I told you the story about my Max Faget call was because I could remember back to that experience when I wasn't handheld and nobody told me it was the wrong thing to do. People come in very relatively skilled because they get invited to come here, so they must be good. But when they get into this big picture where there's a whole lot better people, you can really get lost in that. I saw where we lost people. We lost people's potential because we didn't reach out to really make sure that we carried them line by line. In my case I think I lucked out that there were people who noticed that I was interested and didn't mind sharing [their knowledge], like Marilyn Bockting, like Gene Rice. Charlesworth even, who allowed me to break him up a little bit, because Charlesworth loved to make jokes and laugh. He really, really did, but a lot of people didn't see that. He would just crack up. It was so nice to see him that way.

In fact when Charlesworth hired me, months later I heard—this was '72, '73—that he had hired me because I was a Spanish-speaking American, or whatever the phrase was for us back then. So, I went to him. I said, "I got a question to ask you. This is kind of a touchy question. But I need to know the answer. Did you hire me because I'm Mexican?" He laughed. I said, "Because I'm Mexican and because the law says you have to?" He laughed.

He said, "I'm from Mississippi. Do you think I give a crap about all that?"

I said, "Okay. Dumb question." Maybe somebody dropped that in his ear, but I think I proved that I really was a good secretary. To the day he died we remained friends. We have so many people that come into JSC and we don't really handhold them to get them through that stormy weather, the forming, norming part [Bruce Tuckman's stages of group development] of becoming a team. Then we lose them. In my role as EO Director I also took on the role of discrimination complaints officer for a while. I wanted to have my hands on the complaints because they were getting a little out of hand.

In the complaints world, the clock is ticking the whole time. You have 30 days for this, 90 days for this, whatever. I totally would disregard the clock, although I was conscious of it. However long it took me to resolve an issue, sit you down with your supervisor. Can I sit you down with your supervisor? Because I want you to tell him or her directly what you're telling me. Then I would facilitate the discussion, and 95 percent of the time the complainant would say, "That's all I needed. I just needed somebody to talk to, somebody to listen to me. I'm cool."

I discovered this little trick that people just really want to talk. We heard dignity and respect. That's all I need. That will take me a long way. If you respect me and treat me with dignity there's almost nothing I wouldn't do for you. I found that people really were responsive to that.

While I was in EO, we had the separate groups: Hispanic, Black, Asian, gay, disabled. We had them all. One day Huntoon and Abbey said to me, "Why do we have to have all this separatism? Why can't we just have a JSC group?" Having come through participating in those groups, women, Hispanic, whatever, I always never really enjoyed the separatism. My deal is if

I want to belong to the majority, then I have to learn what the majority does. I'd actually gone to the Simmons Graduate School for Women. The women who wrote *The Managerial Woman*, Margaret Hennig and [Anne Jardim] were the facilitators for that. It was a one-month class. I was in Boston for that. What they said was you have to learn about where you want to be. Then once you get in, *then* you make the changes, but you can't try to make the changes to get in.

Another person I heard, he was the president of Prairie View A&M [University, Prairie View, Texas]—this was years ago—said, "I tell my students that when I go to the bank to ask for money I wear my three-piece suit and I wear the role. When I'm home among people of my friendly culture, I wear the sarong." I remembered that. You have to become like where you want to go and then you can make change. So, in my mind for the EO world, I don't really want all of these separate groups, because for me, I didn't really depend on the separate groups. I depended on the people that I worked with that noticed me and mentored me. How will you be mentored if you keep sticking with your own groups? Because those groups still weren't [that represented] at the top.

One of the things that I got busy with—and it was controversial—was to dissolve, disband the separate groups, and to form a JSC Diversity Council, because I thought it was more important to mingle with each other than to remain separate. Another little story. Joe Atkinson and I had gone to—I think it was Dick Johnston's party. We walked in together and there were [about] 500 people. Dan [Daniel A.] Nebrig was there. Then later Dan said to Joe and me, "Joe, I have to ask you. Why is it that when there's a party some people always hang together?"

Joe said, "Well, it has to do with expectations." He was very philosophical.

So I said, "Could I try to answer that?" I said, "Dan, when you were at that party the other night, what happens? People look for their comfort zone. What do you look for? You

walk in, there's 500 people. Somebody I know – that's where you head. So, when people are not totally comfortable in a group they just go [where they can be comfortable]. Notice at family things, the women in the kitchen, the kids outside playing and the men in the living room fighting for the remote control. So it's a people kind of thing. It really isn't about race."

Dan said, "Oh. That's true. It's a comfort kind of thing." My deal was I wanted people to be comfortable with the senior staff and for senior staff to know who these younger people were regardless of their backgrounds.

So, for the first program that we did was American Heritage Day—actually we did American heritage first and then the Diversity Council came down the line—but the American heritage. We sent a survey out. What is your heritage? We got a lot of responses. There were 41 countries represented in the responses. Then for American heritage we said, "Okay, who would like to sponsor a flag?" The flags in the Teague Auditorium – those are the flags. We had people who bought flags and we put [a label on with] their little name and donated by. We had companies that bought them, but we eventually bought—I think there's 150 countries. So they're not all there but we eventually bought a whole bunch of them.

What I wanted to represent was that everybody has a heritage. The first American heritage, Pam [Pamela J.] Adams, who was working with me at the time, said, "Let's invite somebody that will attract other people aside from the usual minorities to our EO program." We also had an order from Headquarters that we should have some kind of program to commemorate the signing of the affirmative action. It must have been '94.

We said, "Yeah, and who's going to come to that, the usual minorities?" So we decided to invite Rocky Bleier. He's a Pittsburgh Steeler [football team] multi-time Super Bowl winner.

He had a story to tell because he's a little guy, not your typical football player. So we invited him.

Guess who asked if they could introduce Rocky Bleier? Brewster Shaw and Steve [Steven A.] Hawley wanted to introduce him. Had they ever come to one of our programs? No. So, we let Brewster introduce him. It was super. Rocky sat up there, told his story about not being your typical football player, having had an injury. He went to Vietnam, got injured in his knee, was told he would never play again, but he did. Then he shows his [Super Bowl] rings. I forget how many he had but he had more than one.

Then we had the speaker on affirmative action, Civil Rights Act. So we had a captive audience. [Then] we went outside. We had the Native American dancers because they were here first [in America]. They were an hour late. Fortunately we had food going on so [everyone] ate. That planted a seed that—and the audience was very mixed—it planted a seed that to me it's just better if you have a mixture of people, a synergy of people. Then we decided, well let's do the Diversity Council concept.

We sent all the organizations an invitation to send us candidates. We had a board panel that picked the candidates so that it was a diversified group of people. It had all of the representation in it. Then the people that we put on the Council, we all went to training for focus group training because we wanted to form the focus groups and ask people. We had 14 different groups, including the senior staff [which] was one focus group. We had several groups, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and we had administrative, we had engineer, we had Apollo era. So, there were 14 total groups. The question was: you're sitting next to somebody in an airplane and you just told them that you work for NASA. Would your enthusiasm match theirs? The dialogue that

happened! So, eventually, we put the report together. I actually finally presented it to [Center Director] Mike [Michael L.] Coats after I retired. I came back and I presented it to him.

The message was inclusion from the very beginning. When you bring somebody in, make sure they're tied into the environment, to the culture somehow. The best way is by mentoring, by actually handholding them. Whether it's a formal type of relationship or just a friendly [one], like I had. Then the other one is build on that. Don't throw people into an environment just because you're supposed to, and then you see failure because they weren't ready for it. The more you can prepare somebody from the bottom step, regardless of where they come in, then the better they're going to learn what the culture is. Consequently, my dissertation is socialization in the high reliability organizational culture of the EVA [extravehicular activity] team. But socialization and an organizational culture were key to me because I saw this lack of socialization that I had experienced. If everybody's not willing to step forward and is more likely to wait for something to happen, then they won't reach their potential.

For me the EO world was another tremendous learning experience. Lots of controversy at a point. In the nine years that we clocked intakes for complaints, I think we clocked like 350 people [who] just came in and wanted to talk. We actually had seven formal complaints through that whole period. Now they're in double digits per year.

I got in trouble because of my approach or philosophy. Headquarters did not like the approach of not minding the clock, but to me it was more important[that] I can catch up with the clock if I have to, but I would rather try to resolve it because number one, they are important employees. Anybody who works here is important, therefore, we must return them to their workplace. Number two, management learns, too, that they have a role. Initially when I took

over the discrimination complaints I made it a point that I was not going to resolve these myself, because I [or the EO Office] didn't cause the problem.

One of my first situations was with Brewster's [organization]. He said, "Well, why can't you fix it?"

I said, "Because I didn't cause it. It's not in my territory. It's yours. But I can offer to help you resolve it so that it goes away and it doesn't keep peeking its little head up." So that was the approach that I took. We didn't cause the problem, so you have to be involved. It works tremendously well. Most of the time people do not really want to file a complaint. Not because it's the law or anything, but because this is not cool. They know that it's not really cool.

With the law part, one of the things I would tell senior staff—the other thing is Abbey required each director to make a presentation periodically. We had to get up and talk about something. The first time I had to do this it was like, "What am I going to talk about? They're not going to like what I talk about." So I did the numbers thing and I showed them the intakes at that period. I remember Dave [David C.] Leestma said, "So, your visits are going up, huh?"

I said, "Yeah."

He said, "Well, that's good. Obviously they trust you and they feel they have a place to go to. So, that's even better than just having the occasional person who does file." So I thought, oh, okay, that was a good idea, yeah. So, again we were successful. By the time I left I only had a staff of five, counting me. The other thing is I promoted my secretary to be an assistant, because when I got there we had all of these specialists, and they were doing a lot of their own administrative work. The secretary just had normal stuff to do. Well, I needed the specialists to do upper work. They could let go of some of their administrative duties, give it to the secretary. But then I thought I'll just make a management assistant kind of job and promote my secretary

and let her handle the under part of the specialist stuff, and then hire a new secretary who can take over some of the administrative duties like training.

That worked nicely. You don't need a lot of people in my opinion. We can do the job with a lot less people. I'm not demeaning anybody or anything, but I really believe that at some point people start to overlap too much and duplication of effort starts to happen, and then people are not challenged enough. I think part of what I saw during the Apollo era, the initial Shuttle era was that everybody had something to do. In fact, one time I asked Glynn Lunney at the management class that I attended in my first lead job, "Okay, so what's the difference? Why did we go to the Moon, what appeared to be so smoothly, and now," this was probably in the late '80s, "people just seem to be so engrossed in what's in it for me?"

He said, "Because we knew where we were going." So, right now, in fact for the last several years, we really haven't known where we're going.

I think people are motivated as long as they're challenged and they don't have time to think about am I happy or not. I hate to say that, but it comes down to that. It's that self-actualization kind of stuff. They're actualized by their work, by the challenge. The only time I was unhappy was that transition when I worked with Puddy. That was mostly my fault because I'd had such a good experience working with Abbey and Young. But I can't ever say that I had a job I did not like or that I wasn't challenged. Even back at the Federal Narcotics, when the guys would go out to do their undercover [work], and they would be gone for hours. There was a back door, and I was always afraid they'd come in the back door and catch me if I was reading a novel or something. So, a very short time after I got there, I never read a book. I tried it a couple of times. Close my drawer [not get caught]. What I learned, though, is there's always something to do. I don't care how unchallenging it is, there's always something to do.

In Narcotics we had file cabinets against the whole wall that started in [around] 1920 when the office had started in Houston. I started with drawer one, and took out the first file. It was all raggedy from the onionskin copy paper. So, I cut it, put new covers on it, new labels on it, new Accos [report covers]. But while I'm going through it, I'm reading the story. Then I start to recognize names of informants and names of guys who became big dealers. In fact, one was a picture of my girlfriend's mother in her wild days. I would never have believed it because she was this nice little old lady with a bun now. She had been either living or swinging with a big time narcotic dealer. I never told my friend. It was like, oh, my God. To me that was learning the job, so by the time these guys would come in and tell me stuff, I didn't have to ask, "Well, what's that?" The same thing at NASA. There was plenty. We didn't have Google, we didn't have all of these extra things, but there was plenty to help you become [more knowledgeable]—even the phone messages I was telling you about that I hated to take [on yellow message pad]. So I love information. I think if you're not into picking up information then you're losing out a lot.

I was in EO for 10 years. After about five I got antsy. I think the longest job I had was six years before then, when I was in the Astronaut Office, mostly because I would get unchallenged and take care of everything I needed to do, or couldn't learn any more [I thought]. I never was going to chisel a promotion where I was. I wanted to go to where it was. It happened a couple of times that I did get promoted where I was. I wasn't going to make the job happen there. Part of it was being ready, so school actually provided a lot of readiness for me. Just by going for the bachelor's, even though I was a [GS-]12. I probably would have stayed there, maybe gotten a 13 eventually. But going to school popped open that bottle. Here I had better opportunities.

I was close to 50, and before I went to the director job, I wasn't being promoted, and I decided I would start my graduate school. I thought, I'll quit, take an early [retirement], and I'll go teach junior college. Then I got the deputy job, and then I got the director job. One after the other I got 13, 14, 15. It was like, oh, wow, now what do I do? By this time I had my master's, so I waited a couple of years and then I got antsy again.

I'd already done the Diversity Council, the American Heritage, the complaint stuff. All of what I had done in HR had helped with my EO work, because I knew the system very well. I knew what could be done, what couldn't be done, how things worked, so that was very, very helpful.

I think the relevance of experiences is very critical. In my dissertation I talk a lot about that. The relevance of experiences and how they help you transition into the new position. So I think all of my experiences were very relevant. Then from there I took off to learn new things. When I reached the point in EO, I wanted to apply for the SES CDP [Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program]. Now, Mr. Abbey had told me not to worry about going to school for that, for a class. Well, I knew that the EO Director was a 15, and unless somebody really pushed for it, it was not going to become an SES. I knew it had been a push to make it a 15 in the first place.

I wanted the SES CDP because that certifies you for other opportunities, even outside of the Agency. So, I decided to apply for it, but Abbey had to approve. First he said, no. He said, "You don't need to go to that." It comes up every two years. The second time it came up I went to Wetherbee. He was his deputy then.

I said, "Hey, Jim, I really would like to go to this but George said, no. He's too busy, and I won't have time to talk to him. I don't think he wants to talk to me."

He said, "I'll sign it." So, he signed it. Then he told George at the PeTe's [restaurant] line. We were interviewing a group of astronauts there. George was, "What? What?" Well, I was only going to be gone Thursday through Friday once a month. By the time I took off on Thursday I had already worked my 40 hours, so it wasn't like I was taking off from my work. I just had to make sure that my office was covered. By then we had the beepers [cellular pagers]. So my office knew [that if] anybody walked in with a complaint, they were to call me, I don't care what.

We worked it out. My office was always so good about taking care of me, just very loyal. The thing is we always had our staff meetings and I talked about everything, who was complaining, where we were with that, what Headquarters said. So, it was not a surprise for anybody when something came up. They knew what to do. There are some things that are ultra critical, but if it had to do with a complaint, that's part of my staff. Why shouldn't they know about it? They know it doesn't go outside of the office. So, to me that was very key that they knew everything that was going on. There were only five of us, so if somebody was gone that left a big hole. There was a gap of information. In turn, they also kept each other informed.

Anyway, I got into the program. I actually had to go for an interview. I got into the SESCDP. Great program, one of those that I think people should have as early as a [GS] 12. One of the sessions was going for a week to the Congress, and you get lots of lectures on that. You go to watch them in action. You get the mechanics of how all of this works and how it comes back to you in policy and procedure.

Then once I finished that—it was two years, going back and forth. In your plan you have to line out what you're going to do to keep the development going. One of my cohorts was Charles [H.] Scales. I don't know if you guys knew him. Also, Woodrow [Whitlow], he's at

Headquarters now. He was in my cohort. Also, Jay Shin [Dr. Jaiwon Shin]. He's at Headquarters now.

This was a very well represented group because they got their SESs. But while I was in that, toward the end, I grabbed the George Washington University experience [Executive Leadership Program, doctoral program], because one of my cohorts, Susan Miller said she had gotten into the program. I said, "Oh really? Isn't that kind of expensive?"

She said, "Well, try it. NASA approved mine." So I applied, and sure enough I got the interview, and then I got selected for the program. So, it's like, oh, now what am I going to do, because I had told Abbey I wasn't going to be going too much.

Well, by that time things had changed for him. So, I was able to go to class for two years once a month. It was good. The other day I saw Abbey and he congratulated me. He said, "You worked very hard, you should be very proud."

I said, "Well, it's because you approved it. You and Wetherbee."

But careerwise somebody told me that I would know when it would be time to leave. I had seen all these people who just didn't know when it was time. They ended up getting parked somewhere, some little job, when they used to be a big guy or big woman. Now they were doing a little job. So, I had asked Abbey a couple of times about moving out of EO, but there aren't that many career options with this kind of background. I didn't want to just go because I didn't want to do it anymore, because I enjoyed the job. But it was like I wasn't that challenged anymore.

With the SESCDP I actually got a 60-day detail. Because I know Brewster so well, and he had told me that he needed some help with some personnel stuff, I made that a one-month project, and I went over there and I worked for a month in that building over there [motioning].

WRIGHT: With Boeing.

GILLETTE: Yes, with Boeing. So I got a little perspective of big industry, because I had only worked a teeny tiny part in a small company. Then the second piece was with Dan [Daniel K.] Carpenter, who came in as Public Affairs Officer. I worked with him for a month because George said he wanted me to help him set up. It was two really nice comfortable experiences that I hadn't done before. The PAO [Public Affairs Office] experience actually had fruit because in '04 when Beak [Center Director Jefferson D. Howell, Jr.] came in, I went to work in the new External Relations [Office] with Greg Hayes. It's a small world, so don't ever burn your bridges because it comes around.

I became [Greg's] deputy. At the same time I was put on the source board for the second round for the secretary contract. So I got to do a source board, which I should have done [sooner]. Everybody should have a source board way early in their careers, because it's a really good experience to go through.

I did that while I was assigned to Greg already. I was going back and forth. Then it was the Return to Flight after [Space Shuttle] *Columbia* [accident]. Now with *Columbia*, I wasn't that involved, even though all of them were people I had worked with on the board or that I had been on their selection board. When it happened, Sue [Susan H.] Garman [JSC Associate Director] was there, so she took care of putting it all together. The senior staff decided to participate by playing host to the VIPs that we had invited [to the memorial], so we went over to Space Center Houston [JSC visitor's center] to greet the VIPs. Then we would put them on a bus and escort them back to JSC to the memorial site.

So I'm at Space Center Houston helping somebody out. Arturo Sanchez, I remember he came over. He said, "I need your help."

I said, "What?"

He said, "I need your help," [as he pointed]. It was Dan Goldin.

I'm like, "I'm not helping him."

He said, "I need your help. Come on. You take over." It's like I don't want to help, because I was still mad, all the stuff that had happened with George leaving JSC.

So, I said, "Okay, whatever." So, I go over and I start to help Mr. Goldin.

I said, "I'm Estella Gillette and I'm going to help you and I'll be escorting you and your wife. Welcome to JSC." He looks at me. He's putting on this little name tag.

He said, "I know you, don't I?"

I said, "Probably."

He said, "You're the burrito lady."

I said, "No, it's actually the enchilada lady." Because when I was at Headquarters Mary Lopez went to visit me. I had an apartment in downtown Washington and then we had another friend who lived there, too.

So, Mr. Abbey said, "Well, since Mary is coming why don't you guys make dinner for all of the JSC people who are here?" There were [about] 50 people from JSC that he had taken up there.

I said, "Okay, we'll make burritos, okay, that's fine." So we made burritos and enchiladas.

Well, while we're cooking, George calls and he said, "So, is dinner ready?"

I said, "Yeah. But it's for tomorrow."

He said, "Well, is anything ready yet?"

I said, "Yeah. We got some food. Do you want to come over?"

He said, "Yeah, because I can't come to the dinner tomorrow."

I said, "Oh, Mary is not going to like that very much. You're going to have to tell her, I'm not telling her."

So, he said, "Can I bring some friends?"

I said, "What, your close personal 500 friends?"

He said, "No. Dan Goldin."

I said, "Yeah, right."

He said, "Yes he's coming."

I said, "Yeah right. Who else?" Wetherbee and [William] Shepherd. So, I go tell the girls guess who's coming to dinner. We think he's kidding. He wasn't kidding. He came. So Goldin remembered me from that. All the things I did. He remembered that I was the burrito lady. I wasn't even the burrito lady. I was the enchilada lady!

But that broke the ice when we were at Space Center Houston. I put him on the bus. He was talking and talking about JSC and how he always loved coming to JSC, what a wonderful place, and all the people are so wonderful. We get on the bus. As we're getting off he said, "You know, I bet people at JSC are still mad at me."

I said, "Well, we told them all to behave today, okay?" So we're walking in and we have to go through the lobby of Building 1. As we go outside, who is standing there? George. I'm like, oh, my God, I'm busted. But another thing I learned with the guys. They get over things a lot easier than women do. I had seen it when George was "ousted" back in '86, '87. The rumors were that Cohen and [Richard H.] Truly had done it. That night there was a softball game and

George hands Truly a beer. So this time here's Goldin and I said to Mr. Abbey, "Hey, Mr. Abbey. Look who I found." So they walk and embrace. Then they want to sit together. I said to George, "No, you have to sit with the Center Directors."

It was very interesting that they seemed to get over stuff. Now there's probably irritants still, but lesson learned for me as a woman is that the guys seem to handle things a little better and don't personalize things. As a female manager I had observed [that] from the guys. I think it made life easier for me, because I didn't take things personally. In fact back to when I came back to—go back to Greg Hayes again and External Relations. Later Abbey told me that. He said, "You know that Beak removed you because the AA [Associate Administrator] at Headquarters EO wasn't happy with what you were doing." [I wasn't sure if he was kidding.]

I said, "I know." I did get a lot of flak from them that I was not doing things the way Headquarters wanted me to. But I felt that I knew my Center a lot better and it worked, and I didn't have two-digit complaints, and I had people that seemed to go back fruitfully to their work.

I said to Beak, "Mr. Abbey said that you removed me because Dorothy Hayden wanted me to be removed."

He said, "Stell, that's not true, you don't believe that."

I said, "Whether it is or not, it was time for me to leave." So again I wasn't going to be upset because of that. Plus I had been asking for [a move]. Plus the philosophical changes when you have new management and you have to either go with it or leave or something, or get a time to get to know it. I think a lot of times people personalize things. It's not the end of the world.

One day I'm out for Return to Flight after *Columbia* at Ellington. I'm observing all of these super efficient young people doing the things that I used to do, the protocols and [assisting]

the astronauts. It was like a little bell just went ding, it's time. I came back. I told Greg, "That's it. I'm done at the end of the year."

He said, "Good, because I'm going after you, the year after."

After that I just said to him, "I'll set it up so I'll help you on institutional stuff for the new organization." We had merged three pieces. "Then I'll go." [Retire]

My husband [Pete] also was going to retire at the same time. So, Greg asked me eventually where did I want my cake and punch retirement party. I said, "No. No cake and punch here. We have a combined 84 years of service, so we're going to have a big party." So we had 250 people out at the Gilruth [Center], and used the models from the Public Affairs [Office] warehouse as table decorations. Other than Mercury, we were there for all the programs. So January 2006 we called it in. I wasn't part of the mainstream as far as the rockets, but I can certainly say that I was under those wings that carried us up there, and many women like myself. If I get around to it I do want to write the story about the wind beneath their wings, because so many of us were supporting that and made sacrifices just like the main [stream] people did.

At the same time I don't think they would exclude us from that team. They considered us part of that. I know the models that I had, the mentors that I had, I could go on for days talking about the experiences I had with them. They were very good teachers. They were encouraging. The times that I was perhaps a little offended by something they would say, I would think about it and I'd say, "Okay, how could they have said it better but get the same message to me?" Usually it was a good message, it was just the way they had said it, which is what I tell my husband all the time.

Basically that's it. It was a wonderful 40 years. I don't know where it went to. All of a sudden I'm one of the senior ladies at JSC. The encouraging part was seeing so many women who did evolve. I worked with Huntoon a little bit on the selection board. I think the women had to be really tough to survive, but I think whatever changes we've seen at Johnson as far as family came because the women were able to balance things. Again, we got in and then we started to make changes. I remember when we didn't have a Child Care Center for years. My children grew up and I had to stick them in the nursery, because even my mom lived too far for me to take them to her.

Finally when I was in the Astronaut Office I get a call from Jack [R.] Lister. He said, "How would you like to chair a feasibility study [committee] to see if we should have a Child Care Center." I thought it was a done deal. Look who's asking. So, again I formed a committee. I love committees. The committee was made up of scientists, engineers, secretaries, admins, finance people, so that we would have a good round [group]—great committee. We did studies for the location, for the funding, for the type of childcare it would be. We came up with the little trailer that we had initially. Came up with it would be self-directed, [by a] very cooperative group of parents who donated time and resources. The Gilruth gave us some funding. One thing we did that was, I think, really smart was we hired a childcare consultant from U of H [Clear Lake]. They had that excellent program. Diane Kane was the person. She came out and she led us through what kind of childcare, the rules about number of caregivers per number of children, all of that. Within the year of our actually implementing, we had certification from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). That was a biggie and apparently in good hands because eventually they were able to build that big center.

Now, Aaron Cohen was instrumental in making it happen. When I started to campaign for it I actually went to the senior staff before we had the presentation that the committee said I should make. I went to several different senior staff members to give them a personal preview of what we were going to talk about.

I remember one senior staff member who shall remain nameless said, “Why would I want to do that? Why can’t people pay for their own childcare? My wife stayed home with the kids. Why should I pay? Why should the Center pay for somebody else’s?”

I said, “Well, number one, she wanted to stay home. Number two, you could afford for her to stay home, okay? Maybe somebody doesn’t have those two choices or doesn’t want those two choices. And as a recruitment tool it’s silly for us not to have it. If you’re going to have dual-career people here, you’re going to have to get serious about it.” Then Bill [William R.] Kelly, who was the head of finance at the time, he had three daughters and had I think he said seven grandsons among the three.

He said, “It’s not fair for my girls to have to sweat it out,” I think a couple of them were engineers, “just because they have the babies. You have my support wholehearted.”

What happens is when something happens to you and you have the experience, then it makes a big difference in how you see things. He was thinking about his girls as career women, so, therefore they deserved the opportunity to come work. His grandchildren deserved the opportunity to be taken care of.

Then with the Child Care Center, Mrs. Cohen also played a big role because Aaron would tell me, “She told me I should do this and do that.” So, when I went to do that presentation, there was the committee and the senior staff. I was wearing a suit, and I was

sweating. I was so nervous. But we had dry-run it about three, four times where they'd videoed it, and they would throw questions at me. We really practiced it.

When we finished in an hour, and we had the approval that we would get support from the Gilruth, Mr. Cohen says, "I was really expecting a lot more philosophy on this."

I said, "You got three hours? We can talk more."

He said, "No, no, this is fine." But we really stayed away—it was knowing the audience—we stayed away from the philosophy and we talked about what's the practical aspect of this. I think Mrs. Cohen, too, she was an honorary committee person. So, when the Child Care Center got named for him, I thought that was so appropriate because he really had a big hand in it.

Another thing that I had my hands on [was] the grove for the regular people, not the Astronaut Grove. When Brandon Shaw died, Brewster's son, it was so sad. There was so much reaction among the community at JSC. The church was just packed. Couldn't even find a seat to sit. I said to Mr. Abbey, "You know how we have that grove for the astronauts. Can we plant a tree for him? I have some baby oaks. Can I give one back to the Center and we can start one for Brandon Shaw?"

He said, "Where did you get the baby oaks?"

I said, "Well, they were actually acorns from here."

He said, "You took acorns from here?"

I said, "Yes. I'm trying to give it back."

He said, "No, never mind. I'll plant a tree." See that grove? We have two rows now.

WRIGHT: Yes, it's beautiful.

GILLETTE: Good idea. But he again blessed the idea and took it from there and started, and did it nicely.

WRIGHT: Well, why don't we stop for now, and we'll get you back? We'll be able to fill in some other blanks.

GILLETTE: See if there's anything else.

WRIGHT: Oh, we will, yes.

[End of interview]