

**NASA JOHNSON SPACE CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
EDITED ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT**

DONNA M. MULLANE
INTERVIEWED BY JENNIFER ROSS-NAZZAL
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ROSS-NAZZAL: Today is August 26, 2014. This interview with Donna Mullane is being conducted for the JSC Oral History Project in Houston, Texas. The interviewer is Jennifer Ross-Nazzal, assisted by Sandra Johnson. Thanks again for agreeing to sit down with me and talk about the first six women astronauts. I sure appreciate it.

MULLANE: No problem, happy to do it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I wanted to ask you about the selection of astronauts in 1978. This was the first time that there were women being selected. What did you think about Mike [Richard M. Mullane] flying with other women in space, who weren't secretaries?

MULLANE: I had no problem with it. I didn't even think twice, to be honest with you. I thought it was an awesome feat, that women were going to participate in an all-male job. I was excited. Having two daughters, I certainly didn't want to think that men wouldn't want to work with my daughters in any field that they chose to go into, so I had no problem with it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did Mike tell you that he was unhappy with the selection of women initially, or did you have any sense of that?

MULLANE: No. No, he never said that at all. I think he was just so excited that he was selected. I have a feeling that not only Mike, but many men thought, “Oh, well, women, they probably will be way behind,” the military men that were flying high-performance aircraft. Especially the flyers, because they were in an all-male situation where there weren’t female pilots at the time. I think they may have had some misgivings about the capability of the women, but that was short-lived.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Do you know of any examples that you can share? Mike obviously shared a number of stories about how the men would tease the women, that they weren’t exactly considered [one] of the guys. Do you have any stories, anything that you noticed or saw, you were a witness to, at that point?

MULLANE: No, I really don’t. I know that at the [social events], when all of us would get together, there would be bantering back and forth. You could figure out right away which females were ready for that and could feed it right back to them and those that were more reserved and smiled, but didn’t banter back.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Who were the ones who were ready to jostle with the guys?

MULLANE: Judy [Judith A.] Resnik, [M.] Rhea Seddon, Anna [L.] Fisher, a little bit. Kathy [Kathryn D.] Sullivan held her own too, pretty much. Sally [K. Ride] was very reserved. She would smile. She was quiet, but she had some zingers too, every now and then, but not as often, I guess I should say, as Rhea and Judy.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Can you talk about those social activities? Did you participate in many of them? Obviously, you were home raising your children. Did you have a chance to connect with the class?

MULLANE: Absolutely. There were quite a few social functions for the selectees and the spouses. That was a good thing because you got to know each other very well. You would go to the parties, and you talked with everybody. You always gravitate towards the people that you have most in common with. Mike and I were coming from Fort Walton Beach, Florida, and the Coveys were there with us, so we traveled to Houston together. There were some people in the class that were in our test pilot school class that were selected, so we gravitated towards them.

Then, when everybody bought their homes, certain people bought in different subdivisions, so those that would be in one subdivision would tend to get together more because you were living in close proximity. We'd have impromptu, "Come on over for a drink," or, "Let's do a potluck. Bring some food over." They usually had children. Those that didn't have children, of course, gravitated towards those that didn't have children. It was a time to get to know each other. We had a pool at our home, so if we'd all go to happy hour on Friday nights, we'd say, "Well, come on over and go swimming," and they would. Again, you'd get to know those that came over better. I think the socialization was pertinent to the class getting to know each other and know who people were and solidify a friendship in that area.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You guys ended up buying a house in Brookwood Forest, is that correct?

MULLANE: Brook Forest, right. The Haucks were our neighbor; the Coveys were our neighbors. There were some older astronauts, or previous ones that had been there a while, in the area; the Englands were in the area. Then, later classes were in the area—the Grabes and all. You did tend to socialize with them. We socialized with the Coveys a lot because we were together at Eglin Air Force Base [Florida], so we would get together often.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned that people tend to gravitate to those that they know. Sometimes when you're in a group, women will gravitate towards each other because they want to talk about whatever it is—kids, cooking, family—and the men will gravitate to talk about sports, what have you. Did that ever happen in those social events or moments?

MULLANE: Yes, absolutely. I was always very conscious of trying to get around to meet everybody, but after you meet everybody, you tend to go towards the people that you have more in common with. I think the men, when they were together, would talk about flying or training. There were a few that were very avid sports fans, and they would gravitate towards each other—Steve [Steven A.] Hawley, Mike [Michael L.] Coats, they were big sports fans, and so they would talk sports. Mike never was, so he was never in that group.

Women particularly tend to gravitate towards those that have the same interest, and kids are definitely a binding factor. There's no question about it. If you have kids the same age, you're talking about what they're doing at that particular time in their life and the schools they're going to and the activities and that type of thing.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you become particularly close with any of the women at the start, or did that take some time?

MULLANE: Kathy Covey, definitely. As I said, we were in Eglin Air Force Base, and then I ended up working at the same dental office that she worked at. She was a dental hygienist. We were close friends. In our class, I got along with everybody. I felt that I did. Mary Jo Grabe, which was a class later than us, we got to be very close friends because it so happened that she went to dental hygiene school here in New Mexico and my brother was her instructor, so we had a lot in common there. They were our next-door neighbor at Edwards Air Force Base [California] as well. Again, being military made a big difference, because some of these people, you either were stationed together somewhere and you already knew each other, so there was an immediate bond.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I find that interesting. How did these civilians fit in with—it's not a military world, but there are so many military people around. Was it comfortable for them to come in and be part of the group?

MULLANE: I personally think that it was a little bit awkward at the beginning, but it didn't take those civilians very long to be part of the group. It really, really didn't. There were some that didn't; they were academia, and they stood academia. They would socialize and get along really well with people, but they didn't get the humor or participate in the humor and all that the military people had. People say, "Well, why are the military people always so humorous and self-deprecating," and all that. You have to think of what their jobs were. Their lives were on

the line, a lot of them, probably I could say most of them at that time were Vietnam veterans, and they were shot at and their life was in danger. Humor was their way of dealing with things. Considering the amount of military people that were involved in the program and how they interacted with each other, the civilians came on board rather quickly.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you get a chance to spend much time with the women at all in those early years before Mike was assigned to a flight? The women astronauts.

MULLANE: I did. Many of them were social [events]. The happy hours and all, they would participate in that. When we'd invite them over, they would come over to swim after happy hour, particularly Judy, Rhea. Kathy Sullivan did, Anna did a couple of times, Sally did once or twice. The only one that really didn't and that I really don't know very well was Shannon [W. Lucid]. Shannon had a family, and she had three children, I think, and she did not participate in the happy hours on Friday nights. I just didn't know her very well.

We did belong to a Bible study group for a while, and Shannon was in that. Mike likes to say that he was expelled from it because he would pose lots of questions and get into some—I can't say arguments—discussions, and Shannon was right in there. I finally told Mike, I said, "Mike, you're just stirring the pot. This just isn't right, let's not go anymore." I felt bad because, when it comes to religion and politics, you're not going to change anybody's mind, so just let it be.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That was a funny story in the book. It's funny, too, because most people have told me the same thing about Shannon, that she was there, she was working hard, but when it came to after-hours things, she was with her family.

MULLANE: Right, and that's very, very true. We always exchange pleasantries when we see each other—and I don't even see her that much. We don't go to the same functions, but when we used to, it was pleasantries, hello, how are you, the kids are doing well, and then that was pretty much it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: How would you describe some of the women that you got to know, like, say, Judy or Kathy Sullivan?

MULLANE: Rhea was a Southern beauty, no question about it, dressed impeccably all the time, always ready with a smile. She had a great sense of humor. She was a spouse on Mike's second mission, when he flew with Hoot [Robert L. Gibson], and we got to know each other very well. I just loved her and still do. We still keep in touch, and she's just phenomenal, she really is.

Judy was just a gem. She was just a sweetheart. I knew her well prior to her being selected on Mike's and her first mission, and then we got together even more because the crew would socialize together. She just was a dear, and we'd have her over to the house and just loved her. She was, again, just a sweet, kind individual.

Kathy was great. She came over to swim on several occasions. She offered to teach my older children how to sail. Very personable. Anna, the same way. She was always kind. We visited with her a lot, and to this day we see her and we always greet each other with a hug, and

how you doing, how are the girls doing. Sally was Sally; she was a very quiet person. Steve Hawley, her ex-husband, was on Mike's first mission. We got to see her, I guess would be the correct word, more often, but she was very quiet. I don't think Mike was her favorite person because of the way he acted, but she tolerated him. Let me put it that way, she did tolerate him. She was not at the beach house, nor Steve, on L [Launch]-1. They were off on their own. She didn't participate in the spousal activity. She did not show up.

ROSS-NAZZAL: She didn't do any of the events like the spouse party for the upcoming flight?

MULLANE: Not that I remember. I don't have any pictures of her in my album, of her being there. If she was there, it was in and out, but I don't remember. I'm having to pull really back in my brain to remember all this stuff. If I have any suggestion for any spouses, if they want to remember, write it down at the moment because I didn't and I wish I had, because I do not remember. You think you're going to; you think, "I'll never forget it," but you do. There's no question about it. Your brain has other things involved, and as you get older, they just sort of [are] pushed to the background.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It was 30 years ago, so that was quite a while ago. Do you remember if she shared any information—she had flown, previously—[about] the flight or training that she shared with the wives?

MULLANE: No, not at all. Not with me, anyway, and I don't know if she was close to any of the other spouses. I really can't say. Sally was very professional, all work, wanted to always do her

best, very focused. So I'm not too sure that she was really shared much of anything with anybody. Reading her book [*Sally Ride: America's First Woman in Space*], I'm just partway into it, I think Lynn Sherr, who wrote the book, knew Sally better than any of the spouses did.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That says a lot, that she was closer to a journalist than the crew.

MULLANE: Yes, and that's just my perception. I don't know. There could be a spouse out there that she was very close to. I didn't know about it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Can you talk about the socialization of the crew for [STS]-41D? I understand that there are real efforts to bring the families in to make that a really strong unit.

MULLANE: It is. The crew works together so intensely, long hours, so we would get together often. We would have pre-launch parties, and one of the ones was when we had to select our family escort. As I always like to refer to it, our "escorts into widowhood," in case anything happened. We had a party for that, where we all got together, agreed on who would be our family escort, the astronauts that would be with us. For some reason—and I don't know why—I think it was because Mike and Steve went on a trip after, I don't remember exactly how it worked, but they were tagged the Zoo Crew. Hank [Henry W.] Hartsfield, the commander, was the Zookeeper. Mike Coats was Superman. The reason he got that moniker is because my kids said he looked like Superman, he was so good-looking. Mike was Tarzan, Judy was Jane, and Steve was Cheetah. They got this tag for their crew.

We had a party at our house, and my dad had found somebody that does paintings on t-shirts with caricatures, so he got all of the crew t-shirts that had the Zookeeper with Hank's caricature on it, and Superman and Tarzan and Jane and Cheetah, and presented them at the party. That was pretty cool, and again, one more thing that brings your crew together. I think all the crews are that way—at least, I think so. I don't know what it's like now, but back then it was because they worked for a year together, so you socialized with that crew. That's why you got to be more friendly and considered them better friends than others, because you knew them better because of those socializations.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Who were the family escorts for that mission?

MULLANE: Forty-one D was Dick [Richard O.] Covey, and [Bryan D. O'Connor].

ROSS-NAZZAL: You had talked briefly about Judy, and one of the things that I thought was interesting in Mike's book is how he talked about how Judy really thought that many of the wives didn't like her. They thought that she was out maybe to steal a husband. I was just curious why you had decided to bring her into your family and not have that same reaction.

MULLANE: I didn't have the same reaction because, I don't want to sound conceited or anything, they felt threatened and I didn't feel threatened by Judy. My play on all this, if somebody can steal my husband away, then they can have him because then he wasn't for me. They didn't like them working side-by-side with their spouses; they definitely did not like them traveling on

weekends or cross-country with their husbands. They just were insecure, I guess, and I wasn't. I just had no worries about it. I really didn't, and I loved Judy.

She was just fun. She enjoyed my family—I think she did because she kept coming over. I never thought along those lines. I really, really didn't. In fact, a good example too is not only the females, but the female groupies, oh, my gosh! You go to places outside of NASA, and there were all these women who would just throw themselves at these astronauts. Some of the [wives] would get really upset. I can sit back and laugh because I thought it was hilarious because they just made such fools out of themselves. I don't know, maybe it's just my personality; I just didn't have an issue with it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Are you saying that the women, not only Judy, but some of the other women, that the wives had concerns about them flying together?

MULLANE: Absolutely, because you look at Rhea and you look at Judy and Anna—well, Anna was married at the time—beautiful women and they were appealing. Again, it's the first time that their husbands worked with females and they just weren't too sure of it and didn't know what to expect.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned that there were women throwing themselves outside of NASA at the men astronauts. Did you ever see that happen to Judy or Rhea, where there was a guy trying to pick her up because she was an astronaut?

MULLANE: I'm sure there was, but they weren't as obvious, at least to me. There were always men around the female astronauts. They were a novelty; it was something new. Judy and Rhea were absolutely stunning women, but I don't see where men acted like the women did. They're not the giddy, laughing type individuals, so I didn't see that, no. They act differently than the women do.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Men and women certainly are different creatures, aren't they? Can you give some examples of Judy's time at your house, some of the things that she did with your family, or things that you might remember from her about that mission?

MULLANE: She would come over and swim, and we would just talk and laugh. We'd go out to dinner together quite often. Frenchie's was the big place to go to back then. We'd go to dinner with her, and we'd just talk about life and family and just enjoyed each other. There was nothing that stood out because nothing stands out in family when you get together. You just enjoy each other. I think that's what we did.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's great, that she became part of your family. Can you talk about the wives' reception for that first mission? I do understand that that's part of the whole tradition of spaceflight.

MULLANE: It is, and I know Dianne Bobko, Hoot Gibson, Karen Griggs, Barbara Hoffman, and Linda Williams were the hostesses for that mission. Of course, Rhea stepped in for Hoot. Hoot did not come, which is understandable. It was a luncheon, but that's all I remember. Some of

the wives came, some didn't. It just depended, because many of the wives also had their own careers. I did not. I was an at-home mom. I did work part-time on occasion. Depending on when that function was, they were working. Not all the spouses attended.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I find it interesting that you say Rhea stepped in for Hoot because I was curious about that, if Hoot had come and what his role was.

MULLANE: I don't know if any of the other male spouses came. I was never involved in those wives' receptions, to be honest with you, because the spouses that we had, most of them were single, and those that weren't, maybe I didn't go to that particular reception. I just don't remember any of the male spouses being there. When the wives would get together, none of the males would show up. I certainly didn't expect any of the female astronauts, along with the male astronauts, to come to these functions because they were busy training and they were busy doing their thing. They didn't need to be at the wives' functions if they didn't want to be.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I was curious about that, if that would change the dynamics at all, but that makes sense. They do train quite a bit.

MULLANE: Yes they train, and they have their own things. Again, the last thing they want to do after a full day's work is go to a wife function in the evening, or if it's during the day, they're working, they can't come.

ROSS-NAZZAL: At the Cape [Canaveral, Florida], my understanding is that there's a reception for all the guests that come to see the mission off. Did you co-host any receptions?

MULLANE: Right. No, I didn't. I think that was driven a lot by the number of people you were having as guests, that you were going to invite to the pre-launch reception. I know some people did go in together. Again, we were in the early Shuttle program. Actually, a little side here for 41D, that was pre-*Challenger* [STS-51L]. NASA would transport the spouses to the Cape and back, but your children had to fly commercial, which we paid for. What we had to do, especially with young children, we had to find somebody to come to Houston, fly with our children down to Orlando [Florida], get over to the Cape and back, and back home. Then, we had to find our own places to stay and places to have our receptions, which at that time was very difficult. If there were slips in the launch, you'd call your lodging and say, "Well, I need to slip it." "I'm sorry, we're booked; we can't do it." It was a very stressful situation. After *Challenger*, that changed because we all stayed in the same place, which was wonderful, and NASA took care of it. They had somebody hired particularly to take care of those reservations and everything, so that was great.

Back to the pre-launch parties, the very first one was our first time. Mike and I decided we were going to do everything that NASA allowed us to do. I rented a place, and we had a pre-launch party and there were hundreds of people there. Others—and I couldn't say who went in together, but I know some did go in together and give parties together.

ROSS-NAZZAL: They sound like pretty extravagant events.

MULLANE: They were, especially the first one, because you're so excited. Your spouse is finally going to be able to fly in space and you want everybody to participate in it, but again, you were limited on numbers and car passes and all that stuff. It's like a wedding, you had to figure out who was going to come and who wasn't going to be invited, who's going to be on the guest list and who wasn't, and who got which ones, the VIP [Very Important Person], the family bus, or car passes. The first one was for us. After that, I did not do that anymore. I would use the party room in the condo complex and just tell people to come by if they wanted to. It was very simple and very easy.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What are your memories of that first launch? There were many launch attempts for 41D. Do you remember all of those?

MULLANE: Yes, Michael never decided to strap in and go. The first one was terrifying, to be honest with you, because that's the very first time they had a pad abort. The main engine started and then shut down at 4 seconds. We were on the roof with my son and the family escorts and my two daughters. The count was going, then you saw the ignition [ignite], and then nothing happened. Then, you heard the sound of it. You saw the ignition, but then you heard it afterwards, and to be honest with you, the first thing I thought, "Oh, my God, it's blowing up," because of the delayed sound. You looked at the family escorts and their eyes were as big as saucers, too, because they didn't know what was going on. It was the first time it had ever happened. That was terrifying, that really, really was. Then they said, no, everything was okay and the crew was fine. Then, two months later, we went through it again. Mike strapped in to

the Orbiter nine times to fly three times. I was getting used to going and not having it happen the first time around.

ROSS-NAZZAL: How closely did you follow his first flight? I guess we didn't have 24-hour news cycles then. Did you go over to the Mission Control Center?

MULLANE: We were allowed to go once [to Mission Control], and at the time they didn't have anything in the house that we could listen to transmission or anything for the first flight. We just depended on the astronaut escorts to let us know what was going on. It was a six-day flight, so they kept us informed and we would listen to the news, but to be honest with you, when they were in orbit, I was very calm. I didn't have any anxiety over it. Even landing, I really didn't. I never thought anything could happen on landing until *Columbia* [STS-107]. I did, but not to the extent of launch, let me put it that way. We didn't have a lot of input into [Mission] Control, and to be honest with you, even going to the control center one day, you sit up there and you look at the trajectory of the map on the wall, but it was a very quiet day so not much was going on.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What are your recollections of that first landing?

MULLANE: First landing was awesome, to be honest with you. You don't hear, you don't hear, and then you hear the sonic booms and you know they're coming in. It was exciting, it really was, and we were pretty close to the landing. Not up close and personal, but where we could see it coming in, and then you have to wait and wait and wait until they all get out, and then you can greet them back where they were going to shower and change their clothes. It was exciting. I

have to say it was pretty nice to know that he had one flight under his belt. He was so excited, and it was great.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Was the crew sharing any jokes after they got off the Orbiter?

MULLANE: They wanted to get showered. They hadn't had a shower in a long time, so they went and got their physicals and showered, and then it wasn't until we were back on the NASA airplane, going back to Houston, that they were talking. They were giddy and to tell you exactly what they were saying, I have no clue. It was just enjoyment, excitement, talking about it. To be honest with you, Mike didn't really share a lot with me until days afterwards, because I think even he was so overcome with all the excitement and the chance to fly that things would pop into his head at later dates. You don't remember everything until things have settled down, and then, "By the way, this happened," so we got an earful a whole week, two weeks afterwards, on what went on and things that happened. The backup on the valve for the urine disposal didn't work, and they had that ice build up. So, those were things that he told us later on, and how they managed that. It took a while.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did Judy ever talk to you, or Mike talk to you about whether or not she ended up using those bags or the toilet because of that issue?

MULLANE: She used the bags, because she didn't want to draw attention to her being different than the males. If I remember this correctly, I think that's what Mike said, because Mission Control said there is so much that can be used, and so they said, "Judy, you can use it." Nope. I

think she did not want to be different than the men. This is where the females knew that if they did anything differently, the press would find out about it and, “Look, see it is different; it is harder for the women.”

ROSS-NAZZAL: That’s one of the things that I’m actually looking at. It seemed like the women tried really hard to fit in, and the class was known as the Thirty-Five New Guys. How did they manage to really fit in and not stick out? The media, of course, was fascinated because these were new creatures. There hadn’t been women astronauts. How did they really become part of that culture? They were civilians, even.

MULLANE: I just think they knew what they were up against, that they were under a microscope, and that any little thing that was different, they were going to be in the headlines. They just really did their best to fit in and do the same thing the men did. This is what I think really changed, I know it changed Mike’s attitude and I know it changed the other men’s attitudes. When they got in there and they started working and they found out that those women were as smart as or smarter than they were, could handle an airplane as good as or better than they could, that’s when the culture started changing as far as the guys were concerned. They realized, “Hey, why did I ever think that women couldn’t do this? They’re awesome. They hold their own; they’re great.” I think that’s when it all changed, when they realized, “Oh, my gosh, we’re not the smartest and the bravest and the best sticks in the world. These women are great.”

ROSS-NAZZAL: That was one question that I had thought of the other day. You’re obviously a very strong woman, your husband credits you with basically being the reason that he was able to

do everything that he wanted to do and achieved it all, and then you have two daughters. I was curious, what role do you think you three played in helping to change his mind about women in the workplace and being astronauts?

MULLANE: I don't know if we changed his mind at all. I think the fact that he worked with these six women and saw them, that's what changed it. To be honest with you, my daughters are still changing his mind in many ways. The reason I say that is my daughter just self-published a memoir, it's called *Swimming for Shore: The Memoirs of a Reluctant Mother*. He read that, and he said, "Oh, my gosh, even to this day, I am still learning about women and about my daughters and what they're made of and how they think." In fact, for his website, he wrote a blurb about the book and it says in there how she opened his eyes to motherhood. I think Mike still, to this day, continues to appreciate more of what I did during that time, letting him pursue his career and spend the time that he needed to, and I would take over the motherhood [role]. I would take care of the kids and go to their functions and their plays and school activities and counseling sessions and all. He was able to do what he wanted to do and what he loved to do, but I guess we always are always in a learning process, no matter how old we get.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I had actually seen that book, and I was thinking about picking up a copy. I had a baby about 20 months ago, so I thought, "That title sounds very intriguing—I'd like to read that."

MULLANE: She's an excellent writer, and she's funny like her dad, so I think you might enjoy it. She's very truthful. She's the same as Mike, she just puts it out there.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I'll definitely have to place an order on Amazon.

MULLANE: Congratulations on the baby, by the way.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Thank you. He was quite a surprise, actually.

MULLANE: Was he really?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, I'm 43 now. I had to think about that. He was quite a surprise.

MULLANE: They're joys, I'll tell you.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Every day I'm amazed. I did want to ask you about any post-flight PRs [Public Relations]. I know in the book, Mike talks about you going to the Pentagon, but were there other events that you went on and were with Judy and maybe Sally? I don't know, she was getting ready for another flight.

MULLANE: Right, Sally never joined us. She wasn't with us on that one, but we did go to DC, the whole crew went to DC, and that's when we were at the Pentagon. Congressman Don Fuqua of Florida had a reception for us and had a lot of the politicians there. Our New Mexico Congressman, Manuel Lujan, which is where we're from, he had a reception for us and hosted.

Again, if Judy was there, all the attention was on Judy, and rightfully so. The politicians just surrounded her and paid her a lot of attention. We didn't have to worry how we acted too much.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Is that because she was so attractive or she just had, I don't know, this great personality, sense of humor?

MULLANE: All of that. She was beautiful, she had a great sense of humor, and she was the second woman in space, so you had it all right there.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What impact did her death have on you and your family when the *Challenger* was lost?

MULLANE: It was tough, it really was. Not only her, but so many of those—Dick [Francis R.] Scobee was with us at Edwards Air Force Base, and El [Ellison S.] Onizuka was at Edwards with us; he was one of the instructors when my husband went through test pilot school, and then Judy, of course. It was devastating. It was truly, truly devastating, especially when they found the necklace that Judy would wear, and I remember it on her so well. It was heartbreaking, truly heartbreaking.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I think Mike Coats told me it was a sign of "I love you" in sign language. Is that correct?

MULLANE: Yes, correct, because I think she had a deaf niece or nephew? Maybe nephew. I'm not quite sure; I know a relative was deaf, and she wore that all the time.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you end up going to any of the funerals or memorials for the crews?

MULLANE: I did not. I went to the one at JSC that President [Ronald] Reagan was at. Mike went to Ohio for Judy's, but I did not go. Again, with the kids and all, I had kids in high school and I didn't want to leave them alone, no way, so I stayed home.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I understand that. I remember those days. Mike got assigned pretty quickly, not the Return to Flight, but soon after, with Hoot Gibson. That must have been an interesting flight as well because Hoot, from what I understand—and I've met him—is kind of an interesting character. Then Rhea was [the spouse] on that mission. I think she was pregnant at the time, is that correct?

MULLANE: She was pregnant, and it was a great crew. It was a DoD [Department of Defense], so it was all secret. We didn't know a whole lot about the mission—we didn't know anything about the mission, let me put it that way. Hoot is a character, as you say. I love him to death, I really, really do. He and Rhea are just way up there in my books. I had knee issues during the launch. He was very attentive and very kind, and I appreciated that so much. Actually, he was our family escort on Mike's last DoD mission. Hoot was great, and Rhea was awesome. She was pregnant, that didn't stop her at all, man, she was just right in there with everybody. It was a great, great crew, a fun time.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Mike credits her with giving the crew the moniker “The Grissom Crew?”

MULLANE: Yes. The reason is that, of course, STS-26, which was Return to Flight after *Challenger*, they got to go to the White House and visit. Then we were the second one after *Challenger*, and we didn’t go anywhere. That’s why she named us the Grissom Crew, because back in [Mercury], [Virgil I. “Gus”] Grissom didn’t get to go to the White House. We didn’t, so she called us the Grissom Crew because we didn’t get acknowledged. It was right there in between change of presidents, too, so that was an issue as well. That’s why we were named the Grissom Crew.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Can you talk about her sense of humor?

MULLANE: What can I say? She just fit right in. Hoot is a character, as I say. In fact, Mike and Hoot together, you have to watch out because things’ll explode. They just feed on each other. When we would get together, Rhea, would stick right in there going, “You guys.” In fact, when she would get upset with Hoot, she’d go, “Robert! Robert!” We knew, “Okay, Hoot, you’re hitting the borderline there. You better pull back a little. Pull the throttle back a little bit!” We would just laugh. When Mike and Hoot would make comments, whether off-color or whatever, she and I would just look at each other and roll our eyes because there was no stopping it. [It was] combustion when those two got together, and [it is still that way]. They still feed on each other, to this day. When they get together, it’s like they’ve never been apart.

ROSS-NAZZAL: How funny.

MULLANE: It is, it really is. We talk to them. Mike corresponds with Rhea actually more than he does with Hoot through email, but every now and then, Hoot'll call. If I answer the phone, he snorts. I'm sure you know that. Swine Flight was the moniker for STS-27. They were all pigs, so they were Swine Flight. He would snort anytime I pick up the phone. We had a good time, I have to say. We really did have a good time, and it was good. It really, really was good. The other thing, too, you got very close to these people because you didn't know if you'd be mourning with them. We knew how dangerous this business was, so you got close and you realized that you may be socializing in a completely different manner, depending on the outcome of the mission.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Some of these traditions, were these similar to traditions that you would have in the Air Force?

MULLANE: It wasn't the same because there wasn't the flight once every six months or so. They flew on a regular basis. The squadron wives, at least in the Air Force, would get together, have monthly squadron wife meetings, and it'd be a social. It would be a social, and then we'd have little dues. If somebody had a baby, the squadron would buy the baby a gift. We did have socials in the military, and it was on a monthly basis because the guys were flying all the time or deployed.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned that STS-27, of course, was a DoD flight, so everything was classified and they didn't share anything with you. Did that impact that family bonding at all, or that wasn't an issue?

MULLANE: No, it didn't because we still had the parties; we still had to make our family escort decisions. The thing that was difficult for all of us was not knowing. We didn't know launch dates, we didn't know the duration of the flight, we didn't know when they were going to land. I always said it was like planning for a wedding and you didn't know the time, the place, or the venue. That's pretty much what it was because they finally, I can't remember exactly, but they did let us know maybe a month before what the date of the launch was. We did not know the time, but we knew the date, so we could plan our pre-launch parties.

That's another reason why I just had it there at the condo, in the party room, because I didn't want to have to go through trying to find a place at the last minute. There weren't as many places available, too, as there are now because there's Space Camp out there, and the Astronaut Hall of Fame, that they have a lot of the receptions at. I think you could even have them—I'm not sure, maybe not—I thought maybe you could have them at Kennedy Space Center [KSC, Florida]. They couldn't at the time we were there. Landing, we never knew. They would call you 24 hours before you were going to leave, and ours was always Edwards because Mike's flights always landed at Edwards. You were always on call. You never knew.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's a challenge.

MULLANE: That was tough, yes, it was. It was tough. Again, you rolled with it, but it would get frustrating. I've often said NASA would have preferred all the astronauts to be single, no families involved at all, you just have to deal with them.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I can just imagine juggling kids and work and everything else, it's hard to get out the door.

MULLANE: After *Challenger*, children under 18 were allowed to fly on NASA aircraft, but mine were all over 18 by that time.

ROSS-NAZZAL: So you didn't really benefit.

MULLANE: I still had to get them there, but they were old enough they could fly on their own, so it didn't matter.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Were the spouses ever included in those discussions for that new family support plan after *Challenger*?

MULLANE: No, not that I know of. I wasn't. I think the astronauts were, because I remember writing down lists of things that I thought should be implemented and gave it to Mike and maybe Mike passed it on. I think that's what it was, to ask the spouses what they would prefer or implement, and let's go from there. I think everybody staying in the same place was done by NASA themselves, because after *Challenger* all of the families were in different places and they

wouldn't let the families go back to their lodging, rightfully so. They were keeping them sequestered. NASA personnel had to go to these places and pack all of their stuff and get all of their stuff together. I think that was a real hassle, and they wanted it on the airplane going back with the families to Houston. In fact, because of that, [all families would have to pack their bags prior to leaving for the launch at KSC. The bags would be loaded on the bus and remain there until after launch]. Even if we were going to go back to the condo, we had to pack our bag, leave the condo like we were leaving for good.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Makes for a long day.

MULLANE: It does, but [we] were ready. I can understand that, but it was difficult sometimes. "Oh gosh, we're going to come back here after the launch," especially if it was a night launch. You weren't going to leave right away, so we'd have to go back and take out the stuff we needed for the night before we left the next day.

ROSS-NAZZAL: They didn't whisk you away as soon as the Space Shuttle was off the pad?

MULLANE: No, no, not for the night launches, they didn't.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I was curious, do you recall if the wives ever played any pranks on either of those two crews, on STS-27 or 41D?

MULLANE: Forty-one D, we did not. Twenty-Seven, we did not. Thirty-Six, we did. Thirty-Six, Hoot and Mario Runco were our family escorts. It was a night launch, so we were going to meet the crew at the beach house at night. We ended up getting there before the crew did. It was one of the wives—I think it was Terry Creighton was the one who said, “Hey, they’re not here, let’s shed some of our clothes.” It was all G-rated, though, “and let’s drop it along the way to the back bedroom,” where they had a couch that was a hide-a-bed. [We] pulled out the hide-a-bed, “and when they come, we’ll jump in on the bed with our escort.” The fan was going and they had some stockings up there and somebody had dropped a shirt along the way. [There were] shoes along the way. Then we heard them pulling up because it’s a gravel road, and we all [ran and jumped onto the hide-a-bed].

The guys [came in and said], “What’s this? What’s going on?” They went back to the bedroom, and here we all are [laying on the bed saying], “Oh, Hoot, stop it; Hoot, stop it!” [Our spouses] started laughing. Then, Mike popped up [and said], “Our wives are safe, they’re Navy guys!” Everybody burst out laughing, and that was it. Then we went ahead and socialized after that. That’s one of the pranks that was pulled, and we just had a good time. It was a way to [deal with] our fear and our anxiety, I guess.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Sure, let off some steam.

MULLANE: Exactly, and that’s the way we do it. We laugh and carry on, crazy.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What do you think was your most challenging time being an astronaut wife with kids?

MULLANE: I think doing a lot of the stuff on my own. I tell Mike, I felt like a single parent a lot of the times. He was there to support you, but when those guys are in training, they are focused. They really, really are. You may talk to them, and they say, “Yes, yes, yes,” and I don’t think they remember a word you said. I had twins, and for the first mission, they were 15, and for the last mission, the twins were in college—my son was, my daughter was not—and then Laura was a senior [in high school] the last mission. They were involved in a lot of school activities, and my son at first played basketball and then he was a cheerleader, and my daughter was a cheerleader, and my youngest daughter was in drama. There were all these activities to go to, and I usually went to them by myself, because Mike just couldn’t make them. If he could, he would be there, but a lot of times, he couldn’t. He was on TDY [Temporary Duty] a lot, had to travel a lot because of his missions. It was stressful in that respect. Three teenagers are tough anyway and to have to deal with everything on my own, it was [challenging]. I knew this was my role, and I did the best I could, and we survived it. We did okay.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you offer any advice to the other wives coming in, or did anyone offer you advice, some of the old spouses from the Apollo era?

MULLANE: No, not really. Again, the Apollo era, it was so far past that they did things so much differently back then than they did for Shuttle. I didn’t offer any advice because again, as I said, a lot of the wives had careers, so they dealt with it in their way, and I dealt with it in my way. There were no real helpful [guides]. If you had a good friend, you could go and cry on their

shoulder a little bit, and they would cry on yours, and then we felt better and got through it. I never offered any advice, no.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did NASA ever offer any sort of support to the spouses?

MULLANE: No, only after *Challenger* did they start having meetings with Pat [Patricia A.] Santy, a psychiatrist who was with NASA. I went to one of them, and I didn't go anymore. I just didn't feel it was that helpful to me. You were pretty much on your own, but again, [we] came from a military background. The military, they didn't have any support for the wives except your squadron wives, and again, if you had an issue, you went to the commander of the squadron's wife and talked to her, but usually it was all self-contained. It just wasn't an issue, and if it was, we didn't know about it and we didn't know anybody that was having really severe problems with it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's too bad. I was just thinking, when Mike was selected in '78, there was a lot of interest, and then getting ready for missions and things like that, that might have been helpful, too, things that you need to know or do or pass along some of that information.

MULLANE: Again, after *Challenger* things got better because they realized, "oh, our astronauts do have families and they need attention as well, they need guidelines." It wasn't until then that they started helping out. Prior to launches, they would offer you a binder with things that needed to be done, just a checklist that would help you along the way.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What do you attribute that change to? Was that a change in leadership? Obviously the accident made them rethink things, but were there different leaders in place?

MULLANE: No, there weren't different leaders. I think what happened is if there had been any disgruntled spouses earlier and there was complaints, they just put it on the backburner. Then when this happened, I think the whole organization was rethought as far as astronauts and spouses and families went. I think a light went on in saying, "We need to pay attention to the families as well because of what they had to go through with the *Challenger*. It's not only gathering all of their belongings and everything, with everybody scattered all over, but just the emotional situation as well."

ROSS-NAZZAL: I just had a couple other questions for you. What do you think is the legacy of the first six women astronauts, from your perspective?

MULLANE: Number one, it has done wonders for women that were maybe young at the time and what they could possibly do in their own lives. They aren't restricted to being secretaries or teachers; they could get into the sciences and excel and do well. I think it really opened the door to young girls saying, "I can do this, too." I know that's a fact because of the emails that Mike gets from students on, "What can I do to become an astronaut? I want to be an astronaut, how should I direct my education?" It is exciting. I just wish we had a more robust space program right now to continue their excitement in it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I think a lot of people here in Houston are that way.

MULLANE: I know that for sure. I agree with that. It's just so sad that we have to pay the Russians such exorbitant prices to go in space, and taken a backseat, pretty much, in that situation.

ROSS-NAZZAL: As an astronaut spouse, what challenges did you see that the women had to overcome in the Corps?

MULLANE: You mean the female astronauts?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, sorry, the Astronaut Corps.

MULLANE: I think the challenge was working with men who were chauvinistic at the time. I think the work, the training, I don't think that was a challenge for them at all. I think they were more than capable. I think just dealing with men that had never worked with women before was the most challenging and most difficult, and I think they came through it beautifully. I think they put a lot of those men in their places.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you get a sense, were the civilian men just as chauvinistic as the guys from the military?

MULLANE: No, I don't think so, because they were in academia and they worked with women probably on a regular basis, so no, I do not believe that at all.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I think that I have gone through all the questions that I had, but I was curious if you had any other anecdotes or stories that you wanted to share about any of the women.

MULLANE: I'm trying to think if there was anything that was funny, but I really can't think of any. In fact, when I got your questions, I pulled out my albums and started going through them and trying to think of things, trigger my mind on things that went on. I think I made note of most of those.

Again, I'm sure there was a lot that went on in the offices there because when they were selected as a crew, they all moved into office together, so I'm sure a lot of things went on in there that I don't know about and they had a great time. Mike was with Judy for that first one, and that was the only woman that he was crewed with, but I know he had fun with the others as well.

I know when Shannon had flown with the Saudi prince, she was going to go to Saudi Arabia but they wouldn't let her in unless she had a male escort and her husband couldn't go. They were trying to think, okay, how can she go? I think it's in Mike's book, if she could go with John [M.] Fabian as his daughter. I don't know, they were trying to figure out a way that she could get in without a man. I don't know if it was Mike and Hoot that went in, but they went in, "Shannon, congratulations, you've been designated an honorary man!" She just looked at them. I thought, "Mullane, if you come home with a dagger in your chest, I'm going to know why." Ornerly guy!

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did he ever share a lot of those office jokes or pranks with you when he came home? Or you talked about other things?

MULLANE: Mike would share a lot of stuff, he really would. With 41D, he shared a lot, and then he couldn't share too much with the two DoD missions, which was very difficult. In one of our gatherings for the DoD missions—and I think it was the second one, 27—some of the contractors were in town and they wanted to have a gathering with the contractors, and Mike said, “Do you mind hosting it?” I said, “Not at all,” so we had them all over. All of the wives were told, “Don't ask where they work, and don't ask what they do.” I thought, “Okay, how are we going to carry a conversation on with these people? How do you start a conversation? What do you do, where do you work, where do you live?” You can't ask where they lived, either. I thought, “This is going to be really fun.”

As the night went on and all the wives knew that this was the situation, the wives ended up in the kitchen talking, and all of the guys and the contractors were in the living room talking, because it was very difficult. Subsequently, after it was all over and even though it was still secret, we found out. We met with these people later on, and I got to know them and they're great people and we can communicate very well on stuff. We still correspond with some of them at Christmastime. At that time, it was very difficult. How are you supposed to talk to these people, then? What do you talk about?

ROSS-NAZZAL: The weather, I guess, that might be the only thing.

MULLANE: I guess. “Do you like Houston?” “No, not really.”

ROSS-NAZZAL: You can't talk about religion or politics; that sort of limits things.

MULLANE: Right, exactly, it did limit it, but again, it was an experience I wouldn't trade for anything in the world. I thoroughly enjoyed it while I was there. I loved the people, the camaraderie among everyone was phenomenal. When Mike said he was going to leave, I was ready; I really was. I think I was stressed to the max by that time, but I do miss the friendship and the gatherings. I really, really do. I have fond memories of it and wouldn't trade it for anything in the world.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I did think of one question. We talked about this earlier, but I was thinking, when I interviewed Eileen [M.] Collins, she talked about when she went in for Air Force training, she went to a party. All the wives were on one side of the room, and the guys were on the other, and none of the other women who were training went with her. She made a decision, because she had heard that none of the wives wanted the women there, that she would go befriend the women, even though she really wanted to be with the guys to learn more about the planes and that sort of thing. I was curious about Judy, for those gatherings, and even some of the other women, did they tend to stick with the wives and try and get to know them, or were they more off with the guys, talking about the Orbiter and the RMS [Remote Manipulator System] and those sort of things?

MULLANE: To my recollection—and again, I'm pulling way back in the recesses of my brain—I think they did both. I think that maybe some of the women, the spouses, would go up in that

group with the guys because we were used to being military. Eileen was right, especially in the military, the wives would be on one side of the room and the guys would be on the other. I think over at NASA when we got together—and especially prior to crew selection—I think everyone mingled well, I really do. Ours was a large group of people, too. I can't remember, but I think ours was the largest that was selected, and that's a lot of people. As I remember, I think we mingled quite well. Somebody may say I'm all wrong and I could be, but I don't remember that specifically, that the guys were on one side with the female astronauts, and the wife spouses on the other side. I don't remember that.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I just thought that was an interesting comment that she made.

MULLANE: Yes, and it is. That could have been with Eileen. I know in the military that was very, very true because we heard about the airplanes at home. We didn't need to hear about them at our socials. The guys, I'll tell you, flying's in their blood and that's all they talk about, missions and flying and whatever, and episodes that they had, incidents they had. The wives would just go over and do their own thing and their own visiting. I just don't remember that all that much in the Astronaut Office. I don't. I just don't remember.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You're enjoying Mike's, I guess, semi-retirement? He's writing, and he's talking quite a bit.

MULLANE: He is. He's speaking quite a bit. The writing is no longer. He tried to do some fiction and it didn't work out, so he's mainly just speaking and hiking. He's headed out over the

Labor Day weekend to try and hike some 14,000-foot mountains in Colorado, which he's done 39 of them, I think. He's going to try and put a few more on his belt, and then he's off to speak again the following week. He's on airplanes a lot.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Someone had told me that you and Mike have a play where you talk about being an astronaut spouse and he talks about being an astronaut?

MULLANE: We did. We don't do that any longer. That was a long time ago. It was a dramatic interpretation of flying in space and being that spouse. We quit that, I bet, 10 years ago.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I thought that that sounded like an interesting production.

MULLANE: Yes, it was. It was fun and then I told Mike, "Okay, no more. I can't travel." I can't travel like he does. Today, he flew out at six o'clock this morning and he's in Salt Lake City [Utah], has to drive three hours to his venue, then he has to drive back to Salt Lake City, jump on an airplane, go to Oklahoma City [Oklahoma], do his thing there, then comes home Friday night late, and then jumps in a car on Friday and goes to Colorado to hike, and then comes home on Wednesday and leaves on Thursday to go to Texas. I can't do that.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's a packed schedule.

MULLANE: It is, but he enjoys what he does, and the side effect is the travel. He does it and takes it with a grain of salt; I admire him. I keep saying, "Mike, you're not getting any younger.

When are you going to slow down?" I don't think he ever will, though, Jennifer. I really don't. I think it's just in his blood to just keep going, going, going, until he can't anymore.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I hope you're able to spend some time together and travel the globe and enjoy retirement.

MULLANE: We did that this summer some, and in fact, I am going to Texas with him because we're driving. He's going to deposit me at my daughter's, west of Fort Worth, and then he's going to go to his talks in Austin, and then he's coming to Houston for his physical.

ROSS-NAZZAL: If you're ever in Houston, give me a buzz. I'd like to meet you in person.

MULLANE: I will, Jennifer, most definitely. I do hope I helped you out here and it didn't sound too crazy or disjointed.

ROSS-NAZZAL: No, no, it was great information, and I appreciate you talking with me. Like I said, if you think of some other spouses that might be interesting folks to talk with, who might be willing to talk—I know some of the wives may not want to talk.

MULLANE: I'll think about that. I still have your email, so I'll send it to you if I think of anything.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That sounds great. Thank you so much for your time today.

MULLANE: Good luck on your project. Appreciate it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Thank you, take care. Bye-bye.

MULLANE: You, too. Bye-bye.

[End of interview]