

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

TAMARA R. WEST  
INTERVIEWED BY JENNIFER ROSS-NAZZAL  
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ROSS-NAZZAL: Today is August 7, 2014. This interview with Tammy West is being conducted for the JSC Oral History Project in Houston, Texas. The interviewer is Jennifer Ross-Nazzal, assisted by Rebecca Wright.

WEST: Just to kind of help trigger [my memory, I pulled these photos out.] But I didn't finish all of them because it was just crazy up here. That was so long ago. I was new; I had just started out here in '83 and rather quickly they assigned me to the [STS]-51A crew. Normally, someone is in the office a little bit longer, but, I don't know, I guess they recognized talent.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You were assigned as a crew secretary. What does a crew secretary do?

WEST: I first got on board in June of '83. I worked for Mr. [Robert L.] Crippen, who was a branch chief at the time, and I don't remember branch chief of what, but I sat outside of his office. I was his secretary, so I had him. Each secretary usually had about 10 people they supported. Usually, when you get assigned to a crew, you focus mostly on the crew, and the other secretaries pick up your workload. I don't know, for whatever reason, I was hired in June—they launched in November of '84, and you start working flights six months out. I hadn't been there very long when they assigned me, so that was really cool. It was real exciting. I

found some photos from 51A. I can't find all of them—I've lost many pictures over the years—but this one is Rick [Frederick H.] Hauck.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's a great one, with the eagle.

WEST: He had a thing for eagles, so this bust of that eagle was in his office. When they went to do their crew photo, that's the eagle in that photo.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's why the eagle is in the crew patch, you think? Funny.

WEST: They used to have a lot of get-togethers at their houses. This was at Dr. Allen's house. That was my daughter at the time. We had gone over there for a party, just a little get-together. Usually, you become a really tight-knit family. They would have little get-togethers at each other's houses, and I was very fortunate that I was included in a lot of them. I was actually there when they did their crew photo, just standing in the background watching that process, which was really neat. Back in the old days, they used to do the official one, but then they'd always do an unofficial one. I can't remember if 51A ever had the unofficial one, but some of the other crews that I worked did, that were really neat. This one is when they've landed at the Cape [Canaveral, Florida]. They've all come out of their T-38s, and they're heading over to the mics to talk to the press.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You got to go to the Cape for launch, and you were working with them there?

WEST: Of course, that's just the Orbiter. This is their cake that they always have. I don't recall who made the cake. If you ever see any of the footage—they have the white tablecloth, their crew patch cake is on the table when they're sitting around having their breakfast, or whatever meal it is, depending on the time of launch. This is Anna's mom and Kristin. We were at Ellington [Field, Houston, Texas], watching them get on the T-38s to leave. Then we got on the NASA plane and followed them, which is really a cool experience because they're in quarantine so you can't be around them. We're family and friends standing out there, and we're sending them off.

I remember Rick Hauck had, I think it was a '56 Chevy or a Ford pick-up truck that he had been restoring. He came out from behind the parking lot, driving his truck, and he drove it across the runway and in front of the T-38s. He was waving to the crowd, because you had to keep a distance. I have a picture of that, and I couldn't find it. That was cool. They would stand out there, and they would just wave. Sometimes there's media there and they take pictures, and then they get in their T-38s. Once they leave, then the immediate family, myself, their spouses and children, we board the NASA plane and we follow.

Of course, a T-38 is a lot faster than our flight. We would fly out there when we go, and the pilots would always circle around the pad so that we could look out and see the Orbiter sitting on the pad, and then we'd land at the SLF [Shuttle Landing Facility]. The crew times it where they do that as well. After we land and we get out, we stand off to the side of the runway. You're over here by the exit. [Demonstrates] Press is over here at the end of the runway, with the microphone, that the crew will walk up to and talk to the press. We get there, the families, we're all standing here; we watch the crew fly in formation, and then they land. They taxi in formation to right in front of the press, and that's when they get out and they walk across. They

wave to us. Then they walk over to the mic, and they do their little spiel in front of the press. That's always really cool to see them, and then from there, they get on a van and go to crew quarters. At that time, the viewing site was right next to the LCC [Launch Control Center], so this is one of the stands. That's me. I don't even remember who took that picture. That was one of the views while we were sitting in the stands, waiting.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You didn't get to go to the top of the LCC with the families?

WEST: No, the only ones allowed up there are the spouses and their children. I work mostly with their extended families—their parents, brothers, sisters, close friends—that's who I take care of. Each crewmember was allowed 50 guests. For a crew of five, that was like 300 people that I'm responsible for, making sure they get where they need to have the right credentials, get to the bus boarding place on time. So that's who I maintain. That's who I worked with mostly. In the evenings, I worked with the spouses because their guest list was always changing. You're allowed 50 seats on a bus that NASA provides that takes you out to the viewing site, then you have car passes, and those folks are their other guests that they can't, of course, get on the bus. They go into a different location on the causeway. That's where they view from. I'm in charge of all of those people, however many they decide, and they each get 100 car passes.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You've got your hands full.

WEST: It's a challenging job, but I loved it, I really did. It was very hard work, keeping up with everything, but sometimes, when you get there real time, people at the last minute have to drop

out, so you have to be able to be in contact with your car pass people, if they want to move them up to the bus. So those are the types of things we usually talked about with the spouses. I check in with them after they come back from their meal with the crew. We all stayed at the same condo, so that I could be real close to them and we could work and we would change out everything. Then, I had to make sure that those people knew where to go and where to be and get checked in, get credentials. They always offered a briefing and a tour prior to launch. When they come into the guest center, where I would check them in, we make sure they had all their credentials, because you had to have a pass for the tour and the pass for the bus for the briefing. They get on the bus, usually an astronaut gives a little talk to them, a briefing about the mission and the crew and what's going on and what will happen launch day, that kind of thing. Then they board the bus, and they go and do the standard tour.

When they go out to the launch pad, usually the structure, at this time, is already pulled back because I think the RSS [Rotating Service Structure] retracts, like 12 hours prior, I think. It just happened to be that it was retracted at the time that the tour's happening, so when the guests get off, you're in a parking lot and there's a fence, the crew surprised them. They drive up in their convertibles, and they get out. They stand on the other side of the fence, so all the guests get to see them. The Shuttle's in the background. They're standing there, and they're talking with their families and friends. That's always really, really cool to see. I probably digressed from what your initial question was. I'm just thinking.

ROSS-NAZZAL: This is great. You want to go through the rest of the photos?

WRIGHT: I'm interested in this stuff.

WEST: This was flowers that the crew sent to me after the flight was over.

ROSS-NAZZAL: In appreciation of all that you did.

WEST: These photos were post-flight. I didn't do any post-flight, that was handled by the Astronaut Appearances Office. They take care of all of that. I had a couple of pictures. Unfortunately, they're no longer married, but that's Anna and Bill [William F. Fisher].

ROSS-NAZZAL: Is this in London?

WEST: This was their trip to London, and this is another one of them.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did they provide you with that photo, since you didn't handle that? Or did you end up going with them?

WEST: I did not go. This is from—I don't remember which crewmember, [or] how they got the pictures, I don't remember—but when they came back, they gave me a stack I could go through.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It's a great shot.

WEST: This is them again, and that's Rick Hauck.

ROSS-NAZZAL: There's Joe [Joseph P. Allen].

WEST: Joe, and I think Dale [A. Gardner].

ROSS-NAZZAL: You're right, I can kind of see him.

WEST: Dale Gardner. This is Bonnie—that's Joe's wife—that's Sue, Dale's wife at the time. You can't really see Dolly [Hauck], she's probably over here.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's a great shot.

WEST: This is Dolly Hauck and Anna and Bonnie Allen, and this is Dale Gardner and his first wife, Sue, at the time. He just recently passed.

ROSS-NAZZAL: We had been trying for years to talk to him, and he said if we talked to Joe, we got everything we needed. It's too bad.

WEST: This is a picture of the crew, I think it was British Airways, on their way to London. That's the crew with the captain.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Who's this guy in the back, do you know?

WEST: That's the flight crew.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oh that's the flight crew as well. Good shot; great crew.

WEST: Those are the only ones that I could find.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Those are great shots. Thanks, I'd never seen any of these. Anna's been kind enough to let me go through her papers, and she's kept a lot of stuff. She has the paperwork from her flight on the Concorde and some other stuff, but these type of personal photos, she doesn't really have any of those, so that's neat.

WEST: I'm surprised that I found them.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's great. I wanted to go back and ask you, while I was thinking about it. You said you worked for Crippen when you first came in. Was Sally [K. Ride] working with Crip at that time? Were you assigned to work with her a bit, since he was commander of STS-7 at that point?

WEST: No. I didn't work with him for very long because then, of course, they were working STS-7 and they moved. What happens is secretaries, we stayed station. Any time a crew was assigned, then there was a big office move. Whoever the secretary is gets moved into that crew office. We rotated a lot of folks through, so I didn't work with Crip for very long before he was moved into that group. I wasn't involved in anything in STS-7. Of course, I saw things, just being in the office. They were down the hall from where I sat. Of course I remember all the

media and all the hoopla evolved around her being assigned. I might have done some small things for Sally throughout her time [in the office], but I was never directly her assigned secretary. My encounters with her have always been really nice, and she seemed pretty easygoing and laid-back. Again, I didn't work really, really closely with her. Yes, good memories.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Talk about the crew relationship with 51A. To me, they seemed to be a very close-knit group. They seem to get together still, they have reunions, so talk about that.

WEST: You'll find that a lot in the crews because like I said, you become a close-knit family, working so hard. You might be assigned a flight a year out or so, and then you slowly start training. By the time you hit six or seven months away from launch, it was very intense training. You're with somebody *a lot* in sometimes stressful situations in their training and all the planning that goes into that. A lot of the crews, they do stay together. The Astronaut Office as a whole, I think, is just like one big family. They're always supporting each other, whether you agree with them or not, it just always felt to me—and I was there 22 years—that it was just very close. If somebody's hurt, everybody is hurt, kind of thing. They really step up, and it's been really amazing to see that kind of camaraderie with everything.

Anna, I worked with her and I knew her mom, because she was in town a lot, and of course, Kristin. She did bring her into the office a few times, but that wasn't unusual because a lot of people did. A lot of the astronauts are very family-oriented, and they would bring in their kids on occasion, if they're on leave or on vacation or something, and they're just stopping by the office to pick up things. They would have their kids with them. I didn't really interact too

much with Anna and her girls. She only had the one girl at that time. Working that flight, I don't recall anything out of the ordinary. She was the only female so there's always going to be some little things to accommodate, but that's on any flight. I don't remember anything really that stands out that she demanded. She's pretty calm or mellow. Maybe that's not the right choice of words. That was so long ago.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What about the rest of the crew, Rick or Joe? I understand Dave [David M.] Walker was a big joker.

WEST: Dave Walker was a mess. He was single; he was dating someone, so he had a significant other, but he was the only single crewmember. He was a hoot. He liked to joke around. He can be very funny, but he can also be very intimidating, depending on his mood. I did end up working with him as his crew secretary when he was the commander of STS-30, so we had that relationship later on down the road. He was a joker, and he was always talking about flying. He just reminded you of the old era of the pilots and their mentality, "I'm Topgun. I can fly anywhere, anytime." He was always very nice to me, but he was fun because he was always doing something. Dr. Allen, he could be funny at times. He was very nice and at the time, he was working on his book. He wrote a book, *Entering Space*, I think?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, it's a nice coffee [table] book.

WEST: He gave me a copy of it. I wonder if that's the one [where I'm in the acknowledgements.] I think that's the one that I was in. I have his book. I should have brought

it. As he was writing it, he would let me read portions of it, just to see what was going on. I don't know if you've seen the book, but it's got some awesome pictures, like [*Challenger*] on the crawler and all that fog. That was such a cool picture. When the product was finally done, he gave me a copy. I read it, and I thought it was so easy to really understand what they were doing and what they felt and what they were going through. I was still relatively new, but it seemed to me, I got it. I got a lot better understanding of what a lot of the acronyms were for.

He was funny. One story that I have when they were in quarantine, the quarantine at that time was out back by the gym, [Building] 236, I think?

ROSS-NAZZAL: I know it's one of the 200 buildings. I can't remember the number.

WEST: In Building 5, they had offices that were quarantined. Every day, part of my duties were I would go over there, I'd bring their mail, see what they needed, pick up outgoing mail, things like that. We were over there, and we were talking about the guest list and stuff. I think the whole crew was in the office at the time. I said, "I have a special request from one of the guests who says they need a stepping stool so that they can get into the bus." They were all joking and laughing and Dr. Allen—because he's kind of short—he was just laughing. He goes, "Oh, I wonder who that is." I go, "Dr. Allen, it's your mama." He was like, "What?" I said, "I'm so sorry, but your mom," she was an elderly lady, and she was like this [tall]. You thought he was short, she was like that, [demonstrates]. We were all just joking about that. He just thought that was the funniest thing, and then when I told him that it was his mom that had requested it, he was like, "Oh." He was making fun of it. I remember that one because that one stood out.

With Dale, I would always bake a cake for their birthdays, and at the time they were going to be in quarantine so I wasn't going to be able to bake him a cake because they can't have any outside food. Everything has to be cooked in the quarters there. I had made arrangements with one of the ladies in the kitchen at the Cape to bake him a special cake for his birthday. They actually launched on his birthday, so the morning of their press conference, they had the crew cake but they also had this other smaller cake. She wrote on there "Tammy didn't forget," and I have a picture of it, but I couldn't find that one either. There was a little flag or something sticking out, saying that that was from me. That was funny. I didn't ask her to do that, but she put that on there. I wish I would have found that picture.

Rick, he was kind of like the dad, kind of keep everybody in line. He was very, very pleasant to work with. He knew that I was new to the office, and that I was new to being that crew secretary. He was very patient with me. You know how you always have one person that, no matter what, how hard you try, you always mess up something? We had a couple of incidents afterwards. Back in those days, we didn't have a computer. I had to type the crew report on a typewriter, and I remember we were going through one of the pages and I misspelled a word. He thought it was funny. I was mortified because it was supposed to say "public," but it didn't. I was like, "Oh, my God," because you know how many people see a crew report. I was just mortified, and he thought it was funny. There's always that one person that everything you do wrong is usually with that person, but he was good about it.

He was a lot of fun. His wife was very nice. She was the real estate guru at the time. They're no longer married. He just took me under his wing and made sure I was okay. He always made sure I was included into things. That was always very nice.

WRIGHT: You were the crewmember who didn't fly.

WEST: Right. All of my crews—I worked 11 or 12, maybe 12—they all made me feel that way, always made me a part. STS-88 was my last one that I worked, with Nancy [J.] Currie. She's a lot of fun, too. They made me feel special. They made special arrangements for me to come out as a spouse, because they would give the spouse a tour up through the structure where the Shuttle is, and they got to see the white room and things like that. So I was an honorary spouse. I have pictures of that, too, but I forgot them. That was really neat, to go with the spouses and the crew. They took me up to the top of the tower, and I got to see the white room. They even let me sit and look inside the Orbiter. I couldn't touch anything. They said, "Whatever you do, don't touch the tile or anything." They have it covered, the entry, where they crawl in. I sat there and I got to look inside, so that was really interesting. All the crews that I worked always made me feel like a part of it. I have a couple of pictures—and I can't find it—of the fun crew photos where I was in them. I can't find them.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You'll find them at some point.

WEST: They're probably somewhere. I have this box where I've just collected all the invitations because anything that I got, I always saved. I have a box, I think it's in the attic or it's in the spare bedroom somewhere.

WRIGHT: Give you something to do when you retire.

WEST: Yes, in a couple years I'll go through and try to organize all that. I saved everything: I saved all the thank-you notes and all the invitations to their home for parties, and just any of that stuff. I don't know if anybody is going to be interested in it, but it was important to me.

ROSS-NAZZAL: People find that material interesting so don't throw it away. Tell your kids. This was your first mission, and it seems to me that [there] was a lot of media interest in this flight because Anna was going to be the first mother in space. How did that impact you? You're on the job, you're learning, and then you've got all this media.

WEST: I was thinking about that and I don't really remember too much about media interest. I'm sure there was, but it seemed like, back in those days, that they really didn't focus on so much of what the first time is. You had STS-7, you had Sally, then you had STS-8, which was first African American, first night launch, and Anna was the [fourth] woman to fly. Now, I'm not there when they do all their press conferences and when they do all their interviews. It was probably brought up then, when I wasn't around. I didn't work that side of it. Astronaut Appearances Office took care of all the media requests, all the interviews and the press conferences, and the post-flight appearances. I worked supporting them in their crew secretary capacity, taking care of their guests and their family and everything centered around there. If they had training at other facilities, I would take care of those travel arrangements. If they were going to Ames [Research Center, Moffett Field, California] or something, I would take care of that.

The crew schedulers took care of their calendar. Starting, like at L [Launch]-9 months, they took over their calendars. So the scheduling office was the one that set up all of their

training and whatever trips they had to go on, and the testing that they had to do at the Cape because they would go back and forth for the CEITs [Crew Equipment Interface Tests] and TCDT [Terminal Countdown Demonstration Test] and those kinds of things. I did the travel part of it, but all the training and their schedules were completely handled by that office. I would get a copy of the schedule, so I knew what they were doing and when they were going to be in the office.

I worked with them creating their preliminary letters that they're going to send out to the guests to find out who is going to attend. It's just a one-page letter that talks about when the flight is and what they're going to be doing and who the crewmembers are, asking them if they're interested in attending. I wish I had a copy of what one of those letters looked like. I could probably find one. It talks about what's going to happen in Florida, and if they're interested then they need to fill out an RSVP [Respond Very Promptly] card. I worked with graphics to come up with these RSVP cards that say, "Yes, they're coming to launch," or, "Yes, they're coming to the landing," and if so, how many guests. I needed all the guests' names and ages, because there was some restrictions. I worked with graphics on that. The initial mail-out comes at L-4 months, where you have to have all of their guest lists in, and each crewmember usually had several hundred. It's a lot of work to print out all these letters, stuff them, and put the cards in. Some had separate letters for certain people, and I would have to make sure that those individual letters got into the right [envelopes]. Some people were invited to their receptions in Florida, not all of them. The majority of the time, whoever was coming for the launch, they were going to be invited to the reception. Sometimes, if the venue was smaller, not everyone got invited.

You do all of that, then you have to work with the crew on their official flight kit [OFK] and their personal preference kit [PPK]. The official had to be organizations—they're not individuals. They would have to reach out to universities—you couldn't fly anything religious in the OFK either—different organizations, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, or schools, maybe, that their kids are in. They're allowed 10 items in the official flight kit, so they had to work that. They're allowed 20 items in the personal kit, which can be for individuals, and religious items are allowed in the personal because that's not open to the public. The official flight kit is available to the public two weeks after they land, so if anybody called and requested a copy of it, you can, but their personal, they can't. It's working with them, getting their lists, because we have deadlines.

I provide them a list, "Okay, this is what I need, this, this, this, this," and I always pad the dates because they're always late. I had to go through that list of things that are in order and making sure that they're staying on track. Sometimes I would contact a school if they'd been trying to reach them and had been unsuccessful or had been partially successful; calling them and saying, "I need that flag right now," because there was a deadline for when the list is due and then the items are usually like a week or two later. Gathering all those lists, getting the package put together, it has to go through the approval cycle, through the Astronaut Office, and then over into Building 1.

When their items start coming in, I'm responsible for packaging them, keeping them together, putting their name and their number [on them], and just compiling it and keeping it locked in—it wasn't really a vault—it was a room that locked where we would store those kinds of things. Of course, then you have to deliver them. You usually would go to Building 1, and at the time, I want to say it was Francis Smith. Abby Cassell was Francis' secretary, and I would

work with her and with the USA [United Space Alliance] folks, and we would go through our list and check off that everything is there. She had a part—her part was all Building 1 things and other Centers, that type of thing—and I did all the crew stuff, just going through that process of checking off, making sure everything is accounted for and we're all on the same page.

Then there's a matter of providing the VIP [Very Important People] list. At that time, we didn't have the computer, but we had this machine in our mailroom. I don't even remember what it was called, but it was this huge thing that you would have to go in and sit at, and you would have to, line by line, put all the information in, which could be really tricky. I don't remember so much about it. I just remember that it was a pain to have to sit there and do everything one at a time, and you don't want to make a mistake. It was like a message board type thing. I remember it would go to [NASA] Headquarters [Washington, DC], and they would approve, deny, or want more information. If it was a VIP, they had to truly be a VIP. It couldn't be your best friend because you wanted to make sure they got a seat on the bus, unless that best friend happens to be a general or an admiral or something along those lines.

Normally congressional folks were invited for every launch anyway, so unless they had some type of a relationship with a specific senator or congressperson, that person might be on the VIP list, but as a whole, it was just general knowledge that everybody was invited. They didn't always show up. All but Anna and Dr. Allen were military, so it was customary to invite whoever was the chief of staff or the high-ranking military officials. A lot of them knew admirals or generals, and they would be on that list. There were celebrities. I don't recall any celebrities from that flight.

I saved all my crew secretary books, and they're in the box somewhere. I think that is in my attic, that had all the paperwork and all the lists and all the guest names and all the OFK

items and whatever I used in my books. I did save all of that from each one of my flights, but I don't remember a celebrity on that particular flight.

I do have a funny one from STS-88, though. June Lockhart is very fascinated with space, and she's made several friends with the astronauts. Bill [William S.] McArthur was one of them, and so she wanted to come to STS-88's launch. She's on the list. They put her on the family bus; it was just going to be her. I can remember sitting at the guest center, where everybody checks in. I see her walk in. She is dressed to the nines, and she has all these bags in her hands, like she'd been shopping for, I don't know, but she probably had 10 bags in her hand.

She came in, she came over to the counter, and everybody was looking at her. Not that they knew who she was, but the fact that she was dressed so elegantly and then she had all these bags. I remember her coming up, and she was standing in front of me. She's very, very nice. She goes, "Hi. I don't know if you know me, but I'm Lassie's mom." I said, "Yes, ma'am." I had spoken with her several times. She didn't drive, and we had to arrange for a driver to take her to and from the airport and take her to the hotel. It was just funny that she would introduce herself as Lassie's mom to people. Then she wanted to know if she could sit down somewhere and wait for her ride with all her bags, so we put her in the office behind us. The actual day of the launch, she showed up out there and she was trying to get on the bus, but it kept getting delayed. It was just very unorganized. I remember her getting on the bus, and there wasn't a seat. She sat on somebody's lap until somebody got up and they ended up getting into my van and riding. I would lead the buses out to where the viewing site was. That was always a funny story, "I'm Lassie's mom."

WRIGHT: Maybe that sounded better than, “I was in *Lost in Space*.” Especially going on a flight, anyway.

WEST: She’s been out here many times, and she’s friends with several of the astronauts. She was really funny, really friendly. Lassie’s mom.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You told us that you were at the shoot for the crew photo for 51A. What are your recollections of that event?

WEST: I was there. It was neat. You have the photo shoot with the backgrounds, and I was just standing in the back, just watching the process, how they arranged them and making the eagle part of it. I don’t remember them doing a funny—they might have; I don’t remember it. On some of the other crews that I’ve worked, like STS-39, they actually wanted me to dress like a cheerleader but I wouldn’t do it. They went to the summit, into the Rockets’ locker room. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen that photo.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Is that Mike [Michael L.] Coats’ flight with Guy [Guion S. Bluford]? I think he showed it to us.

WEST: There was two versions. One, Coats is the coach. They’re all dressed in Rocket uniforms, and they’re all sitting on the bench in the locker room, and they’re ready to go. The next picture they obviously lost because their hair’s all messed up, and they have towels wrapped around; it was like a before and after game kind of thing. I did not want to be a cheerleader. I

hadn't been a cheerleader in forever. Didn't quite work, but that was fun. A lot of the crews, even ones I didn't work for, they had some really, really good ones. I can't remember which one, but Mario Runco thinks he's Spock, and they had actually gone to the soundstage in California and had a picture done on *Star Trek*. He's sitting there with his little, his Vulcan ears. There are some great, very creative, funny pictures out there.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you ever go to training with the 51A crew and see what they were doing?

WEST: I didn't. Back then, you didn't do that kind of thing. I guess nobody ever really asked. For [STS]-61C, which was my second flight, where Hoot [Robert L.] Gibson was the commander, Rhea [Seddon's] husband, they brought me over to a sim [simulation] one night. I got to sit on the flight deck and watch them do a simulation. The funny thing about that is they throw out all these contingencies, how they're going to respond if they were actually in that situation. I remember Pinky [George D.] Nelson sitting there, and he was talking about this asteroid coming. I'm just sitting there and I think, okay. He goes, "Well, I don't know if we're going to survive this one," and they get hit by this asteroid. It was just funny.

Hoot, he is a character. You wonder how Rhea and him got together. When they're together, you can see it, but when they're separate—because he is so wild and she's more reserved—she can be funny. You have to be, to be married to him. I did work with them, and I was there when she was pregnant with Paul. In fact, I used to baby-sit for them when they would have events, or if they were just going to go to dinner or something. I would actually baby-sit for Paul, their son at the time, because I had my daughter, so we would go over. They lived over here in Nassau Bay. Sixty-One-C was my funniest crew. We called them the Delta Boys.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Delta Boys? Why is that?

WEST: Franklin [R.] Chang-[Diaz], he is very serious. Everybody else—Steve [Steven A.] Hawley and Pinky Nelson and Charlie [Charles F.] Bolden and Hoot Gibson—they would just crack you up. They were just really, really funny, but then you had Franklin, who was very, very serious. We called them the Boys of Delta, because at the time crew quarters were two trailers inside of a building right across from the graphics, the print shop. I don't remember whatever the number is, but that was the crew quarters at the time. You go inside that white building, there were two trailers, and then in the middle was the common area where they had TV and where you would eat. We would go over there—I would be invited—and they would always watch *Animal House*. We would sit out there, and we would drink beer, and we would watch *Animal House*. That's how they got [named] the Boys of Delta. We always had little things around their office, to kid around with them. That one had Senator [Bill] Nelson [Florida Congressman at the time] and Bob [Robert J.] Cenker.

A funny thing with that flight—we were going out to the barbecue at the beach house, and we picked up Senator Nelson's wife and his parents in the van heading out there. She was dressed just immaculately, they all were, but his mother had a mink coat on. Our first attempts were in December for that flight; we finally launched in January, but it wasn't cold enough for a mink coat. I just remember, every hair was in place. You could definitely tell they were a political family. You could just look at them and knew that they had money, and they were a political family. I just couldn't get over her in a mink coat.

WRIGHT: Around sand too.

WEST: They were nice and they would speak with you, but it was so way out of my league. Senator Nelson is very clean-cut, boy-next-door. I never saw him cut loose or anything like that. To pair him with that crew was interesting.

WRIGHT: Are there any jokes you recall from 51A? Did they have any crew pranks or anything like that?

WEST: Not that I can recall. With that one being my first, I was really focused on all the work aspects of it, of what had to be done and trying to learn the process and the procedures, and making sure we stick with the timeline. As you do more crews, you get a little bit more relaxed because you know what you have to do and you know what to expect. Not that I wasn't diligent in doing everything, but you're a little bit more relaxed about it because you've done it before and you know what you have to do. It's not like you're learning something new. Being my first flight, I was really focused on what I had to do because I didn't want to mess up. I wanted to make sure everything flowed smoothly. I probably didn't interact as much with that crew. When they're in the office, I would go in and just chat with them briefly and talk to them, guest list related, or anything of that nature. Mostly, that was my learning crew and I was just trying to figure everything out and see what I needed to do and not mess up.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You were learning on the job, I guess.

WEST: It was definitely on the job training because prior to working here, I worked for the Houston Astros for two years. That's a whole completely different experience. I had never worked for the government, and I never really was a secretary until I got hired out here. I was learning all of NASA's rules, correspondence, and procedures, and all the acronyms. I'm trying to get into that world, into being a secretary, which for whatever reason, it seems to really flow easily for me. I seem to pick up everything. It was a challenge to learn all of that, and then after only being there maybe six months, being told, "Okay, well, now we're going to make you a crew secretary and get you into that world," which is wonderful.

It's a lot of work and you work hard for a long time, but you see an end result. It's not like you work so hard gathering all this information and putting everything together, and then you're just handing it to somebody else, and then that's it. With this, you work with the crew, you interact with their families and their guests, and you do all this. You travel with them to Florida and then you see the launch. I didn't get to go to every landing, but some landings I got to go to.

You saw a complete cycle. All the hard work really paid off. That's very rewarding, to have that feeling, that all those months of working late and working weekends and traveling just really paid off. It's just a great feeling. I just really loved my job over there. It was very hard to leave, very hard to leave. That was 21 or 22 years, there. I got to see a lot of changes, the office evolving and growing. When I first started, we didn't have maybe 50 astronauts or so? I don't know the exact number, but it didn't seem as much, and then it kept growing, and then at one point, we were like 100-plus. It was interesting to see all that, to see a process of when they go through selection. Seeing all these people walking through the office that are being interviewed

and wondering, “I wonder if he’s going to get selected?” Sometimes they would talk to you. There was a lot of changes. It was interesting.

One funny story that I will tell—I hadn’t been working there very long. John [W.] Young was the chief, and Hank [Henry W.] Hartsfield was the deputy. They had the corner office. I worked down the hall but the inside corner, in front of Crippen’s office. Right outside our office was the coffee area. Mr. Hartsfield had a very loud voice, and he was always yelling. Not that he was mad or anything, but it was like he was always yelling, and he was always yelling at people down the hall. I don’t know if you know Sylvia [S.] Stottlemeyer.

ROSS-NAZZAL: We’re going to talk to her tomorrow.

WEST: She was like the lead in the front office, and she worked right outside his office. She was helping me getting acclimated to my new position. One day, I remember telling her, I said, “That man just scares me. All he does is yell.” Then—and I can’t believe she did this—he came down, he was getting coffee, I guess, and he was being loud. He was hollering at somebody down the hall. She goes, “Hank, you have got to stop yelling. You’re scaring small animals, and you’re scaring Tammy.” I could have just died. I could have just died. I was so embarrassed because you’re new and you’re like, “Oh, my God, I’m working with astronauts.” After a while, that newness wears off because they’re just like everybody else, right? I just was like, “Oh, my God, I can’t believe you did that to me.” He did tone it down some, I guess, when he thought about it. It was funny. That was embarrassing, but he was a good guy. Even after he retired, I still saw him all the time and I talked with him. It’s sad that he’s gone.

ROSS-NAZZAL: If I remember correctly, there was a delay in the launch for 51A. I think there was a one-day delay. Did that cause a big wrench in your plans, trying to handle all those guests, when you were at the Cape?

WEST: When that happens—it seemed like we did slip, but I don't remember how many days—part of my job is calling everybody. Everybody that's on that list, that's supposed to be on that bus, that's why I always had to make sure I had phone numbers or hotels. We had a recording that they could call into, and we updated it with the information. That was on their invitation, and it was also on their pass for the bus. They can always call that number, but most of the time I called to make sure they knew. A lot of it was family members, so the spouses would talk to their mom or dad, and then it was just spread by word of mouth. Most of the time, I had to call and say, "Okay, it's just a 24-hour delay. We're going to meet at the same place. We're going to stick to the same time," because there wasn't that much of a time difference, "and everything that we did today, we're going to redo it."

Or in some instances when we get scrubbed and we're already out there, we make that announcement once we know what the delay is. Like if it was for weather and they're saying, "Okay, a 24-hour turnaround." If they don't know, then we tell them, "Okay, make sure you call this number to check in. I'll be back at the visitor's center if you want to come out there, or you can call." We try to keep you as informed as we can. "Watch the news because," especially in Florida, "you have more of that information." That's part of my job, making sure that everybody knows. Sometimes, especially if they delay more than one day, people can't stay. Now they have car pass people that they want to move up to the bus and having to contact them and let them know, making sure they check in with me. A lot of times I would bring all the credentials

home, and I would go to hotels in the area and meet them. For security reasons, they don't know where we stay. Of course, immediate family knew because a parent or a sister would come and stay with kids while the spouse was having dinner with the crew or whatever. We didn't advertise where we were staying, because you don't want the media hanging out there and bothering them.

We had security meetings, so we had security there. The crew secretary stays there, and then the families all stay at this one location. I would meet them somewhere, or I'd go to their hotel and give them their credentials, whatever I could do to accommodate everybody. That was all part of my job, making sure everybody knew where they were supposed to be. You have those cut-offs. When I tell them, "We're pulling out of the bus, five o'clock in the morning. If you're not there, if it's 5:01 or 5:02, we will not wait for you." You can't because it takes you an hour to get there, and that's not even with a lot of heavy traffic.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, it's pretty isolated.

WEST: I do recall on 51A, Kiwanis Island Park is where we met. That's where we got on the bus, we'd check them off, make sure everybody has their credentials, and then we're ready to leave. I follow out in a van, so I follow the lead and the buses follow behind me. I remember we get on State Road 3, and one of the buses breaks down. The other buses that are okay, they go on, so I pull over because I've got to be with these people. One other bus stopped, and I can remember getting all these people off the bus and getting them on these other buses, standing, which they're not supposed to do. Our lap-sitters really weren't lap-sitters. They were trying to get another bus out there to us, but it wasn't going to reach us in time. I want to say it was like a

48-passenger [bus] moving all these people. Some got in my van, others got into other buses, standing or whatever—and we got a police escort so that we didn't miss it. At that time, we launched on Schwartz Road. You go down this dirt road and then you walk up a hill, and at the top of that hill is the bleachers. The buses all parked alongside this road.

We're all running because we're trying to get there and I'm trying to make sure everybody is okay and everybody makes it up this hill and gets situated. Everybody wants to buy first day covers. They have a little concession stand where you might get something to drink or a little snack. Not like you could get a burger or anything like that. They had a little mini gift shop if you wanted to buy a shirt or a hat or a patch. The envelopes were the big thing—everybody would fill out the envelopes, and then they're stamped the time of launch, and then they're mailed back to them or to whoever they addressed the envelope to. I remember that was a scramble in getting up that hill, because you're in the dirt. It wasn't planned, I guess, to be a viewing site.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What are your memories of that launch? Was it an emotional day for you?

WEST: Yes. In fact, each one that I saw, it was like, "Oh, my gosh," and I would be crying. Every one was just like the first time. I can remember just sitting there and watching. They always say you want to watch it, you don't want to try to film it. Even though you've got your camera up and you're taking pictures, you don't get the same effect. I believe that's true. It's exciting because you see it launch and you see it clear the tower, and then, all of a sudden, that's when you start feeling all the vibrations and the sound just hits you. It's already almost cleared the tower. I wasn't expecting that, so that was like, wow! You could see it but you didn't realize

there was that delay for the sound and the vibrations to hit you. That was a little bit of a surprise. It was cool because that's part of the experience. You really feel like, "Oh, my God, I saw the Shuttle launch." It was awesome, every one of them. One of our flights, I think we got down to, like, 30 seconds and they had to scrub. You're just really tense.

Of course, after *Challenger* [STS-51L], you always held your breath when they go "Press to MECO [Main Engine Cutoff];" you're just like, "Oh, my God." You don't even want to watch. For me, it took a while to not be so tense and nervous. You know these people, and you work with them really closely in the last six months. They're like a family member.

Ellison [S.] Onizuka and I, we became really good friends. He was a jokester, and the dirtier the joke, the better that it was. He was rather on the cheap side. I remember one time I had to send him out to Sunnyvale, and he wanted to stay at a cheap hotel—not even per diem. He wanted a cheap hotel, so I booked him at Super 8. He was like, "Yes, that will work." It was just a one-night thing. It was, I don't know, \$30 or something, and that's what he wanted, so I booked it. He came back. He came into my office and he said, "If I ever tell you 'cheap' again, make sure it's at least per diem. It was right next to the freeway, and my neighbors changed every hour."

We were always cracking jokes, and he was friends with Mr. [George W.S.] Abbey. He had said other things about this hotel, and apparently, he told Mr. Abbey. When we went to Hawaii for his memorial, I was standing on the balcony in Charlie Bolden's suite. It was me and Charlie and his wife, Jackie, and Mr. Abbey standing out there. We're just thinking. Mr. Abbey never talked to me, never smiled. He looked at me, and he goes, "So, you know how to find cheap hotels?" I went, "Excuse me?" He just laughed, and that was my whole conversation with him just about, but Ellison obviously had to tell him.

We were always swapping jokes and recipes. He always thought he could barbecue. He could make fajitas, because we had this big fajita fest thing for the longest time, and he was one of the cooks out there. He was always bragging about it. I brought in some that my dad had made and he was like, “Well, that’s not too bad, but don’t give it to anybody else.” I’m still friends with Lorna [Onizuka] to this day, too. She is just as crazy as he was. She’s just so funny, and I think they were really good match. Personality-wise, they were along the same [line]. He was like the class clown. He was just very sweet and just loved telling jokes—dirty jokes, I won’t repeat—he was a lot of fun.

That was tough, being here for *Challenger*. You just don’t expect it. You always know that there’s a risk, but it’s always in the back of your mind. You never really think about it. Each time, the night before launch, we have a contingency briefing and we go over exactly what’s going to happen if they have to abort after they launch, if they have to land at a TAL [Trans Atlantic Abort Landing] site, or for anything. We have these guidelines in place, and we go over them with security. We know exactly what we had to do, who we have to pull out of the crowd, and who’s going where. Obviously, the spouses, they all go to crew quarters, but family members, you pull them out of the stands, you put them on a bus, and you take them over to the auditorium. You have all these rules. Everybody else, we’d get them back on the buses and take them back, and then they go to the auditorium at the visitor’s center until you get briefed. Of course, I wasn’t there for 51L, I was here, but that was part of your training. You have to know what to do for whatever happens. That’s not always fun, but I’m glad that that policy is in place because I imagine when it happened with Maureen Smith, I knew that secretary, I could just only imagine how it was. We had never experienced it before. Fortunately, I never had to experience that.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you know the rest of the crew on *Challenger* very well?

WEST: Mike [Michael J.] Smith's CACO [Casualty Assistance Calls] Officer was Dick [Richard N.] Richards, and I worked for Dick Richards. I didn't know him all that well, but afterwards, I got really close with his family. In fact, I'm still close with Jane. We still talk every once in a while, every few months or so, or [when] she's coming into town. I got to work with them in all the activities. The CACO officer steps in and they get everything in order—the burial, the insurance. They do everything to help out, whatever the family needs. I was able to get close to them.

I didn't really know Dick [Francis R.] Scobee very well. Judy [Judith A. Resnik], I never worked directly for Judy, either. I knew her, and I would say hi or something in the hallway, and I knew she played the piano. I'd heard her play the piano before. She seemed to be very—"driven" is not the right word—focused on what she had to do, just like everyone else. She could be very funny, too. She could be really easygoing and not real stuffy. Well, there are some that are stuffy, but she wasn't standoffish. You had a feeling you could approach her if you needed to, because there's some people that are kind of standoffish—and maybe they don't mean to be, but you're always kind of hesitant to have to ask them anything. It's usually fine. I didn't know her too well.

Another story with Judy, my mother worked out here before I did, and she actually did a rotation in the Astronaut Office right before I got hired. She worked for Judy, and my mother plays the piano as well. That's how I was able to hear [about her]. My mother had a friendship with her. She was only in the office, I think, six months on her rotation, but she did support her.

They had that friendship because they both played the piano. I knew a little bit that way, but I never really interacted a whole lot with her. My mother, she rotated out and she went to Building 45, I think. At that same time, I had applied. I had applied to NASA right out of high school, and I didn't get accepted. I filled out the application again, I came in and did a test, and then I got hired. I was placed in the Astronaut Office, so it was kind of a coincidence that my mother was there and my father worked out here as well.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Where did he work?

WEST: My father's work was procurement. He worked out here until he retired. He was here about 30 years, I guess? He retired. He started out in communications, back in the sixties, and then eventually worked his way into procurement. He was a manager in the procurement office over in Building 45.

WRIGHT: What's his last name?

WEST: Gonzalez, Johnny Gonzalez. You know him?

WRIGHT: I've heard the name. I don't know him, but we've seen the name, yes.

WEST: He worked out here, and my mother had worked out here. I think my mother was only here about 10 years, and she left and went and worked for an attorney. Then I came out here. My daughter works for SAIC [Science Applications International Corporation], so she's been out

here, affiliated with NASA for about 10 years now, I guess. My youngest daughter is adamant that she's not going to work for NASA. My brother, when he was in college, he did a co-op stint through here, too. My sister never did, but it was just funny that all of us were here at some point. My dad was here during *Challenger*.

I was sitting in the chief's office; I was in Captain Young's office with a couple of other folks and [Robert F.] Overmyer. We were watching, and we were joking around. I made some wisecrack about Onizuka I don't recall, but we were laughing, I can remember, and then the launch. I remember walking out, and I was standing down the hall in front of the conference room where a lot of the other people were. Everybody is moving around and doing things.

I can remember Bob Overmyer stepping up. He was the lead person. He was telling people what to do, going over and locking the offices, because sadly, people came in and were stealing things out of their office. At that time, anybody could come up to that floor to watch the launch because we usually had it on in the conference room. I can remember Overmyer coming out and just barking all these orders to get security up here, get the phones turned off, all of these things. We had policies in place. I remember security getting up there and locking the doors. People were in there, taking anything that had their signature on it. I just couldn't believe it. You're just shocked. Finally, security got there and had locked the doors.

It was just a crazy time, and that's why you have the glass doors in front of the elevators. That was because of what happened, and then from that time forward, no one else other than the office people were allowed on the floor during launches. The guards would sit out there. You had to be on a list, and you had to check in for the longest time. You just couldn't believe it. You were just in shock. The phones were all going crazy, and they finally shut down all the phones.

We had to go through the list and recall everybody that was on travel. Everybody had a list. Before each launch, you had to turn in a list of where your people were and how to reach them, because some of them were on travel for training for their flights or a speaking engagement, vacation, anything. You always had this who's where list that you had to turn in that listed where everybody was because we had to account for everybody. Then we started making phone calls to everybody that was out of town, telling them you have to get home. That was tough.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It must have been a tough time.

WEST: For months, all we did was answer mail. They turned the phones back on, but I don't think they turned them on fully. I think they turned on a couple lines. We would get Xerox boxes full of mail every day, people writing in theories on what happened, you always have these unstable people giving you their theories about aliens. Some of them were kind of funny. The majority, though, were all condolence letters. Captain Young had made this card that he signed, thanking them, so every person that wrote in, that was our job for months, we had to respond. We would do labels and mail out one of those cards to everybody that came in. We're talking thousands, 50,000 letters. For the longest time, that's really all we did.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you have a chance to work with any of the other women? You must have worked with Rhea in some capacity, working with Hoot.

WEST: I briefly worked with her. I was never her direct secretary, but a lot of times in that office, even though you didn't directly support that person, everybody did whatever. Somebody else wasn't available to help them, they would come to me or to one of the other secretaries. I never worked one of her flights. I really didn't get real close to her. Just enough where we would talk. I would go to their house, and I would baby-sit, but nothing really more than that. I had my family, too, so I didn't get to do a lot of the activities.

I never worked for Kathy [Kathryn D.] Sullivan. I knew her because at one point, I rented from her for a brief time when my husband, daughter, and I, we were moving, and she actually had a condo over here on El Dorado [Boulevard] that she rented out. The timing was just right, so I lived there I think almost a year by the time we got everything figured out. We never socialized or anything like that. She always seemed to be very friendly. Every now and then when they come back for, like, Mr. Coats' retirement I think was the last time I saw her, I talked to her briefly. Just to see how she was doing, what was going on. Nothing really more than that.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You became better friends with some of the guys than the women in the office.

WEST: Yes, there was more of them. There was just more of them at that time. I worked closely with Shannon [W. Lucid] when she was training for her Mir flight. I worked with her husband and her son quite a bit because she would go for months at a time to Russia to train. I would work with them, getting their passports together, getting all their visa applications done and getting it submitted because we used TTI [TechTrans International] at the time, making all the arrangements to get them over there. Of course, they stayed at Star City. They have these

little, I don't know if they were cabins, like a duplex, I guess. I worked with her, and she's pretty funny, too. She's got a good sense of humor. I liked working with her.

In fact Anna and Marsha [S.] Ivins, they came to my baby shower for my second daughter. I remember Shannon always got my girls books. She was really big on that. I think I still have the books. She always brought books, and Marsha Ivins got my daughter a miniature astronaut, you know the orange suit? I got a jogging suit that had the NASA patch on it. Anna had gotten me this cute little white, it wasn't a onesie, it was a top and it had a little pink bow on it. On the bottom was like a cloth diaper, and it had "Future Astronaut" in pink written on the butt. We interacted with that. I never worked any of Shannon's flights, but just talking to her about getting her husband and son to Russia. I don't recall her daughters ever going over there. I just remember her son. He's the youngest. I know her husband went for the launch because she launched over there. That was so long ago, too.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I guess that was, wasn't it?

WEST: Something will probably pop in my head midnight tonight, I might remember.

WRIGHT: You can call our office. We're not there.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Or you can just send an email, that's fine. I'm going to ask Rebecca if she has any questions for you.

WRIGHT: Since you talked about, just a minute ago, the little gifts that you got at the baby shower and the picture that you showed us earlier with Anna's mom holding Kristin, she's got a little flight suit on. Was that a gift? Do you know where they had those made?

WEST: I believe she had that made. Out at Ellington, the PE [Personal Equipment] Office out there, they're the ones that do the flight suits for everyone. I'm not sure what company they use, but that's who they go through. I think that's where she had this one made. Now you can go to the gift shops and get them, but back then I believe she had someone make that and had the patches put on. I want to say she might have gone through the PE office to do that. I just don't remember.

WRIGHT: I'm just curious because I knew they were a unique item back then. Like you said, they are commonplace now. About the crew secretaries, you mentioned that once you were assigned with that crew, you were with that crew until?

WEST: Until after landing.

WRIGHT: How quick were you assigned to another one? Was it just continuous? Were you ever assigned to more than one at a time?

WEST: Yes. My next flight was 61C, which was supposed to have launched in December of '85. Fifty-One-A landed in November of '84, then I immediately got assigned to that flight, so I

worked that flight. That one was delayed a lot. I had that flight, then there was *Challenger*, and then there was [STS]-61H?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Were you working that, with Mike Coats and Anna?

WEST: No, Jon [A.] McBride was the commander. It went away after *Challenger*, but I had that flight. I was working 61C, trying to launch in December, and we ended up launching in January. Then I would have had the next flight after *Challenger*, but after *Challenger* that flight went away. Even the number, the whole mission went away. It became [STS]-35. Vance [D.] Brand ended up commanding that one with Jeff [Jeffrey A.] Hoffman and Mike [John M.] Lounge and [Robert A. R.] Parker, and the payload specialists. That was the ASTRO-1 mission, so that one didn't come out until 1990. There was another secretary that started that flight. She left the office, and then I had to step in. That one was a challenge because I stepped in like a month before launch. When you work with all these guests for so long, you start knowing their names and you recognize the names, and when cards come in, you know exactly what crewmember invited them.

One of the things I did as a crew secretary after my first flight was I came up with a checklist of everything that we need to do. The RSVP cards, they used to be just the one color. I said, "Why can't we assign a color to each different crewmember, so when a card came in, you can say, "Okay, this one is yellow. I know it's the pilot," or whoever. I did implement that, and we started doing that. That made it a lot easier, because back then the computers were just starting to get initiated into us. I think it was '85, '86 whenever we got the Xerox Star computer, I don't know if you remember that. A lot of this was all done on typewriter, and that's

challenging in itself. We did make those changes, making it color-coded. Each crewmember was assigned a certain color, like the commander is red, based on their position on the flight. We try to coordinate the colors to that. Then it got to be, “Well, I don’t like that color.” It didn’t matter. I said, “Okay, these are your choices. What color do you want?”

That made it a lot easier when the cards started coming, because you’d get hundreds of cards in at a time. You could just separate them by color and you knew exactly which list to go to. When you’re stepping into one a month before launch and I’m trying to read through and just look through the guest list for each crewmember and trying to recognize the names and understand whose family member, that type of thing. That was interesting.

WRIGHT: The crew secretaries, were you guys like a little tight-knit family too, to support each other? Like you said, there weren’t very many of you when you first started. Traded ideas?

WEST: We did. My first flight, another secretary went with me and Sylvia went with me, which was policy for a first-time crew secretary. They always took one secretary that had been there before, and then Sylvia, sometimes she would come, sometimes she wouldn’t, because she wasn’t a crew secretary at that point. She was more in the management role. They did always do that, so that way you don’t get lost. You kind of know where you need to go and how to get to these different points and how to get to the visitor’s center, especially if you’d never been there before. I had never been to that area before. That was a policy that was in place, which was really good because she showed you the roads you have to take, where you have to be. We would always go one extra day early. We tried to—it depended on the crew’s schedule—just so that we could get acclimated to the area. We know how to get from the airport, to get to the

hotel, how to get from the hotel to the bus place, how to get to the crew quarters, how to get to the visitor's center, because all your guests are going to be calling and saying, "Well, I'm staying at Howard Johnson's on A1-A, how do I get to Kiwanis Island?" You have to know the roads. Fortunately, it is very simple, it's just very main roads. It's easy to do, but you got to know.

WRIGHT: You had no cell phones and no Google Maps, did you?

WEST: Nope. We did have a cell phone that a crew secretary got that is like this big [demonstrates] and it probably weighed 5 pounds, that we used for emergencies if we needed to. You had to carry that thing around in your purse. It was very heavy. One time, I was standing in Ron Jon's [Surf Shop], and I decided I was going to make a call. I called my house, checked on my husband and my kids. That was interesting. We've come a long way from that to something like this. [Shows phone.]

ROSS-NAZZAL: Big change.

WRIGHT: What an interesting opportunity set that you had.

WEST: I have been so fortunate because everybody that I worked with has been great. I really didn't have any problems with anyone, and I just loved my job. I loved what I did. I passed over other opportunities to move forward. But, if you really like your job and you like coming in to work every day and doing what you're doing, is it going to be worth a few more dollars in your paycheck to go somewhere else? Of course it is going to be completely different because you're

unique in that office. You have all these rules that apply to everybody, but then you're unique, so they don't really apply to you. You have your own set. I never felt the need to want to move on because I did enjoy it. I moved up through there.

I became the division secretary after a period of time, and I stayed there. STS-88 was my last launch that I worked. Bob [Robert D.] Cabana was the commander. He was also the chief of the office, and he specifically told me I had to be his crew secretary because I had worked another one of his flights. Normally, when you became the division secretary, you couldn't do a crew secretary job because it was just too time-consuming. He was the chief, and when he got assigned to that, he told me, "You know you're going to have to be my crew secretary, right?" I said, "Yes, I'm ready." That was good.

Dave Walker started the Dog Crew. I don't know if you're familiar with that. It was one of his flights after STS-30—I think it was [STS-53]. For whatever reason, they became known as the Dog Crew. They went out and bought an old station wagon, painted it white and then they put a tail on it, like on the Shuttle, and they put a PA system in it. That was their crew car. They put their patch on the side, it was the dog crew. Cabana was part of that.

On STS-88, Cabana said, "You know we got to be the Dog Crew," so we were all trying to come up with dog names. He was Mighty Dog, and they were trying to think well, what is going to be mine because it's not going to be—you know. Another secretary, who wasn't very well liked, had a very derogative name behind her back, as part of the dog secretary. I became Rovaya, and I can't recall what the meaning is. They told me, and I said, "Well, I hope that you mean this as nice," because I didn't know Russian. They said, "Oh, no, it was good." We all had these dog names. I remember making message boards, and I put their dog names on there.

Whenever they had messages, I would hang them. They were going to name Nancy Currie, she became Laika, I think. She would always joke because that was the name of the dog that died.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's what I was just thinking. Isn't that the dog who died in Sputnik [2]?

WRIGHT: They didn't know their history.

WEST: That was funny. I don't know if I have them in my office or not, but I have a picture. They would drive around, too, and they would bark at people on the PA system. Before they built that building over at Rocket Park, there was a really nice picture of them all standing in front of their dog car. That stayed around for a while. I think Rick [Frederick W.] Sturckow kept it. He was the pilot. He was Devil Dog. I don't know if he still has it. Of course, he's been retired for several years, but he actually had it. I don't know if he still had it out at the farm or not. Of course, we don't have dog crews anymore, but that was really funny.

WRIGHT: Must have had a wide variety of personalities that you worked with.

WEST: I had Jim [James H.] Newman. He could be difficult at times, but he's just so smart. He's computer-savvy. I can remember when they assigned me as that crew secretary, we had just started this new web-based program that we did all the guest things in. I looked at him and I said, "I will be more than happy to give you a copy of the program, the spreadsheets, and you do whatever you want to it, but don't touch what's in the system." I just used to laugh at him because I told him, "You intimidate me." Now, we're good friends. We chat a lot, but at the

beginning, he really intimidated me and finally I told him. He was always wanting to go in and tweak things, and it was like, no, you can't. I would just say, "I will make copies of all the spreadsheets for all these different things that I'm working in, and you can do whatever you want with it, however you want to organize it to meet your needs, but this is how I have to work with it. Please don't change anything." We ended up working well together.

One of the older astronauts had a pretty rough image and none of the secretaries wanted to work for him. I had no problem with him. He was always very nice to me, no problems whatsoever. Even when I wasn't his secretary anymore, I still did his work. He would always come back to me and ask me to do things. He was a military guy, so everything had to be this, this, and this. I don't care what NASA policy says. You would never win, so you always did it the way he wanted to do it, and everybody just accepted it. There were a lot of folks that were that way. That made me feel really special and proud to be there because they felt like I could do whatever they ask and I could do it in a timely manner. The majority of the time, it's pretty close to being error-free. It was a good time to be there.

WRIGHT: To build a career, yes.

WEST: Tammy [Tamara E.] Jernigan, I worked for her. I think she's probably the one I got the closest to. I got to know her family really well. I helped her out, and I did a lot of personal things for her. I would go to her house frequently. When her niece would stay with her, they would come over to our house and hang out. She was probably the closest person. I worked the STS-80 flight with her, but even otherwise, she would always come to me to do things for her.

That just always made me feel really, really good about it, about being there, because I feel like I was appreciated. I got awards, and I got a Snoopy.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I was going to say, I noticed your Silver Snoopy.

WEST: Leroy Chiao, I worked STS-65, and after that flight, he nominated me for one. Carl [E.] Walz and Bob Cabana were the ones that actually presented it to me. That was back in '95, and this is my most treasured. All the other awards, they're nice, but this is the one that means the most to me because it's not given freely. It's a little more loosely now, but back then, it wasn't an easy job to get one—especially for a secretary. There had only been one or two other secretaries that had ever received one since it started. I have my certificate hanging in my office, I have it framed, and I wear it quite frequently.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It's quite a compliment.

WEST: Once I left the Astronaut Office, I worked for Mark [K.] Craig for a very short time, up on the ninth floor, and then *Columbia* [STS-107] happened. I went back to FCOD [Flight Crew Operations Directorate] during all that process, because I knew all of those people. I knew all the formers and was helping when they were doing the memorial service out here. I worked all of that, coordinating, getting all the formers, getting all the information to them. I knew who the formers were, and I could tell them where they needed to sit.

Then, I got assigned to the Return to Flight, the task group, so I was off-site with the Apollo Building. It's no longer there. I think it's Five Guys now, across the street. For two

years, I worked the Return to Flight task group. There were a lot of former astronauts on that board: General [Thomas P.] Stafford, Dick [Richard O.] Covey, Susan [J.] Helms. There was quite a few people. I worked that, and I got to learn a lot of interesting things about the SRBs [Solid Rocket Boosters] that I didn't know. I've since forgotten, but that was interesting and it was a challenge in and of itself because you knew these people. It was just tough, and then I came back from that. I came back to FCOD and Dr. [Ellen] Ochoa was the deputy and Ken [Kenneth D.] Bowersox was the director. I worked for Dr. Ochoa. She got moved up here, and then I got moved up here. Interesting, I worked her very first crew, so we go [way] back. I remember when she was hired.

ROSS-NAZZAL: How funny. She was hired in '90, right?

WEST: Yes, the early nineties, something like that. Somehow I've managed to get in with everybody at some point. Mr. Coats, the funny story about him is he and Bryan [D.] O'Connor, I would always get them confused because I thought they looked so much alike. One time, they actually sat [together] in an office; there was four members to an office. I remember I had this photo that they wanted all the Navy astronauts to sign, and I walked in there and I handed it to Bryan O'Connor, asking him to sign it. He goes, "But I'm not in this picture." I said, "Yes, you are," and I pointed to Mr. Coats. He goes, "Nope, that's not me." If you look at them side by side, I can tell them apart, but for whatever reason, I don't know if it was the style of the hair and the color—because he was Marine and Coats is Navy.

WRIGHT: They're tall and they walk like a military guy, it's one of those things.

WEST: Yes. Another one I got confused was Joe [Joseph R.] Tanner and Steve [Steven L.] Smith. Again, they don't look anything alike, but I would always call them by the wrong names, and then it became a running joke. So then they started calling me "Beth," for Beth [Elizabeth T.] Turner. I would call Joe, Steve, and call Steve, Joe. One day I came into my office and Steve had decorated my office with all of these pictures, and they put a picture of him, of Steve Smith, and then Joe Tanner. He had a sign on it that says, "I'm Steve, not Joe," and then he put a picture of Joe and another one of Steve, and he said, "I'm Joe, not Steve," and they had it all over my desk. Even to this day, when I see Steve, I always call him Joe. He always calls me Beth.

Willie [William C.] McCool, we used to joke around like that, too. I always thought he looked like Kevin Bacon. We started joking, and one time, he called me "Cindy." I said, "Cindy?" He goes, "Yes, Cindy Crawford." I said, "Oh, my God, you need glasses." We would joke around. I would call him Kevin, and he would call me Cindy. He was a good sport about that. Mike Foale, I like Mike [C. Michael] Foale and Rhonda, they're great. I always called him "Sir Michael," even though he hasn't been knighted, but he has one of those British Orders. I forgot what it's called. He has something, but he's not knighted. I always called him Sir Michael. He was good. I keep digressing, I'm sorry. All these things just keep floating in, but I know I need to get back to my desk soon.

ROSS-NAZZAL: No, I think it's fascinating. It's noon, so we won't keep you. I just wondered if you wanted to look through your notes, if there was something that maybe we didn't cover and you had a chance to jot down. I hate for you to waste your efforts.

WEST: I think we pretty much talked about all of that. I went over the duties, working, getting all their stuff together.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What's great is Anna has let me go through her records, and actually, while you were talking about it, I was remembering because I had seen the letter that you sent to the families and the postcards. She had all the yellow postcards that came back. She kept them.

WEST: All the RSVP cards?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, so I thought how interesting; I remember seeing those.

WEST: Yes, I wish I had the opportunity to work more with the first six, but I just wasn't in the position to, other than working with Anna on her flight. The one about [STS]-51G with Shannon Lucid and the Prince [Sultan Salman Abdulaziz Al-Saud], that was interesting time. A funny story I remember about that is, well, he was very protected while he was here. I wouldn't say you weren't allowed, but there was protocol that you had to follow, so I really didn't get to interact with him. I wasn't assigned to that flight anyway, but I would see him in the hallways, and I would say hi or something. He was very friendly, always very nice, but he was a prince. I just didn't interact with him because I didn't think it was proper. Not that he said, "Don't talk to me," kind of thing.

After that flight, they always did a post-flight landing party, and we were at that barbecue place right across from Ellington, Pe-Te's. They had a lot of their parties there. They would get up, and they would each make a little speech. They would say something funny. I can

remember them talking—I think the prince was talking about the diversity of the crew, and he was saying how everybody is from different places, and “I’m from Saudi Arabia, and then you’ve got Shannon here from Oklahoma.” He just made it sound like Oklahoma was its own little country, and everybody got a big laugh out of that. That was really funny, and I know I didn’t say word for word how he said it, but that was the punch line to the whole joke, was about all the diversity from all the different countries and Oklahoma.

WRIGHT: That was nice, that he even made recognition to the females on the crew.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, especially given the society he was from.

WEST: On *Challenger*, I didn’t really interact too much with Christa [McAuliffe]. I did with Barbara [R.] Morgan more so. She was the backup there. I did a few things, but I didn’t really interact with them. I was working the 61C crew, which was right before that one. When we went down in December for our first launch attempt, I remember going into crew quarters one night. After I worked the guest center, I would always go over to crew quarters, check in with the crew, see if there’s anything they need. The 51L crew were there for their TCDT, so they were all standing there and they were watching *2001: A Space Odyssey*. I remember seeing them, and I took pictures. I had a bunch of pictures that I took of them, my crew and that crew, we were just all hanging out in the common area. I had all these pictures with the same camera, and then, of course, we didn’t launch, so we came back and then we tried again in January. I had taken my film to be developed, and after *Challenger* happened, right before then I had taken my film, and they were all stolen. Or “lost” is what Eckerd’s said. I had three rolls of film that had the 51L

crew on them, relaxing in crew quarters, just laughing and joking around. Of course, all the ones I had from my crew, 61C, they were just gone. That was really unfortunate because I had a lot of good shots on that camera. That was a hard time.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What a great career for you.

WEST: Yes, now I've been up here almost seven years, I think, up here. It was good to work with Mr. Coats again. He's such a sweet man, and then, of course, with Ellen, and then I had a brief stint with Steve [Stephen J.] Altemus.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, he was here a very short time.

WEST: Six months or so? I knew who he was but I never really interacted with him before, so I've seen a lot more interaction with senior staff being up here. He was a character. I don't know where he got his energy from. One day I asked him, I said, "How did Dianne ever keep up with you?" I don't know if you know Dianne [N.] Millner, she's a little older. I was like, "I don't know how she did it." Not that I'm young or anything, but I could never keep up with him. He just laughed, he said, "She couldn't." Now, I work with Kirk [A. Shireman]. I knew his name but I had never worked with him before, so we're still getting used to each other, but he's such a nice person as well. I have just been really, really fortunate throughout my whole NASA career. I've been here 32 years, going to retire in 2.5 more years.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Are you?

WEST: Yes.

WRIGHT: You have to, to start those pictures.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's right, yes, and find all your records.

WEST: All the boxes. I have one of those big tubs, those Rubbermaid tubs, that I had thrown everything in, newspapers from *Challenger* and everything in it. I know it's up in the attic. I need to go through all my stuff, which is a job.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I understand. That is a job. Thank you so much for spending some time with us today. We sure appreciate it.

WEST: I hope I gave you something.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, it was wonderful.

[End of interview]