

# JOHNSON SPACE CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

## EDITED ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

LOUIS A. PARKER  
INTERVIEWED BY REBECCA WRIGHT  
HOUSTON, TEXAS – DECEMBER 6, 2011

WRIGHT: Today is December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011. This oral history interview is being conducted with Louis Parker in Houston, Texas for the NASA Johnson Space Center [JSC] Oral History Project. The interviewer is Rebecca Wright, assisted by Jennifer Ross-Nazzal. Mr. Parker serves as a Public Affairs Specialist, the JSC Exhibits Manager, and Outreach Lead for the Office of Communications and Public Affairs [PAO]. He begins the interview by sharing information about the quarter-scale space shuttle test article.

PARKER: We are to the point where the [final] locations of the [space shuttle] orbiters have all been pretty much solidified, so we thought that we might want to recall that [quarter-scale model]. Actually, before the announcements for the orbiter locations were made, I kind of put the guys up there on notice to say we might be recalling this [artifact], so they could start looking at what the cost would be to take it out of the building.

I don't know if you know, but it's at the Calgary International Airport [Alberta, Canada]. They have a science center there, called SpacePort. It's an educational science center for kids, but it's adjacent to one of the terminals at the airport. Back when they were building it, they came to us and wanted something big to put in it, and the orbiter model was available. They said, "Oh my gosh, we'll take it." NASA said, "Go ahead and loan it to them. We're not going to use it around here."

They literally paid for it to go to Canada, which, I think at the time was \$35,000 transported, because it's oversized and it had to have a lead vehicle for the journey there. Then they had to figure out how to suspend it from the ceiling. For that, they actually talked with a couple of engineers from down here. They flew them up to Canada to help them get the model orchestrated into this facility. Then they built the walls behind it. To take it out of the building, they're going to have to take a wall out. Then it is going to have to be transported to the Smithsonian [Institution]. Who knows what that will cost.

The way loan agreements are set up—our loan agreement say that the organizations that get the item from NASA pays all the costs. We could exercise that and we most likely will exercise the take-down, take-out cost. The transportation costs,—I don't know. If the Smithsonian wants it, they may negotiate. The Smithsonian, like everybody else, has no transportation money, but they have always wanted this particular Shuttle Program artifact, they do want the [quarter-scale] orbiter back. They do want it in the national collection.

We have the mated external tank and SRBs [solid rocket boosters] that go with the model here in [JSC] Building 413. The Smithsonian wants the whole thing, and they want it at the [Steven F.] Udvar-Hazy Center [Washington, DC] to go with [Space Shuttle] *Discovery*. Of course, they are saying that they don't have the money to ship it, but don't want that to get away. Long story.

We're going to talk to them again. We're supposed to talk to them this afternoon, just how we're going to orchestrate releasing that the model, and then having it picked up by the Smithsonian. It's got to go through this artifact screening system that's been set up for shuttle artifacts through GSA [Government Services Administration]. The Smithsonian, if they acquire it, the accountability, then what they would do is turn that around and loan it back to this facility,

but it would be a Smithsonian item instead of a GSA item. Much like the Saturn V [rocket] is a Smithsonian item, on loan to us [JSC] from the Smithsonian.

WRIGHT: While we're talking about the Smithsonian, would you like to talk more about how you work with the Smithsonian, and how these artifacts were loaned?

PARKER: My first responsibility when I came to work here back in 1972, '73 was to work specifically with the Smithsonian to find homes for, back then, the old Apollo, Gemini, and Mercury artifacts that were still kind of floating around. The original artifact system that was set up by the agency, to the best of my knowledge, was set up by [Charles A.] Chuck Biggs. He started the filing system. He even designed the form that they used back then, which was a JSC Form 2275. The numbering system was a numbering system that he came up with, which was HOU and the number, and it started at 150. We used that system. The Smithsonian adopted it. He got me ingrained in all of that, and I kind of cut my teeth on space program activities by virtue of the artifacts that were residual of the Apollo program.

Back in those days, I worked with one of the curators at the Smithsonian, a guy by the name of Louis R. Purnell, who was a member of the Tuskegee Airmen. He was one of the original members of that group of aviators. As a matter of fact, his picture is with the group displayed at the Smithsonian. Heck of a nice guy. Great guy. The interesting thing about him—I worked with Lou for years and years before I finally met him. I didn't realize it, that the guy was black. He had that Virginia accent, so I just thought he was an Easterner. The other thing is he had turquoise-colored eyes. Just a great guy.

Lou and I got to know one another almost intimately over the phone, in trying to find locations for things like Apollo command module boiler plates, all of the Apollo parachutes that were used on all the flights, space suits. You name it. We were trying to find places for these.

Back then, the [National] Air and Space Museum was run by a gentleman by the name of [Frederick C.] Fred Durant [III]. He didn't want anything to *not* come to the Smithsonian. He wanted everything. It didn't matter what it was. Nuts and bolts. You name it. If we offered it, they wanted it. Now, whether or not they would actually receive it in the collection at their facility up in Washington [D.C.], that was another thing. What we wound up doing back then, they would accept accountability, but then we would find—I would find, Lou would find—a home for it, a museum that would accept it. We would ship it to that museum, but the Smithsonian would accept accountability of it and issue the loan agreement to that museum. I did that for probably the first four, five, six years that I worked with Chuck, before I kind of jumped over to the [PAO] News side for a little while, and then jumped back. When I jumped back, I was back in the middle of the artifacts system again, but other things came along. As they've come and gone, I've really pretty much kept up with the Smithsonian people; like I'm now working with people like Valerie Neal and Allen Needell and those folks to talk about all this shuttle hardware that's become available through the system.

WRIGHT: Do you find a lot of difference of how they're dealing with the [closing of the] shuttle program?

PARKER: Yes. Obviously, they're more selective. They don't have the storage space that they once did. They still have the storage facilities up in Silver Hill, Maryland. They've got several

warehouses there. If you ever have a chance to go tour those, they've got aircraft all over the place. That's where they have their space suit morgue, if you will. It's a climate-controlled refrigeration vault; when you go into it, literally it looks like you are walking into a morgue, because they have these space suits on these racks that look like bodies that are lying in state. That's where they're trying to maintain some of the space suits. Amanda Young, who was one of the curators that worked there, did a project where she received government grant money to do a study on the effects of space suits after being displayed compared to not displaying—UV [ultra violet light] effects, sunlight effects, and all that. Her conclusion was that the space suits were being deteriorated by putting them on display. Her concern was that, in a hundred years, the inside of the space suit that Neil [A.] Armstrong wore to the Moon, would be degraded so much it would be crumbling. They were trying to take actions to make sure that none of that would happen.

Even now, some of the space suits that are displayed, some of the lunar space suits that are displayed in there—there are few of them. There are not that many at museums. We have one at Space Center Houston, the one that [Charles P.] Pete Conrad wore. The Smithsonian wanted to have that one recalled because they didn't want it to deteriorate. I kind of fought them on that and they said if we would at least adhere to the guidelines that they had on how to display a space suit, we could keep it.

Basically, what that means is that there's a special kind of stainless steel armature that has to be made, that the suit actually goes on. When Space Center Houston was being built, and as they were buying things and procuring the right kinds of hardware to display suits, they literally went out and bought the armatures that met the Smithsonian specifications. Back then, those armatures were two, three thousand dollars a piece. Instead of having the helmet

connected to the suit, they wanted to make sure that the helmet was not connected, or the gloves were not connected, so that ventilation could go through, and of course certain kind of lights had to be used. That supposedly will help deter any of the deterioration that might go on, because there are lots of plastics and rubbers inside in the glove area. Over time, these get real hard and start to crinkle. I think Amanda even did some tests on some, as far as immersing in certain kinds of liquids, to keep the suppleness. She did a lot of things.

WRIGHT: Earlier you mentioned dealing with some of the legal issues associated with loaning artifacts. How did that also work into your job, and with the Smithsonian? Do you get contacted [by the NASA Office of Inspector General [IG]] when artifacts show up in collections or auctions?

PARKER: Here, lately, with the advent of all these online [sales] and all these auctions that come about we will get kind of unsolicited notes and letters from people saying that they have acquired a certain piece of what they think is a space object, space hardware, and are wanting us to authenticate what it is. Our standard response is, "We don't authenticate" certain things. If it is hardware that has a traceable part number, serial number, that we think we may still have records of, then we might do that.

A lot of the things that come to us, they wind up being early training, early prototype pieces, that literally may have been thrown in the dumpster. Somebody just picks it up and just walks off with it. You may recall that there was an issue with a piece of flag material that appeared on an auction. Somebody out in California had something that they were thinking about buying. Literally, it was a piece of scrap fabric that purportedly came from the fabric that

was made by our tech services people for the flag that went on Apollo 11 to the Moon. What's interesting about it, the gentleman who picked it up was a NASA employee. Apparently he picked that up and kept it, and then somehow or another, it got through somewhere, and it was being reported as, this is the fabric from the Moon flag that Neil Armstrong [left on the Moon.] It may have been an IG person that called me and said, "Is there any value to this?" Or it may have been a reporter, now that I think about it. I said, "I don't think there's any value at all." That would be like going to ILC [Dover, Delaware], the people that make the space suits and looking in their dumpster, getting a piece of Beta cloth and saying, "This was probably made from the suits that the guys..." Does that make it worth anything?

I said, "I don't think it's worth a plugged nickel." If somebody pays \$5 for it, that's \$5 more than I would ever pay for it. I kind of squashed it, but I think there was a story that came out, and it got a little bit of play. I may have been quoted as saying that I didn't think it was really worth anything as a piece of scrap, because there's lots of scrap all over the place.

It's things like that that we hear about. There's a guy—I called him the consummate scrounger, because that guy could find hardware anywhere, just about anyplace—he would call me up sometimes, saying, "Have you seen the latest Christie's [Inc.] auction book? There are space suit pieces. How did they get that? How did this person get those?" He would always ask me the question. I always said that sometimes stuff kind of falls through. It goes through the excess system, it gets screened, and no one catches it. Lo and behold, John Q. Public finds it and goes, "My gosh, there's a piece of NASA whatever; I'm going to get it."

It comes up, I would say, more often than not that the pieces that people get, like I said, are mostly training prototypes or throwaways, things of that sort. The value of it is probably more to maybe a person who worked on it than it would be to somebody who's not.

WRIGHT: You were telling us that you probably have maybe 14 working days left [before you retire]. You've told me that it was by chance that you ended up out here [at JSC] at all. Do you want to tell us the story, how you chose NASA?

PARKER: My wife and I had been married just a few months. We both knew that we wanted to co-op somewhere. She was an education major, so she wanted to be a co-op at a school. Actually, I wanted to work at a television or a radio station. Back in those days, in Houston, the only TV stations were [channels] 2, 11, and 13. Channel 8 was run by U of H [University of Houston], which is where I went to school. Channel 39 was one of the newer UHF channels. Remember you used to have those little circular antennae? You had to have those because you couldn't pick up the station, because it wasn't a VHF station.

Channel 39, back in those days, had workshops for all of the University of Houston communication majors, which I was. We would put on programs for Saturday morning, where the people from the writing classes would do the writing of the program, the people from the camera classes would run the cameras, the audio people would do that, and the director class people would direct, and all that. That's how I worked at Channel 39, but it was all through the school. I went to all the TV stations, looking for any kind of anything—I'll run cable, I'll go get coffee, I want to get into the business. Nobody was hiring. No one had any co-op jobs. I went to radio stations. Same thing—I'll do anything, I'll mix, I'll run tapes, I'll do whatever.

That first semester, actually, my wife wound up being a teacher's aide, and I worked in downtown Houston as a stock runner, working for W.F. Hutton [& Co.]. Not E.F. Hutton, but W.F. Hutton. I learned about stocks and bonds and banks and securities and large sums of

money. When the next semester was getting close, I started again trying to find places. The University of Houston Co-op Office sent me places. One of the places they sent me to was the University of Texas Dental School at the [Houston] Medical Center. I went down and interviewed with the gentleman there, and he wanted me to run all of the video systems for the dental school, basically take video of dental surgeries; run the cameras and all that. Told me how much I was going to make, when I could start, and I said, "Okay, I'm in. I'm there. I'm your guy."

So I went back to the University of Houston, and the guy there said, "I've got one more interview for you to go on." I said, "Where is that going to be?" He said, "Go out to the Manned Spacecraft Center. NASA." I said, "What am I going to be doing?" He said, "Go out there and find out. Go to the Public Affairs Office, and they'll interview you, and you tell me what you think." I thought, okay, what the heck?

I came down here, came down NASA Road 1, which was a four-lane blacktop. There was almost nothing between JSC and the freeway [I-45]. You went through Webster, and then it was nothing.

We [NASA] were in the midst of the Apollo 17 flight. I walked through Building 2, which back then was Building 1. Walked through there, media everywhere. I kept going. I thought, "Holy cow, this is a lot of stuff going on." I interviewed with the gentleman who was the chief of the branch. His name was [J. C.] Jack Waite. He told me I would be working with a guy named Chuck Biggs. He said, "You'll be working with exhibits, and displays, and artifacts." He said, "We might even try to get you a period where you'll work in the News branch and work with the guys who do commentary during the missions and all the things that go with it." Film and photos. Back then, it was film. Video wasn't as prevalent as it obviously is today.

I said, "That sounds pretty good," and then went and talked with the HR [Human Resources] guy. He told me how much my salary would be. When he told me that it was going to be, like, \$180 a month more than what the other place was, I thought, "Golly, I think this would be kind of fun. The space program. On the Moon and all that." So I took it, thinking that I'll get my degree, and then I'll go off and I'll work in the broadcast industry and I'll make my millions later on.

I started working out here, and actually, the first few days that I was here, I did a lot of reading about the space program. More than what I ever thought I wanted to know about. The guy that I was going to work for, Chuck Biggs, I think at the time, was in Russia. I think he was negotiating for some exhibit space and I thought, "Man, I'd like to get involved with that kind of stuff." The branch chief said, "You just sit in Chuck's office. Sit behind his desk," and after two or three weeks, I came in one day and I saw this little guy sitting behind Chuck's desk. I thought, "Who the heck is this guy?" I walked in and I introduced myself. That was Chuck Biggs. He was back from Russia. A little guy, about 5'6", with a beard. We got to know one another quite well. He was obviously my mentor in the area of exhibits and displays and artifacts.

I'll never forget one of my first assignments on locating and documenting artifacts. There was an Apollo fuel cell or something out of the Apollo spacecraft that was in one of the buildings. Back in those days, we always liked to get pictures of the item so we could certainly see what they were. The office had a Polaroid 60-second Land Camera, black-and-white Land Camera, where you take the picture, pull it out [of the camera], and let it sit for 60 seconds, then [separate the print from the negative]. He said, "Take the camera and go find this thing. It's in

Building 49. Take a picture of it and get as much data as you can. Here's the guy you need to see." I just said, "Okay, I'm off. Give me the camera." I walked out the door.

I can remember he said, "Building 49 is in that direction. You can walk there." Building 49 is a pretty good walk from Building 1, or Building 2, but I didn't know any better. I said, "Okay, I'm off." So I'm walking, looking. Back in those days, they didn't have numbers on the buildings. You just had to kind of walk in, look around. Of course, I probably walked into two or three buildings, asking, "Is this Building 49?" They said, "No, it's..." So I went there, I located the gentleman, found the object, took pictures of it, and came back, just feeling all good about myself.

That was the start of my training with Chuck Biggs. He would always kind of point me in the direction and say, "You can either talk to this person, or call this number, or do whatever." Many times, I would call and that wouldn't be the right number. I'd have to talk to somebody. That's how I learned the business of artifacts and who people were. Of course, I would always preface my conversation with, "I'm working with Chuck Biggs on whatever," and they would go, "Oh, okay, we know Chuck." That kind of introduced me that they'll talk to me because I'm working with this guy.

WRIGHT: It helped you worked for a good guy.

PARKER: It helped that I worked for a good guy back then. I would hope that, as Beth [Leblanc, new JSC Exhibits Manager] goes through her paces with people, if she happens to mention my name, they'll say, "Okay, I know who you're talking about and I know what you're doing."

WRIGHT: Tell us about some of the first exhibits that you were responsible for, or that you participated in, that stand out.

PARKER: When I first started here, I did a lot of behind-the-scenes things as far as projects and events. Chuck was still the exhibits manager, and so he kind of got the nice trips. I say nice trips—anytime you go overseas or go to another country, or go anywhere, I think it's a neat thing, a neat experience. I did a quick flip-flop from working for Chuck to working in the [PAO] News side, for a guy named [Douglas K.] Doug Ward. Actually, I wanted to get into that business more than exhibits and artifact. I went to work over there, and worked through the Skylab and ASTP [Apollo-Soyuz Test Project] programs. After ASTP, and we were flying the ALT [Approach and Landing Tests] getting ready for shuttle, Chuck, in the meantime, had gotten another gentleman who was working with him. That gentleman retired. They needed someone to work with Chuck. They knew that other people were retiring, and they thought Chuck might advance through the branch.

They asked me if I would consider going back to work for Chuck. I said okay, but later on, I went back to my supervisor, Doug Ward, and said, "I'm not really sure I want to do that. Is there any way we can reverse my decision?" We went up and talked with the director of Public Affairs at the time, who was [Harold S.] Hal Stall. He said, "We kind of figured that you might have some second thoughts about that. In order to kind of entice you to come over, we'll give you a promotion." I said okay. Money talks. Again, being a young guy, trying to look out for future families and all that, I went back to work for Chuck.

Even after a couple of years, I was getting kind of antsy about what it was I was in, what I was doing, and thought, maybe it's time to kind of look outside [NASA]. It was about that time

that, suddenly, Chuck was involving me more and more with some of these big projects. There was a big home show down in Mexico City and he wanted me to manage the exhibits. I did that, got to go down there.

My very first Paris Air Show that he got me involved with was in 1979. While I didn't actually go over there for the show, I did a lot of the pre-work for the exhibit that eventually was constructed over there. I worked with a gentleman who later became the exhibits coordinator at NASA Headquarters, a guy by the name of Jack Schmid, and got to know him very well. He's still a great friend of mine. I just have a lot of admiration for him, because he was a true designer. He worked for USIA [United States Information Agency] for a long time, then worked independently, on his own, and went to work for Headquarters for 10 or 12 years or so before he retired.

Suddenly this job started growing horns and eyes and started becoming very exciting. I started doing more and more of those types of projects, big projects where Chuck would literally have me coordinate all of the exhibits work to be done, and then, in some cases, actually be the on-site supervisor when the exhibit would have to be fabricated or shipped. I started doing many of the air shows, and then Headquarters seeing that we had a capability at JSC to provide exhibit production work for Headquarters, we started doing a lot of work and events for Headquarters. That's when I was fortunate enough to go to a lot of very nice places overseas, Canada and South America—just all over the place.

The World's Fair came along in '83. By that time, Chuck had become the branch chief. He literally just said, "This is your project." I managed the NASA exhibit that was at the World's Fair; it was there for six months. Part of that NASA existence at the '83 World's Fair in New Orleans [Louisiana] involved having the orbiter, the *Enterprise*, there. Prior to it going to

New Orleans, we came up with this idea of taking it to a Paris Air Show (Spring 1983). He assigned that project to me. That was a really neat experience working with all that we had to work with and getting the tour set up, and working with the organizations in France, to have it land and do the things over there.

[Originally] what happened was we thought we would take the orbiter to Paris and then bring it back. When people in Europe found out that it was going to be in Paris, they started immediately contacting their embassies and their ambassadors to say, “Can you bring the orbiter to Germany and land it over here? Can you bring it over to Finland? Can you take it to Holland, or Italy?” Actually, what happened was, because there was all this international involvement—we had a whole other group of people who were involved with that, along with the security folks who had to be with it—that really turned into almost a nightmare of trying to satisfy all these requests. Everybody wanted to have it come to their airport. And, [we were asked], “if it couldn’t come to their airport, could they at least fly over our airspace and drop down so people could see it?”

One of the things that we did with the orbiter when it was in Paris—it was on display at the air show—each day, when it wasn’t going to some other place, it would fly around the [Boulevard] Peripherique, which is like the big loop around Paris, so people could see it and Paris could see it. The traffic in Paris is bad anyway, but every time the orbiter was flown around—and it would fly 1,000 feet, 1,500 feet, very visible—it just would create all sorts of havoc. As a matter of fact, that particular year, the French Open was happening at the same time as the Paris Air Show. John McEnroe was playing. He literally stopped a match one day because it was flying across. There was a picture in *Sports Illustrated* or *Time* [magazine] with him pointing at the *Enterprise* flying across the sky. That was a neat experience.

Then, when it came back [to the United States], immediately we took it to New Orleans. To get it to New Orleans, we had to first fly it to Mobile, Alabama. We flew it in there. I went over for that. Of course, the people in Mobile had to have a big event. Actually, it was a two or three-day event where they invited thousands of school kids to come. The kids would literally walk by it. There was even a school for the handicapped that came; I think the kids were blind. They wanted them to literally be able to touch it. There was a picture of me that appeared in the Mobile newspaper, of holding a little blind kid up to touch the nose of the *Enterprise*. That was really kind of neat.

From there, they had to take the orbiter off the back of the [Shuttle Carrier Aircraft] 747. To do that without a facility, you had to get two huge cranes and lift [the orbiter] up and set it down. The airport where we were located at Mobile was maybe a mile from the loading dock that goes into Mobile Bay, which goes into the Gulf of Mexico and the Intracoastal Canal. They wheeled it over to the barge, and then they went out into the Intracoastal. I got in the car with a PR [public relations] person from the World's Fair, and we drove from Mobile to New Orleans. About a day later, here came the *Enterprise*. They wheeled it off of the barge, and they had a pad built up, a raised concrete pad, and wheeled it up onto that. It was outside of the pavilion where our exhibit was going to be.

Our exhibit for the World's Fair there—you always hear about this kind of stuff—was literally conceived at a bar on a napkin. Chuck Biggs and the gentleman at the Space and Rocket Center at the time, a guy by the name of Ed Buckbee, they were literally talking about what they [we NASA JSC] wanted to do. They took a napkin and kind of sketched it out, and from that, that's what our exhibit became. We took the napkin-sketch and we designed our exhibit. I coordinated all of the elements to come in for the exhibit.

The World's Fair people had a lot of problems with the finances of the event. They had told us that on a certain day the building that we were going to occupy would be completed, they were going to put carpet down and have electricity all over, and be ready for us to move in with our structure and start putting things together. I was coordinating the shipment of things to arrive in New Orleans on certain days. We were going to be setting up the exhibit. We had things coming from Rockwell International. We had stuff coming from all over [NASA Centers].

I remember going over there to prepare for all these shipments to literally arrive at our exhibit. I walked into that part of the building, and it was probably an area five, six thousand square feet. They didn't have any carpet on the concrete floor. They hadn't painted the walls. No lights were on. Nothing was ready. I had trucks literally arriving within a day or so. I remember having to go back to my hotel room and calling people saying, "Slow up if you can, because nothing is ready. If you come here, those trucks are going to have to sit out in the parking lots. This place is a mess, and it's just not going to work."

We got to where we opened, and the show we thought was a success from the NASA standpoint. The World's Fair people, I think, it failed miserably, actually. They were expecting over a six-month period of having six, eight million people, and they had about half that. They lost so much money.

One of the companies that we had worked with was Sony [Corporation]. Back then, we used a lot of Sony tape players, and a lot of Sony monitors. Back then, the tape players were these big, humongous players for three-quarter inch pneumatic tape. They were big, honking players. We kind of cut a deal with them to loan us the monitors and the players, because we had videos all through our exhibit. Not only did they give us enough video equipment for our

exhibit, but they gave us a lot of standby material in case something needed repair, maintenance, because it was a six-month period of time there. They gave us additional equipment. The Fair people set us up in what they felt was a secure, locked area within a big storage facility. It was a climate-controlled area that had a lot of cages where you could put your materials and then lock it up. Aside from 15, 20 or so units in our exhibit, we had another 15 or 20 that were being stored.

We figured, because the Fair people lost their shirts, from a financial standpoint, they couldn't pay their workers, their construction people, their electricians. We figured that they [the workers] somehow broke into these [locked] cages and they literally stole all that equipment. We had to put in a loss report with Sony and say, "We don't know what to tell you. It was a secure area, but somebody got into it." We figured the workers were trying to get money or trying to get something. That's just my supposition there. We're talking many, many thousands of dollars of AV [audio visual] equipment that got lifted.

But good experience. I thought our exhibit was a neat exhibit. We sent people over to staff it. We had staffers from JSC, as well as from Marshall [Space Flight Center], because they were close. Went along for six months, and then at the end of six months, we came in and got everything out and went on our merry way.

One of the other major projects that we did, that's a little bit more recent, was the World Space Congress. The first one was in 1992, an event for AIAA [American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics]. It was in D.C. Again, Headquarters wanted us [to put together the exhibit] because we had the capability to fabricate exhibits. The main part of this exhibit was a huge audio visual component, which was a 47-screen video wall. Not just 47 screens this way [along one wall], but kind of spotted all over the place. We built the structure for that, for the

video units, and the video units were various sizes. Big video units, small ones. Remember, these are regular sized televisions, not flat screens. It was 1992. The idea behind this big project, this big exhibit, was, once we used it for this event, which was a four-day event; we also wanted to use it in the '93 Paris Air Show in order to help justify the cost of it. The project was probably \$2.5 million, which included the production of the video, which was done by a video company out in California. Made lots of trips out there to look at all that.

We did that in '92, and then in '93, we took it to the Paris Air Show. The '93 air show was the last time that NASA, by itself, went as the agency, and partook of the [U.S.] Commerce Department's pavilion that they operated. After that, they tore the pavilion down. The only other time we went to Paris after that was when JSC went as part of the consortium with, back then, CLAEDF [Clear Lake Area Economic Development Foundation; soon afterwards became BAHEP–Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership] because the development foundation wanted to participate in an international event. We actually did it two times with them. NASA Headquarters has since gone to the air show with some aeronautics displays, but as far as it being a true agency exhibit that talked about all of the agency programs, it's not been back since '93.

Fast forward 10 years from 1992 to 2002 to the next World Space Congress. AIAA had this plan where, every ten years they would have a World Space Congress. Next year [2012], they were supposed to have one, but I've heard that AIAA is probably not going to have it, just because of, again, the budget climate and the resources climate the way it is. The 2002 event was here in Houston and that was one of my big projects, to orchestrate an agency exhibit at the George R. Brown Convention Center. I worked with all of the NASA Centers that wanted to participate, and I think darn near every Center participated.

When it was all over with, we had an exhibit at the World Space Congress that was about 18,000 square feet. We had a huge chunk of that main exhibit hall. We had stuff all over the place. CLAEDF was there, too. It was one of those deals where we started about a year and a half in advance. It's fun to think about now. During the time, it was very stressful, just because trying to coordinate who was going to be bringing what, where they were going to be, working with AIAA guys as far as making sure we had the right amount of space and services. We had a new [NASA] administrator at the time. Sean O'Keefe was the guy. He came down and looked at everything. Nice memories from that as well.

WRIGHT: From your explanation, these are huge commitments. You mentioned a year and a half in advance. Can you give us some specifics or help us understand more of what it takes to create an exhibit, and what it takes even to decide where and what type of exhibit you're going to have?

PARKER: Once an event is identified, as far as it being a foreign event or a domestic event, you look at things like the agency theme that you want to portray. It's fairly easy, because it's pretty much the same anywhere you go, just depending on the timeframe. For instance, back then, we were certainly touting shuttle and all the things it would be doing. We were flying a lot of payloads, and we were doing a lot more commercial payloads. We were doing DOD [Department of Defense] flights. We were talking about this thing called space station. Talking about the capabilities of shuttle and how long is it going to fly, where are we going, what we're going to be doing, what will be the launching pad from that into the next program.

Even when the creators, I guess, of the Shuttle Program—I don't know that they knew that we would be flying it 30 years, or 15 years, I think, as we were evolving through it—they just kept it going. Of course, we were all trying to build up to space station. I knew, ultimately, that's where we would end up, and then, suddenly, shuttle would end. Then we probably thought, but we'll have another program, Constellation or whatever, which we did for a while.

You start with themes and messages. You obviously look at what kind of [physical] space that you are going to be relegated to, or what might be available to you. You look at things like resources, budgets. When we were doing many of the Paris Air Shows, the way we handled it was, we know, roughly, about how much space we would have at a U.S. pavilion, but we would put together an exhibit plan that would include the major NASA programs. Then we would literally go to the AA—the Associate Administrators—for that discipline, and we would say, “We're going to be talking human space flight 60 percent. We figure that the budget for this is going to be this amount. You need to cough up about 60 percent of it.”

Before we would do that, we would go to the NASA administrator and say, “Here's our plan. Sixty percent shuttle or human space flight, 30 percent space sciences, 10 percent aeronautics. This is what it's going to cost, so we need this kind of money from these people.” The administrator would virtually sign off on it. Then that would allow the exhibit guy and the Public Affairs guy to go to the AA and say, “Mr. Administrator has approved this. Here's his signature. We need this kind of money from you guys.” Back then, the guys would say okay. They would pull all this money, and then we would go into the production mode, whatever it might be.

We did a lot of on-site construction at the Paris Air Show. In order to do that, then, to be cost-effective with your money, once you had your exhibit plan together and that included things

like drawings of what this thing is going to look like, you would bid it out, just like a contract. You would bid it out to European vendors. There was all this procurement rules that you had to follow to make sure that you were doing it correctly. Of course, you always had to justify--why are you doing it in Europe and not having a U.S. vendor do it? It was obvious why you did it that way. We were always able to go out and have a bid conference. It would involve somebody flying over to Paris and meeting with whomever was bidding and go over some stuff.

They would award the contract, and then these guys, depending on where they were located, would start building pieces. Then we would fly over a month in advance, meet them. They would bring their stuff in and start their work. That's where we would supervise the actual construction. I tell people it's kind of like building a small house. Once you've got the plans and everything all done, and you've awarded the contract to the builder, you're literally there on site. It's saws and wood and metal, and electrical lines being run, and you're sitting there looking and drawing, going, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. That wall has got to come over three feet." That kind of thing. That was three or four weeks out.

Then, of course, once it's all done and the show happens—and back then, the show ran about 11 days—then when it was over, they would come in with a wrecking ball. In two days time, what took them a month and a half or a month to build, in two days, it was [makes sound effect] done. We generally built these exhibits to be that way, except for the last couple. Like I said, the World Space Congress video wall, we brought that back and we actually traveled it around the U.S.

One year—it was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Apollo 11—we had a full-size Hubble Space Telescope mock-up over there, before we even flew Hubble Space Telescope. It was full-size. It even had a lot of the same thermo fabric. We spent a lot of money on it. On the flip side of it, it

was a cutaway that showed the light pattern—the way the light would travel in and bounce off the mirrors, and how it would be recorded. It was all done with fluorescence and all sorts of different kinds of lights. Pretty neat. We brought that back, and it wound up at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center for a short period of time. One year, we built a space station module. We brought it back, and I think it went to the Space and Rocket Center, too, as well, for a period of time. For the most part, [makes sound effect] torn down. The million or whatever you spent on it kind of went away.

That's kind of the gist. Some of the smaller events, like some of the events that I did later on, those exhibits were a little bit smaller. Instead of 6,000, 5,000 square feet, it might be 1,200 square feet or whatever. Same general concept as far as themes and messages, and then coming up with a design concept, producing, literally fabricating, putting together, and then shipping, and then setting it up.

WRIGHT: Talk about the interaction and the protocol between Headquarters and the Centers for doing exhibits.

PARKER: Back then, we did a lot more for Headquarters, because we had the capabilities. I probably communicated with Headquarters, I would say, 60 percent of my day. They used to always have a log of everybody's long-distance telephone calls and who they all called. We had to sign off to say that these are correct, and if there's a personal call in there, then we would pay for it. If you looked at my call sheet, where most people might have a quarter of a page, half a page of long-distance calls, I'd have six or seven pages. They would all be the same number at Headquarters. I did a lot of back and forth with them.

Whenever we were doing projects and we needed funding from Headquarters, they used to do it *not* like they do today, all electronic, where you just type a few things and it's gone. They would fill out forms and they would fax the forms to us. Then I would have to look at it and take it to our budget people to have them code it so that the money could be applied on the contract. Then we would set up a job order, back then. Not a task order, but the same thing. We would have that specific funding code, and everything would get charged to that.

Kind of a funny story on the first World Space Congress. We did the fabrication of that exhibit. The design of it was being done by a guy that actually worked at Headquarters. He was subcontracted. Working at Headquarters, but was being paid by a company that was our contractor at the time. It was funny. We were getting money from Headquarters, sent to Houston, to pay a guy back in D.C. for this assignment. He was doing a lot of changes. It was causing us a little bit of concern, because every time he would do a change, we'd have to change the exhibit. We're talking about welding pieces. We had a lot of hard pieces. This went on for a long period of time. We were kind of getting down to where we were suddenly spending a lot of overtime to get this thing ready, because it had to be shipped and installed.

Every time we'd get a change, I would just go to my contractor and say, "Here's the newest drawing. Let's get them done. Here's what we have to do." They'd all go, "Oh my gosh." Spending money like crazy. A lot more than what I really realized. I got a call one Monday or Tuesday; actually, Chuck got the call, because he was the branch chief. [William] Bill Larsen was the COTR [contracting officer technical representative] over a portion of the contract. I was actually a COTR as well. He called us up and he said, "Let me tell you something. If we don't get money from Headquarters before Friday of this week, I'm going to shut this contract down. You are going to send your people home, because you're out of money.

You have spent all of our institutional money. I know you're getting the job done, but you're not getting any reimbursement. If we don't get money by this Friday, that's it."

Boy, I called up my guy at Headquarters and said, "Jack, we need," I think it was \$600,000 or something like that. I said, "You need to get your budget guys to get this money down today, or guess what? You're going to have a half-finished exhibit." He got it done.

That's one of the things that I always tell people, that I almost bankrupted the PAO [Public Affairs Office] contract back in those days. It's just one of those things where you get caught up in doing the work, and you know it's going to get paid for, but sometimes you lose sight of the fact that we weren't the only part of this contract that was being funded. We were literally spending other money from the contract. Of course, nowadays, they would never, never, ever let you do something like that. They're always, "Send me the money first. Let's get the contract. Then you can do your work." Back then it was like, "The check is in the mail. The check is in the mail." We just had stuff to get done. Fun times. Fun times.

WRIGHT: Learned some interesting lessons along the way?

PARKER: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. You can bankrupt a contract if you're not careful. Bill Larsen, another guy who's a champ. What I have learned about contracting, and about contracts, and the stuff that I used for source [evaluation] boards later on, came from that guy. Just brilliant, and a heck of a nice guy on top of that, too. He's one of the guys that was truly one of my mentors, when I was a green, wet-behind-the-ears person, that treated me like someone who he thought would be okay. Again, I think a lot of it was the fact that I was associated with Chuck Biggs.

He said, “Chuck’s not going to steer you wrong.” He said, “You’ll be okay.” Taught me a lot. Taught me a ton of stuff.

WRIGHT: It was an interesting time when you got here, because Apollo was closing down, the shuttle wasn’t yet here. As you mentioned, you were finding places for all this hardware. You were learning so much because things were changing, so you were kind of learning what was coming and what was going?

PARKER: The way Chuck treated me—I think he felt like the best way for you to learn about what we do, and how we use this, and how it applies to our Public Affairs mission to disseminate information, you have to literally go out and beat the bushes. You have to hit walls and you have to fall down, but once that happens don’t ever feel sorry. He was always there to help you, to help you understand what your mistakes may have been, and to point you in the direction. Not to necessarily give you the answer, but to point you in the direction and to keep going on.

People think that I know a lot more than I really do, but it’s just because I know who to call. I know a lot of people in a lot of places. I know enough about command module interiors, but I don’t know as much as an engineer who created those, but I know who to call, who has the resources to go and find this information. I think that’s something that—I don’t know, I hate to stereotype people today, but I think much of that is missing in the people that come to work for us today in our office. Engineers, that’s different, that’s a different situation. We have a lot of people who certainly have a lot of knowledge, have a lot of capabilities, but there’s something missing there that should make them want to go out and search out and seek, and not be

discouraged or rely on somebody else to give them the answer, necessarily. I think they can find it out themselves.

WRIGHT: Did you have any involvement with the Saturn V being moved to the Center?

PARKER: Actually, I did. It was mostly from working with Center Operations, looking at the drawings of where it would eventually be, and of course, where it is now. When it first came here, we watched it come in on the barges through Clear Lake and come to the back gate. Once the pieces came, we had to bring it on site, like at two o'clock in the morning. We had to take down fences and roll it in. It was interesting. One day you'd see it sitting out at the loading dock at Clear Lake, and then people would go away, and the next day you'd come in and you'd go, "Where is it?" It's over here by Building 14. Originally, they put it in the parking lot before we put it where it is now.

I did a lot of the paperwork transfer between NASA and the Smithsonian, because that is a Smithsonian item. If you look at our loan agreements with them, it's listed down there. Actually, before we even put the Saturn there, we put the Little Joe II there [in Rocket Park]; we put the Mercury-Redstone [there], because they used to be next to our building on that breezeway where now nothing is there. When I first came to work here, back in the 1970s, sitting out [on the west side of Building 2S], we had a mock-up lunar module, we had the Little Joe II, the command module, and we had the F-1 engine, and we had the other engines, the H-10 and the J-2. Then we had the Mercury-Redstone, all sitting on that pad. We knew we wanted to move it out there [to Rocket Park], so I was part of that, getting it all moved. With the Little Joe II, we had to get the launcher system. We had the command module and the boilerplate, but we

had to get the launch system. That came from White Sands [Test Facility] and got shipped over here.

I remember the day that we stacked that out in the Saturn V [building]. It was in February, and it was one of those rare times it was, like, 20 degrees, with the wind blowing. We had contractors putting that thing together and putting the launch tower together and stacking that. I thought I was going to freeze out there watching that thing go in. Then, of course, the Saturn got moved into place. I remember the transportation officer back then was a guy by the name of Horace [L.] Bell. As they were putting the second stage in the cradle that was built up for it, and they were shimmying it up, he said, "In about 20, 25 years, this is going to be somebody's nightmare, because it's outdoors." Of course, it was 10 years later it was somebody's nightmare.

As you probably have heard, [the Saturn V] was kind of our signature item. You'd say, "To go to the Johnson Space Center, look for the big rocket on the side of the road, and you're there." People bellyached and cried and moaned and groaned when we put this "barn" around it but I tell them, if we hadn't done that, we'd be tearing that rocket down right now [because of the deterioration]. It wouldn't be there, because it was in really, really bad shape.

The restoration of Saturn V was interesting. I got a call one day from Allen Needell at the Smithsonian. He said, "Are you aware of a program that [First Lady] Hillary Clinton started called Save America's Treasures?" I said, "I don't think so." He directed me to a couple of news stories. It was one of those deals where historical items could be submitted for historical preservation. If approved and accepted by the program, the government would match funds raised to preserve or restore the so-called item. I said, "Hey, here's how we can get this thing restored." Of course, I started working with Allen Needell. We put together a plan. He had to

submit it, because the program was not available to certain federal agencies, NASA being one of those, but it was certainly available to the Smithsonian. They had all sorts of things that needed preservation. As a matter of fact, the space suit preservation project that we talked about, that was about a \$170,000 project that Amanda Young got the money for that.

Allen and I worked together. He wrote up some write-ups for the RFIs [request for information]; I helped write them, and he submitted it. Sure enough, they accepted it. The next part of it was trying to get the money raised. Of course, we couldn't raise money, so Allen did a lot of the footwork, trying to get people to put money up for the restoration. I certainly put him in contact with Space Center Houston, and they gave him names like the Houston Endowment [Inc.] and some other local places. Lockheed Martin [Corporation] and Boeing [Corporation] may have pitched in some money.

When it was all said and done, I think he wound up getting close to \$800,000. The government matched that with another \$800,000. By that time, certainly Joel B. Walker [JSC Director of Center Operations], was on top of all this. Joel is a pretty crafty fellow when it comes to Center resources, and I think he had money set aside. He said, "I'll pitch in to help put this facility around the rocket and do whatever." It was kind of a combination of Smithsonian and the government, with the restoration money. The restoration work had to be done with a contract and Allen Needell, the Smithsonian, had to be the perpetrators or the keepers of the contract activity. They did allow us to co-coordinate, I guess, because it was our facility that we were building. It was the money that was being used to restore the Saturn V. I think Allen used the same company that actually did the restoration work of the Saturn V at the Cape [Kennedy Space Center, Florida]. He was able to get a lot for as much money that he had available. I think

certainly if he had had more money, probably could have done some more. He orchestrated that, and I kind of watched out over it.

Once the building was pretty much done and the restoration work was pretty much done, then I started asking Joel about additional resources to add things like concrete floors. I said, “Otherwise, you’ve got a big barn with a lot of grass growing around it, and a sidewalk.” Fortunately, again, Joel was able to kind of fill in with concrete. He did the grassy area with that artificial turf. It’s still dirt underneath it. He’s closed it in as much as you can close something in without literally building a concrete floor. Then after all that was done, the Smithsonian said, “We need to make sure that the conditions inside, as far as humidity and all that—we need to keep that pretty constant. Otherwise, we’re going to undo all this work.”

Again, Joel came in and put the air conditioning units that are in there. We actually have little humidity meters, where we take readings of what the humidity is. Every month, we send that reading up to the Smithsonian to say what it is reading. As long as it’s between 45 and 65, or whatever it is, then we feel like there won’t be any further deterioration of the metals. Dust and stuff like that—from the dirt that’s underneath the artificial grass that’s there—that’s a different story. Still, I think for the amount of money that was put into this project, I think we probably did pretty well.

We’d love to see a facility like what they have at KSC, the [Apollo/Saturn V Center] building over there. I’d love something like that, but you’re looking at another \$60, 70 million project to do something like that, and I don’t think Space Center Houston would be able to do that. Plus, they’re getting ready to start their ten-year plan, which is going to involve getting this [mock] space shuttle from KSC, getting it placed over there, and then building out to it. Then, also, part of the plan is building onto the area that’s adjacent to where the big large-format

theater is. They're going to build a Mars display there, of sorts. Not just a little display, but a total immersion into a Mars landscape atmosphere. It's a multimillion dollar project over the course of the next eight to ten years.

WRIGHT: Were you involved in the design at the beginning of Space Center Houston?

PARKER: It's funny. Our office, before Space Center Houston was even a thought in anybody's head, we subcontracted with a designer to design a new visitor complex. As a matter of fact, he was one of our first designers way back when. Again, Hal Stall thought that we needed to do a better job for visitors, and he wanted to have something more than just a building and walking tour. He asked us what we thought about bringing on a contract designer to come up with some ideas. We went to this gentleman, Colin Kennedy was his name, and said, "Here's what we want." He designed the very first building that eventually would grow into what Space Center Houston was.

Because he was subcontracted to my contract, I worked with him on all that. He later actually did some work for us as a contract person for the Paris Air Show, for the exhibit there. We used his services a lot, even after he left NASA. He was our designer when I first came to work for NASA in '72. Then he left and was a freelancer, and then we went back and forth with him. Very early on.

People think that Space Center Houston exists because of the *Challenger* accident, but we started that way before *Challenger*. We started what became Space Center Houston probably 1982, '83. We started talking about how we could, somehow or another, build a new complex, how could we get it funded. Do we want to try to go for appropriated funds and make it NASA,

or do we need to have it contract-run, or concessionaire? Hal Stall literally poured the latter part of his NASA career into trying to figure out how to create it. He did all of that. We came up with a 503c nonprofit organization, which people wonder if that was a smart thing, but it is what it is.

WRIGHT: Looking back on the years that you've spent here, what do you find as your most favorite memories of what you've done?

PARKER: I think, certainly, everything that I've talked about as far as these projects, the events. Of course, going through them, I thought I was going to die from frustrations to just hard work. People don't really realize the kind of work that goes into some of these major projects, these major events. The first time I heard of going to a Paris Air Show, like everybody, I go, "Oh my gosh, Paris Air Show. How do I get that assignment?"

That was me, until I got over there and started working. If you do it properly, if you do your job, you come back and you go, "Oh my gosh, I don't know if I want to do that again." Then, of course—I'll use the example my wife has always said: you go through childbirth and you think, I don't ever want to do that again; then a couple years later, you forget about it. Really, that's the same with this. The first time I went to an air show, I was in Paris for, I think, three weeks and five days, something like that. The very last day before I was supposed to fly back, I had an open afternoon. I said, "I'm going to get to see a little bit of Paris." I really had not seen it. Chuck [Biggs] would say, "You're going to be working pretty long hours. From seven in the morning until seven or so at night, eight o'clock. No days off." I said, "I can handle that."

That first time I went there, that last day, I found myself climbing up on top of the Arc de Triomphe, because back then you could climb up there, and you have this beautiful panoramic view of Paris. I got up there and I got out my little 35-milimeter camera. It was kind of hazy, kind of a dreary day, actually. I took some pictures and I sat there for a while. I thought, "I am sick of this place." I crawled down and went back to my hotel. Packed, took a nap. I said, "I'm ready to get out of this place."

All those events; when the next one came along, I'd get all psyched up for it. We'd go and have a great show, but you go through it, and after you're there for however many days, it grates on you. It's only the last few years that, suddenly, as I went to shows and I set exhibits up, and staffed or do whatever, then tear down—I think, "I'm tired of this." This is just starting to grate on me. We would go to these big shows and we'd get everything all put together, and in would come the Headquarters people or whatever, in their suit and tie and their coats. They would sit there and go, "Oh man, what a great exhibit! This looks great. Man, you guys did a great job." They are there for a day or so, they go to a reception or two, and then they're gone. Then we're there to manage the show to the end and then tear it down. I just think, "I want that job." I want to come in for a couple of days, have wine at a wine and cheese place, and then go home and go, "Those guys did a great job! What a great exhibit. We got all this publicity, had all these people, and all that."

I never, in my wildest imagination, would have thought that I would work for anybody, let alone NASA, and do the stuff that I've been able to do, to create the things, be a part of the team. You have to have a good team, and I have been very fortunate in the contractors that have worked for us. Great people, very talented. Any success that people heave on me, if I didn't have these guys supporting me, none of that would happen. No way.

To go to the places that I've gone to, oh my gosh. I never would have thought that I'd be going to Jerusalem or Denmark or Holland or Japan or South America, places like that. Just great places. Not that I had been able to see a lot of stuff there, but the fact that I'm there and I'm representing the agency, and people entrusted that to me to do—that's going to be something that will stick with me. Like I said, it's been a great ride. I couldn't have asked for any better career anywhere.

WRIGHT: We talked about some of the people that you learned from. Can you share with us some of those lessons that you might have learned from Chuck Biggs or Hal Stall that you might be leaving for the folks that will follow you?

PARKER: I try to tell people that when you go off and as you're working things, just because you hit a door or a door shuts in your face, don't let that be the end of it. We've actually had people come through the office and have that happen to them. They just quit. You can't do that. You have to continuously keep going forward. You always have to be, especially in Public Affairs, you have to be in a state of always wanting to learn more about what's going on, because there's so much that "does" goes on.

If you're doing your job as a Public Affairs person, if you're not learning about what's out there, there's something wrong. Public Affairs is supposed to know a little bit of everything, and people expect you to know. Even though we're at a human space flight Center, a lot of times people will say, "What about the rovers that are going to Mars?" or "What about the James Webb Telescope?" You need to know something about other NASA projects; you need to learn about that.

I tell people, always be in a mode of wanting to learn, wanting to do things. I tell people, volunteer for stuff. If they need somebody to take a tour, or staff an exhibit, or staff an event, whatever it is, volunteer to do that. Figure out how you can fit that into your schedule, because that's the way you learn this stuff.

When I was first here, besides working with exhibits and displays, I did protocol tours. One year, I think the Super Bowl was at Rice Stadium. They had the [football] teams coming out to go on tours, and they had people from Pittsburgh [Pennsylvania] coming out for tours. Not just a handful, but five and six buses. They needed people to be on the buses to corral. Even if you're corralling, people are going to ask you, "You work at NASA? Tell me about this stuff." You can interact with folks. You volunteer for stuff like that, because that's how you learn what's going on out here. I tell them, don't sit back and think that stuff is going to come to you, because it may or may not, but when you're more proactive, the other thing is, management sees that. The old adage about if you want to get stuff done, take it to a busy person—I think that's true. Sometimes those people get frustrated, because I've felt myself feel that way. My boss will say, "Can you do this?" I'll think, "What's the matter with Joe over there?" But, it's because he thinks enough of me that I can get it done.

WRIGHT: Public Affairs, or the name has been changed through the years.

PARKER: It will always be Public Affairs as far as I'm concerned. The directorate is External Relations; our division is now Office of Communication and Public Affairs. To me, it's always going to be PAO.

WRIGHT: PAO has so many areas that it's responsible for. You mentioned that you had wanted to be on the News side. Any regrets that you didn't get to?

PARKER: I don't think so. I don't think so, because, really, I went to school to learn and to develop skills in writing and producing what would have been either film pieces or video pieces. Building an exhibit, to me, is not different than trying to produce something on video. You have a storyboard, you have a script, you have visuals. A lot of times, our exhibits have moving pieces to it. I think that I'm using a lot of what I learned in school to do what I'm doing. No regrets.

One thing about the News side is during the shuttle program, you had stuff going on all the time. The next shuttle flight, next shuttle flight. Now, they're in a little bit of a dry spell. Not really. They're starting to get more, and certainly in the International Space Station [ISS], and the next program, Orion MPCV [Multi Purpose Crew Vehicle], but right now, it's a little dry.

Some of those guys are starting to do some things with us, because we've got the bulk of things that are going on. Right now, we're doing a lot of work, obviously, with Space Center Houston on the [Explorer, the mock space shuttle] orbiter coming over. Our people are working with Space Center Houston to update the "On Human Destiny" film that's there. Before you go into Starship Gallery, you see this film on the history of the space program. If you recall, it stops at space station, and the last image is a graphic rendering of what the space station looks like, and then it says, "to be continued." They're trying to continue that and use more actual footage, but still say that there's more out there. They are working with Bob Rogers [& Co.], who

originally produced this video, to add these new parts and pieces. The video folks over at JSC are working with him.

We're helping Space Center Houston with a new exhibit on space station, because they're lacking in that area. We're helping them with MPCV exhibitory, because, again, they're lacking, and we can help them with that. We're helping them with the tram stops. We're trying to update the information for Building 9 to transition out of shuttle into ISS and robotics. We're getting ready to open up Building 16, which is where the Shuttle Avionics [Integration] Lab[oratory] is located. That's now going to be a tram stop where people can walk through, so we're working with that area. Just a lot of things that are going on in our branch that may be or may not be going on over there.

I have no regrets at all. I couldn't have asked for a better job with a lot of neat, exciting things that go on.

WRIGHT: Every day the same, but every day different in its own way?

PARKER: Yeah, that's pretty much it. I tell people, I'm going to be watching. I want to see a lot of things come to fruition. I can't wait for the [mock space shuttle] orbiter to get here. I can't wait for certain things to pop up. I can't wait for Space Center Houston's new things that they're going to be doing.

Actually, I can't wait for KSC to get *Atlantis* on display. I'm certainly disappointed that we didn't get an orbiter. I'll probably be disappointed until the day I die. I don't understand what happened there. Regardless of what people say, I think that something was not right, but we just go on with that. There are a lot of things that are going to happen, and it's just a matter

of who's leading the ship, who the captain is, and how much the nation is willing to support, and I think the nation will be behind whatever course it is we take. It's the people who have to be convinced. The people who have the coffers, who have their hands on the finances and the resources. That we have to, somehow or another—I'm hesitant to say better educate, because I don't think that [educate] really is it. That's one of the pet peeves that I have when our managers talk about how we need to do a better job of informing and educating. I just think that they get their information from skewed reports. To me, they're not being advised appropriately. Do we need to do a better job? Yeah, we always could do a better job. We should never think that we've done the best that we could. You're never there. You hear that all the time. We need to do a better job of this; we need to do a better job of that. Considering what we have to work with, I think we're doing a pretty darn good job as it is, and we can do better, and we will do better, but when you start making those kinds of comments, you need to look at where are you getting that data from. You can take surveys, and you can get that stuff to tell you just about anything you want. If you want to try to motivate your people, you can get surveys that say, you're not doing a very good job in this area.

Too many times, we go to events, and people love us for the most part. We'll get all this great feedback from places we go, from football games to racing events to marathons, rodeos. They love it, after they go, "Gosh, why are you here?" "Let me tell you why we're here. We've got guys that are flying in a space station, that do exercises and do this."

They go, "Oh."

"The reason they're doing that is because we're getting ready to go to another planet, and it's going to take a lot of time, and they have to make sure that their bodies can do it."

"Oh."

Then you have somebody go to an event, and one person will come back and say, “You know what? Our exhibit is kind of shoddy-looking. I wasn’t real sure what...” That comment will get elevated to the ninth floor [JSC Center administration], and they’ll come back and say, “Guys, you need to do a better job of...”

I’m thinking, “Wait a minute.” What about the 500,000 people over here who love what we’re doing? Like I said, you can get anything from any situation that you want. I don’t think you need to continuously beat your people about the head and shoulders about how they need to be doing a better job. We are doing a great job.

We have been participating over the last eight or nine years in a thing called Education Alley. It is an educational event that’s tagged to an AIAA event that’s, each year, out on the West Coast, called “Space.” Space 2009, Space 2010—you have the technical exhibition, where you’ve got your typical tradeshow exhibits. Companies like the Lockheeds and the USAs and Boeings, they come in and they have their tradeshow exhibits, and their guys with their suits and ties, and they’re talking to—we call it a choir event. They’re talking to each other about what we’re doing in space.

With that Expo is also the conference part, which is where people talk about what they’re going to be doing next, which is a useful conference for space folks. Then there’s a section that’s called Education Alley, where they set aside an area and they invite selected people from agencies to come in and showcase stuff that’s going on that’s relative or would be of interest to education to students. Then they invite students from the areas to come in.

Over the course of a three-day period, you might have about three or four thousand kids, about 1,000 a day, which is about all you can stand on a seven or eight hour day, because it has to be during the school time; they bus them there. These kids come in and they see this stuff, and

they just eat it up. Granted, you get some that are “out there”, and they’re just running around. But, you can see the kids who look at this stuff, and they’re interested in the science of it, they’re interested in the mathematics of it, they’re interested in the technology of it. You have them for however long it is, but you can talk to them about going to Mars, or you can talk to them about what it would take to be an astronaut. Along with all these other agencies. It’s not just NASA, but it’s all different but NASA is the showcase. You see NASA there. Everybody wants to be there.

This last Education Alley, we had very simple stuff. You guys probably saw the inflatable MPCV that we had during [JSC] Innovation [Day]. We took that there. It’s full-size. People go, “Oh man, that’s how big it is?” Yeah, that’s how big it is. Four people go inside them. Then we had our inflatable space station module. “Oh man, that’s how big it is?” That’s just one module, yeah. We had our space suit people there. “Oh man.” They just eat that stuff up.

Now, you want to tell me that we’re doing, really, a poor job? The letters that these schoolteachers write back to AIAA say, “Thanks for inviting us. That was really neat. The NASA stuff was really neat. My kids came back and wanted to know more about it. We’re going to NASA.gov.” Take a survey with those people. You’re going to get a 95 percent rating of, “Hey, great job.” You can get what you want depending on where you are. I’m with these people that say we need to quit doing choir events. The technical conferences are where the space people go to. If each one of them would have an Education Alley, where they invite three or four thousand kids; unfortunately, these are all out in California, so we’re in Los Angeles or Anaheim or San Diego, whatever. If there was any way you could have those kinds of events tagged to another event—we had it here in Houston one time, and I think it was successful

here—but if you could have those all over the place, I think we could tell a great story and get a lot of excited students who might, one day, want to be an engineer here or an astronaut here or whatever.

One of my daughters is a teacher. She actually is a PE [physical education] teacher at a middle school in Pasadena. They had their Career Day a couple of weeks ago, and she invited me. I got to go talk to seventh and eighth-graders. Again, there are some that are just, “Yeah, yeah,” but there’s enough of them that go, “Hmm, how long is it going to take to get to Mars? How are they going to...”—that are interested enough that you can see that they’re thinking that this sounds pretty neat.

WRIGHT: I was going to ask Jennifer if she had a couple of questions for you.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I do have some questions. Tying into what you were talking about, how closely do you work with the Office of Education, or the Astronaut Office, to work on the exhibits and to get people excited about these kind of events?

PARKER: Whenever we are doing an event where it is felt, or we feel, that there should be an education component to it, we’ll work with them. It’s just a matter of saying, “Here’s the event, here’s what we’re doing; do you guys want to come in and try to do workshops? Do you guys want to invite school kids, or do you want to do your educational thing? An example is, we are traveling around our Destination Station exhibit, which is an exhibit on ISS. The theme of that exhibit really is—it’s pretty high level—is to, number one, say space station is done. We’ve got it finished. We’re not here to say, “We’re going to build this thing.” We’re here to say, “We’ve

got a football field-sized thing up there that's manned 24/7, and oh, by the way, the real purpose of it is to do science and do experiments and do all that; here's what we think you guys would be interested in." And we explain, "How you might be able to fly, or get an experiment flown on that." Now, that's the exhibit part of it.

The education people come in, and they contact the schools around the place where we're going to be. We're going to be in San Jose [California] in February [2012]. They will contact schools in that area to say, "We're going to be in San Jose at this exhibit, and we're going to have all these things. We'd like to send some speakers there. We'd like to do any workshops for you." That's how we integrate their work into what we do as a total package of an event. The exhibit is the centerpiece, and then you've got the educational component.

Then we invite astronauts. They might go to a school, they might go to a hospital, they might go to a research facility. That's how we bring in the astronaut appearance as part of it. Whenever we are coordinating any outreach event, if we feel, or if the organization says, is there any chance we can get an astronaut to come, we will coordinate with the astronaut appearances office to have them go to that event and try to get them to do something, a presentation. We don't like, and the astronaut office doesn't like this as well—we don't want them going there just to sign autographs. We want them there to do a presentation.

The last few months, there was an event involving crop circles, crop mazes. There's an association that does this, a national association. This year, their theme was space. There were seven or eight places across the United States where the mazes were being cut into something related to space. Two of them were in our area. One was in Brookshire, which is up by Austin [Texas]. The other one was up in Nebraska. The folks in Nebraska, it was a pumpkin patch, had it in the shape of a space station. The one in Brookshire did one in the shape of a lunar boot. We

sent some exhibits to Brookshire, and we sent an astronaut there because they asked for one and it was approved. It was over a weekend. We had an exhibit, a simple exhibit, because everything is outdoors.

Our outdoor exhibits are not as prevalent as our indoors, just because we don't have that kind of stuff. Same with Nebraska. [Astronaut Clayton B.] Clay Anderson went up there, and we sent some exhibits. We involve the astronauts when we can. Sometimes resources are the driver, and it helps if the organization can pay for travel if it's involved. We try to integrate, coordinate, with other offices if there's a part to play, so to speak. Most of the time, education certainly goes hand-in-hand with what we do.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Earlier, you had mentioned that you were disappointed that Houston didn't get a space shuttle [for permanent display]. Were you involved at all with Space Center Houston and their efforts?

PARKER: Other than just being aware of it, because that had to be done by them, because we really couldn't get involved, I sat in on some of the very preliminary meetings that they had within marketing, who did the RFI [request for Information] response. I sat in with some of the guys that they were going to in the area, like [former Apollo astronaut Eugene A.] Gene Cernan and folks like that who were trying to build up support. That's about as much as I was able to do on that.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you have any involvement in the preservation of the MOCR [Mission Operations Control Room]? It was cleared out at one point. All the consoles were taken out. Then they decided to make it a historic landmark.

PARKER: Only from a standpoint of providing any display support, like the video that they show in there and some of the visuals that they put on the front screen. It was always of the mind that we wanted to make sure that the third-floor of the MOCR remained as is, and not being taken apart, like the second floor. There was a bit of a battle between Johnson Space Center and the Texas Historical Commission. I'm glad that they were able to keep the third floor the way it is. I did not know a whole lot, other than just situational awareness of what was going on. I did know Melody Nation, who was here back then, who worked heavily on that before she retired.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Would you share with us some information about displaying Moon rocks in the exhibits, and some of the perils or concerns that you have showing those?

PARKER: Moon rocks have always been very interesting in this position. Going back to when Headquarters pretty much assigned the responsibility of managing the Lunar Sample Program, they gave it to JSC for a number of reasons. The rocks are here. It's obvious that they didn't want to handle it. I think they looked at it and thought for a moment that they might do it, but they said, "We don't want to do that." So, it's always been at JSC.

Here, lately, I've taken back the responsibility of coordinating the Lunar Sample Program. That was one of those responsibilities that I got from Chuck, and then we brought in another person. When Chuck became the branch chief, we brought in another person, and I said,

“You’re the Lunar Sample guy. You take care of it.” He did that for a number of years, and then when he retired, in ’99, it fell back on me, and I’ve had it ever since.

I think once we announced the Constellation Program—Moon, Mars and Beyond—I think that rejuvenated the program to where we were starting to get a lot more requests for samples, for display samples, for educational disk samples. It’s bubbled up. When the gentleman retired, Boyd Mounce—he retired in ’99—we had a total of about 50, 52 lunar sample displays, what we call long-term loans. Some people call them permanent [displays], but the government doesn’t like that term, so they say long-term. And these are around the world, in the United States and Europe, you name it. About 50, 52.

Now we are getting ready to release the latest sample. A gentleman is coming from [Scienceworks], the Victoria science museum in Melbourne, Australia. He’s coming here on December 18 to pick up a long-term sample. His will be, I think, the 74<sup>th</sup>. Since ’99, we’ve increased to about 20 long-term lunar sample displays. People are just eating that stuff up. We released that one, and we have two or three others that are in works. There’s somewhat of a mystique about lunar material. Just the fact that we say it’s a lunar sample, and it’s in a nitrogen field encased environment—they love that stuff.

Toward the end of this month—as a matter of fact, the day before I retire—some representatives from the Thailand Embassy out of Washington, D.C., are flying here to pick up one of our traveling samples to take to a science show over in Thailand. They’ll pick it up December 29, and they’re bringing it back January 29. My replacement will get to receive it back. Any time we get requests like that from those kinds of countries, we certainly have to get [NASA] International Affairs and Headquarters to make sure that everything is okay, political-wise. Once it’s okay, then we process the loan agreement, and they follow the same guidelines

as far as having to carry it place to place, have to have it under surveillance while displayed, and locked in a safe. All the requirements. They followed all that.

They contacted me and wanted to come to Houston to meet with me. I said, "If you have a trip already planned to Houston for whatever reason, I'll be happy to meet with you, but the loan is set. There's no real reason to meet." I thought, "I'll bet you, coming from Thailand, I'll bet you they want to talk about a new science center over there." Sure enough, they flew down here. There were two of them from the embassy at D.C. Flew here and that's what they wanted to talk about. They said, "We are building a new space science museum in Thailand, and we need to know if NASA can help us with that." We do this all the time. I said, "I can provide you with information sources," and when I told them that I was getting ready to retire, they said, "No, you can't do that." Then they said, "Have you ever been to Thailand?"

"No," I said. "It would be kind of a neat project." Anyway, they're coming down here to pick the sample up and use it. We've got another organization from Bangladesh coming in in February to pick up a lunar sample. Then we've got another person coming from Italy in June or July. I get as much, if not more, requests from foreign folks than I do U.S. folks, for lunar sample material. I don't know how to explain it, other than just people are really interested as we talk more and more about the possibility of going back to the Moon and all that. I think it's neat.

ROSS-NAZZAL: The former Inspector General [IG] official, he's been interested in figuring out where these lunar rocks have gone that NASA gave out after Apollo 11 and Apollo 17. Has there ever been any concern on your part or NASA's part that some of these rocks are missing that had been on loan?

PARKER: I don't think so, because, number one, they're big. They're in big cases. For those samples to become missing, that, to me, would indicate that they would have to be stolen. Literally taken from a facility.

One of the black eyes that I will take with me as I leave the agency is that one of my lunar sample disks that I had, that was on loan to a planetarium up in Delaware, is missing. The lunar sample disk is a six-inch diameter, one-inch thick, acrylic disk that has three rock samples and three solar samples. They're all very little. It's under 10 grams. It's designed to be placed under a microscope. You can see the material, but it's better if you look under the microscope, because with that, you can see the minerals. We have a curriculum guide that has a microscopic photograph of that sample that goes with the disk.

This disk had been on loan to this planetarium for many years. They used it for many years. In updating loan agreements with the gentleman, I learned that I had a loan agreement that was expired, and for whatever reason, I didn't contact him when I should have. As a matter of fact, it was two years after it expired. When I did contact him, I learned that he passed away the previous year. The person who I contacted had no knowledge of this disk. I said, "Here's what you need to do. You need to tear that place apart, basically. Go to his secretary. Go to his house. Go to his widow. Go to anybody, everybody, to find out what happened to this disk."

The last emails that I had got from him said, "Yeah, I still have it and still want to use it." It's just that I didn't contact him when I should have. This new guy looked all over. Finally, I said, "If you can't locate the disk, I'm going to have to turn this over to the IG, and they're going to be calling you." I thought maybe something might turn up, but it never did. IG has contacted them. It's an ongoing investigation, but they still haven't located this disk. That is something

that someone could put in their pocket and walk off with. I still think that either the gentleman put it somewhere and just didn't tell anybody, or somebody put it somewhere, not knowing what it was, or somebody stole it.

Just one of those things that I always said, "I don't want to go out of here with something like that not resolved," but it is what it is. The [lunar sample] curator has already written it off. The curator—they loan out thin sections and samples to principle investigators, and they know that in the course of work being done, they're going to lose certain amounts. It's chalked-up like that. They've already literally written it off their books, so to speak.

Here, recently, there was an IG audit of the Lunar Sample Program. They're ready to submit the final report to the NASA Administrator. One of the investigators sent me a note just yesterday, saying, "As far as that disk, is there any word on it?" I said, "Not that I have heard. Nothing on it." It's still MIA [missing in action], I guess. It would not totally surprise me, in another two, three years, if the thing pops up on eBay [online auction site]. When it does, somebody is going to have some "'splainin' to do, Lucy." The IG, they've got their eyes on eBay and all these places. I get notes periodically from them, saying, "Have you seen this? What do you think?" What they generally do is they look at the item. They'll get not just my opinion, but if it's hardware, they'll contact people to say, "Do you think this is something that the agency should spend money to try to recover, or is it something that probably just got thrown away?" They contact me occasionally to say, "What do you think of this? What do you think of that?"

You've probably heard of some of these others, like the lady that was given a piece of Moon rock that she said that her husband had gotten from Neil Armstrong. That got taken away from her. I don't know what the agency would do with something like that. You talk to Neil

Armstrong and he said, “I didn’t give anybody a Moon rock.” For people like Neil Armstrong, I don’t know that he would ever do anything like that.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What’s your relationship with the lunar curator and how do you approach him about getting some samples?

PARKER: He’s actually part of the process. When we get requests in for long-term lunar samples, there’s a process. People say, “Send me the application.” There’s not really an application. There’s a process where they send in their request, and then we go back and say, “We’ve got some general guidelines that we need for you to put together and follow in order to submit your proposal to us.”

There are two parts to it. There’s the display part, which we ask them for a very detailed narrative of how they’re planning to showcase it. We don’t want it to be on a bookcase. We don’t want it to be on a pedestal. We want to see it as part of an exhibit on lunar and planetary science. Show us everything that you can show us: the graphics, the texts. What happens is, when that comes in, when we get that package, I look at it to make sure that it meets the checkmarks. Then what I have to do with it is I send it to the curator, who, in turn, takes it to his curation team. The acronym is CAPTEM, C-A-P-T-E-M [Curation and Analysis Planning Team for Extraterrestrial Materials]. Gary [E.] Lofgren is the curator, and with this group of scientists that make up this team, they look at this presentation and they critique it.

If it passes their criteria, then we approve it, we recommend the allocation of a sample. If not, they’ll send it back to them and explain what falls short in these areas. Then we send that back to the requestor and say, “Here’s what we need to do with this,” and then they correct it. If

they come back and say, “Oh my gosh, this is really not very good; you need to focus more on this,” then we go back to the requestor and say, “I’m sorry, but here’s what we need to do if you want to do it.”

We’ve had places like that. They have a couple of pictures and they have a base and we tell them that that’s not going to work. As a matter of fact, there’s an organization up in, I want to say South Dakota. We’ve been going back and forth with them, because their display is just not quite there. That’s the display part. The other part is the security plan. Requestors have to show us the case that the display is going to go in, and what it’s going to be made of. We need drawings, what kind of surveillance, what kind of alarms, what kind of locks which have to be combination locks. We need as many details as you can.

Again, I look at it and I make sure that it meets the initial criteria, and then I have to send that to the security folks, and they look at it, and they have their little checklist. They go through and make sure that it meets all the criteria. If it does, they send it back and say it’s been approved. You get the two approvals together, and then I send the congratulatory letter.

The sample has been allocated, so soon as the sample has been identified with the sample number, I have that number, I will issue the loan agreement. You sign the loan agreement. Once you have signed the addendum that says you will reimburse the government for the cost of the [display] case, they’ll make it. Then we contact you, you pick it up, and it’s yours to display.

A lot of people say, reimburse the government? The cost of making one of those nice glass cases? Before, it used to be free. We’d just give it to them. Now, due to the cost accounting situation that we’re in, they have to reimburse the government \$9,500. That’s the cost to process the sample, to order the materials which are all handmade, precision made, and then the assembly and the mounting. They get these stainless steel parts and pieces that are

machine made, and they get the glass that's ground properly, and it has to seal. Once they get all that together, they put it all together inside one of those cases. They pull a vacuum, inject the nitrogen gas, make it ready, and it's ready to go. That process can take anywhere from six months to two years, because the scientific team that meets to look at the proposals, they meet at least once a year, and sometimes twice a year. They meet every year when they have the annual Lunar and Planetary Science Conference. They meet then, and then sometimes they meet in the summertime. You have to hit them when they're around.

WRIGHT: How big is that sample that goes in that box?

PARKER: The sample is anywhere from about 60, 70 grams, up to about 180 grams. About the size of maybe a large, large marble to the size a little bit larger than a golf ball.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I'm curious -- I think the last time I went to Space Center Houston, you could actually touch the Moon rock, right?

PARKER: There are eight touchable Moon rocks in the world right now. The one that was at Space Center Houston was maybe the second one. We actually made that sample for a Paris Air Show. It came back here, and then we kept it in the vault. We never really used it. When Space Center Houston was being developed, one of the things that we wanted to have there was a touchable Moon rock. We put that in there. That display, as you can imagine, has a little bit more security. If you look at it, the way it's mounted, it's mounted in such a way that people have to curl their fingers. They can't get a sharp object in there. That's for that reason. The one

at the Smithsonian is out in the open, but they have a guard sitting out there. They came to us and said, “We want to take our guard away.” We said, “Okay, then you are going to have to change your display. It can’t be open like that. It’s got to be such that you can’t get a screwdriver or a knife so people will chip at it.” They didn’t want to spend the money for a case, so guess what? They spend the money for a guard.

There’s eight of those in the world. Three of those eight are transient Moon rocks. We’ve got one in our DTE, “Driven to Explore” [mobile display unit]. Headquarters has one that they use for Headquarters events. Then there’s another touchable sample in the mobile exhibit that Marshall [Space Flight Center] operates, the “Exploration Experience.” It’s a touchable sample. The other five are at museums. We have one, KSC has one, Pacific Science Center [Seattle, Washington] has one, Smithsonian has one, and then the science museum in Mexico City [University of Museum Science and Arts] has one.

The curator told me he’d like to get more samples like that out. We have entertained requests, but like I said, it’s a little bit more involved when you start talking about security, surveillance, the display mount, and all that. We’ve had several people ask about it, but not any that have come back to give us full plans. JPL [NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, California] wanted one. They haven’t submitted us a plan. [NASA John H.] Glenn Research Center Visitors Center, the Great Lakes Science Center [Cleveland, Ohio], hasn’t submitted us a plan on that. We will entertain them, but we have to have the plans before we can do anything with the requests.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I think I only had one more question for you, and that was to ask you to talk a little bit about your work with the media. Of course, you wanted to be on the other side, but you found yourself on the flipside.

PARKER: While I didn't work with the media side, I did do a lot of work *with* news media. I think, back in the days of Skylab and all the things that went on, with the problems that we had with that program in its beginning, I did a lot of work with media, from taking them into trainers and places like that. I met a lot of the media folks back then, like [ABC-TV Science Editor] Jules Bergman. You guys remember him? He's since passed away. Also, Roy Neal [from NBC-TV]. Certainly all the local guys that were here.

I did a lot of work with them in so many ways. I can remember, when Skylab fell, back in '79 [for its deorbit]—that was about the time I was transient from the [JSC] media side to the outreach side. We were doing a lot of work. Of course, everybody in Public Affairs should be able to work on either side. When they needed people to help staff the news desk, they would bring us over, and since I had been around since Skylab, they said, "Come over and help us with that." I did several on-camera interviews with local folks.

It was funny. Back in that day, I ran into a guy who was a [KPRC-TV] Channel 2 reporter, beat reporter, a guy named Mike Capps. It just so happened that he and I went to Sam Houston State [University, Huntsville, Texas]. We were in the same courses together, and he was working for Channel 2 at the time. Eventually went on to work for CNN [Cable News Network]. When he saw me out here and he was covering Skylab falling, he said, "I want to do an interview with you." A "Live at Five" type thing. So I said, "Sure, as long as you don't set

me up.” I had been set up before by news guys; you’ve got to watch them. He said, “I’ll tell you exactly what I’m going to ask you.” I said, “Okay, I’ll do that.”

A lot of fun. One of the things that we did back in those days, we did some work with some movie companies that did movies out here, one of which was a sequel to a movie called “Westworld.” It had Yul Brynner and James Brolin, about robots and people who would go on vacations and would go to these “places,” one of them being the Wild West. You could kind of live out your fantasy as a gun-slinger but the robots went wild and start killing people. The sequel to that was a thing called, “Futureworld,” with Blythe Danner. You know who she is, Blythe Danner? You ever hear of Gwyneth Paltrow? That’s her mother. I’ll tell you something about that in just a second, too. And also starred Peter Fonda. Again, it was a story about people going to these vacation places. One was where you could be an astronaut. You could fly all over the place, but the robots go wild and kill people.

About 90 percent of it was filmed at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, and down at the [Houston] Intercontinental Airport. Blythe Danner was the featured star. I really had not even heard of her. Her husband, at the time, was a guy by the name of Bruce Paltrow, was on site. He produced television series, one of them that I remember was called “St. Elsewhere” about a hospital. He was on site and had expressed an interest to go on a tour of the Center. People were asking, “Anybody want to take this guy on a tour?” I said, “I’ll do it.” Again, you volunteer for that kind of stuff.

I took him to Mission Control. I took him all over the place. Actually, I think I even was able to take him inside the Control Room, and he sat behind the consoles and he just loved that stuff. Toward the end of the tour, he said, “You’ve got to meet my wife.” She had her own little

trailer, because she had just had a baby. She had just had a baby, Gwyneth Paltrow. Six weeks old. He said, “Would you like to meet my wife?” I said, “Yeah, that would be great.”

We go over and go into her trailer, and I meet Blythe Danner, and she brings out this little, tiny baby girl. At the time, I had no kids, so I’m holding this little baby girl, and thought, “Oh, how cute.” She said, “Would you like to have some red Zinger tea?” I said, “Sure.” So I’m sitting there drinking Red Zinger tea with Blythe Danner. Her husband finally said, “I’ve got to go. I’ll see you later, honey.” I said, “I better leave,” but she said, “No, sit and chat.” So I talked with her for I don’t know how long. I was so impressed with the fact that here was a new mom, working, with baby there, still nursing and all that. Later on, two or three years later, when I had my first child, I named her Holly Blythe, after Blythe Danner. I tell people, when that little girl [Gwyneth Paltrow] was a little, tiny baby, I actually held her. Now she’s a big movie star. That was a neat thing there.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I’m going to have to check out that movie now.

PARKER: You can probably find it in the 50 cent bargain rack; it was really a pretty bad movie. Who else was in it? Stuart Margolin. I tell people, if you see that movie, if you know about Johnson Space Center and know how Building 29 looked before it looks like it is now, and the Control Center—they did a lot of filming inside of the electrical building, Building 25. They did a lot of filming inside of the vacuum chamber, with spiky-looking sound deafeners and all that. In Building 32, as a matter of fact, the climax scene was Peter Fonda and his clone fighting at the top of the chamber, Chamber A. One of them takes a dive off of it, into a big, big airbag. It was a neat scene to watch. You can get a good look of what the insides of the Johnson Space Center

looked liked. I think some of it was even filmed in Building 2, our old office areas. It was a fun movie, it was a terrible movie, but it was a neat experience.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Do you have much contact with the media in your current position?

PARKER: Occasionally, when people want to talk about Moon rocks and artifacts that appear on eBay. I did get a call from several people on this professor out in Arizona, since his students are calling, wanting to know where the locations of all the small world plaques. I've gotten several calls about that. That's another one of those unfortunate situations where we tell people that the government and NASA does not give away Moon rocks, except only one—the exception of the Apollo 11 and the Apollo 17, what we call small world plaques. That's the only time that the government has literally given away the Moon rocks. We've given those to either the states or the countries, with the idea that those states and those countries would put them on display in a government building.

We do not give the rock to Arkansas to go to [former governor] Bill Clinton to go home with him, or we do not give it to the governor of Colorado for him to put in a shoebox and take home. We gave it to the people of that state. It just so happens that the governor accepted it, and we expected him to put it in a case somewhere in the governor's mansion. Same with the countries. We gave them to Germany and Italy for them to put in a government building for it to be there forever.

The ones that have surfaced are the ones you hear about, but I would almost bet that half of them probably aren't where they're supposed to be. When NASA hears about that, through whatever means, they still have a keen interest in trying to reacquire them. What they've done in

some of the cases is that—one that was gotten back from one of the small countries, Honduras, I think, was to get it redone, get it back the way it's supposed to be presented, and represent it to the people of Honduras. Now, whether or not that's happened, I'm not real sure. Actually, what we did there is when we did those presentations back in '72, 73, 74, we did that through the U.S. State Department. They're as much on the hook as anybody as their locations.

This latest program—I say latest; it started back in 2005—is the lunar sample distribution program, called the Ambassador of Exploration Lunar Sample display. Before they left, NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe and the then-director of Public Affairs came up with the idea of making small chips of samples, about one gram, one and a half grams, two grams, available to all of either the astronauts or the families of astronauts, starting from Mercury through the Apollo program, to present to them so they could then allocate to their own institution of choosing, whether it be a museum or a school or a university or whatever. We've been doing that, and 44, 45 of those have been remade. Not only did we give them to the astronauts, the Mercury, Gemini, Apollo astronauts, but we also gave one to the [President] John [F.] Kennedy family. Received by his daughter Caroline Kennedy, she designated Rice University [Houston, Texas] as a recipient for that. We gave one to [former JSC Director Christopher C.] Chris Kraft because of who he is. He gave his to his college, Virginia Tech [Blacksburg, Virginia] which was displayed in the building where the [campus] shootings took place. We gave on to [Eugene F.] Gene Kranz, and he designated his old high school in Ohio. Then we gave one to Walter Cronkite [former CBS News pioneer]. He gave his to the University of Texas [Austin, Texas] Center of American History.

Those are the only non-astronauts that were presented these awards. We still have about seven or eight that have not been presented to that astronaut because that astronaut has not

designated a recipient. This program has been going since 2005, '06. Unfortunately, the lady at Headquarters who's the Headquarters fulcrum, if you will, for this program, she's retiring, too. After December 31<sup>st</sup>, the person who takes her place may or may not pick up the ball on this. These samples, like I said, they're little samples, and they're encapsulated in a cylinder, three inches in diameter, about four inches tall. It's got a beveled edge, so you can see the sample, and it's got a little inscription of where it came. We made a base for it. It's illuminated from underneath. It's a nice little display.

Again, once a recipient has been identified, we enter into an agreement with them, and they have to, at a minimum, satisfy the same security requirements that a regular sample recipient or a display sample would have to go through. They've got to have surveillance, all of this elaborate stuff, because of the size of the sample. You could put that sample in your pocket and walk off with it if it's not behind a case. The security is still there. These samples, as opposed to the small world plaque, I have files on each one of them. I have loan agreements on each one of these. I have contacts on each one of these. The other ones, once we gave them to the US State Department, who knows where they are.

People ask me, "Do I have my retirement set up with some of my Moon rocks to take with me?" I said, no, I don't want to wind up in Leavenworth for the rest of my life. That's for sure." Think about that. It's like somebody that might try to steal a valuable painting. Why would you do it? Other than putting it in your house, in your basement, somewhere where nobody else is going to see it except you, what do you do with it? You steal a Moon rock; what are you going to do with it? Are you going to try to sell it? Come on. We had some pretty smart kids try to do that. That's not going to work.

WRIGHT: We kept you a little bit longer than we originally agreed, but is there anything else you'd like to add, or some areas or special other stories that you can think of?

PARKER: I wish that, somewhere in the beginning of my career, I would have been more focused about keeping a journal. There are so many things that went on, like when we were first negotiating with the World's Fair people over in New Orleans, we were going over there pretty regularly. One particular time we were going over there to meet with them, I was with Hal Stall, the big boss, Chuck Biggs, the branch chief, and I think [Daniel R.] Dan Remington, the legal guy. We were going to go and meet with those guys. We were going to meet at the Michoud [Assembly] Facility, just outside of New Orleans. I, for some strange reason, was designated the driver of the vehicle.

We're in this car, and we are heading toward Michoud. I guess either no one really remembered being there before, or we thought we knew that the facility was along this road. Someone said, "We need to stop and get something to eat, real quick. Why don't we stop at this McDonald's and get a hamburger, and we'll just eat on the way?" We go through the drive-through and get our hamburgers, and we're heading out, going toward Michoud. I guess, driving along, everybody must have had their head down. We drive, and we pass by the entrance. We're driving along. I'm thinking, it's got to be here; it's a big building. It's got a big NASA [logo] on the side. [We] keep driving, keep driving. We drove so far, we literally drove into Mississippi.

We drove so far that we literally had to stop and get gas, because we were getting low on gas. Still, we're thinking, it's got to be out here somewhere. We're going down whatever that highway, not Interstate 10, but one of the U.S. highways [I-510], and finally I said, "Let's find

somebody and stop and ask where this place is.” We finally chased down, and I mean literally chased down, a [U.S. Postal] truck, and got him to pull over to the side of the road. I was flashing lights and stuff.

I said, “We are from NASA and we’re trying to get to the NASA Michoud facility.” This poor guy just said, “The NASA Michoud? I have no idea.” The only thing left to do was to just get back and drive back into town and retrace our route. We drive back, and sure enough, we come to where it is, thinking, “How in the world did we miss this?” Of course, we’re about an hour and a half late for our meeting. We go in and we apologize. Finally we get done, and we’re heading back into New Orleans to go back to the hotel. Literally a mile from that McDonald’s is where Michoud was located, the exit that we missed. I figured we just must have had our heads down or something.

WRIGHT: No cell phones, no GPS [global positioning system].

PARKER: Yeah, exactly. None of that stuff. The first time I saw a cell phone—there was a Hollywood group that was here scouting some filming locations at JSC. I took them over to Building 9 to look at the mock-up and trainers. Building 9, the place where the FFT [Full Fuselage Trainer] is located. As a matter of fact, when the tours were on site, we took them through into the tail end of where the FFT is, and they could walk up and they could look down into the payload bay. We had a desk there for our tour guide. We were there, and this guy from Hollywood walked outside, and he pulled out his cell phone, which was the size of a brick. He was talking to his office back in California. I said, “Holy mackerel. Isn’t that neat?” I was thinking, that thing must weight 15 pounds. He’s sitting there, using it like a walkie-talkie, but

he was talking to somebody in California. That was my first introduction to a cell phone. Now, good grief.

What a ride. What a ride. I just hope that the people behind me have as much fun and have as much to tell in 40 years. I've got to believe they probably will, because some of the really exciting times—when we finally get to the point where we've got a vehicle, and we start taking it some place, whether it's to an asteroid or the Moon or whatever—once we start going to places like that. when we go to Mars—I would hope that I might be alive, but I'm not sure about that. But when we go to Mars, you think the place was jumping during Apollo and during the first shuttle flights—when we go to Mars, that is going to be some kind of event.

WRIGHT: We hope that you are around. Maybe you could be giving some commentary of the old days, even back then.

PARKER: I don't know. They may not need a 95-year-old guy to do that.

WRIGHT: Maybe you'll just be enjoying it. Thanks so much, Louis. We enjoyed and learned a lot from you this morning.

[End of interview]