

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

ARDIS M. SHANKS
INTERVIEWED BY JENNIFER ROSS-NAZZAL
KERRVILLE, TEXAS – 10 JULY 2019

ROSS-NAZZAL: Today is July 10th, 2019. This interview with Ardis Shanks is being conducted in Kerrville, Texas, for the JSC Oral History Project. The interviewer is Jennifer Ross-Nazzal, assisted by Sandra Johnson and her cute little dog.

SHANKS: Kona.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Kona. Thanks again for having us out to your house. We certainly appreciate the time that you're taking this morning. I wanted to ask you about your move into Houston. I understand that you bought a house in Nassau Bay.

SHANKS: Had it built.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Why did you move to Houston?

SHANKS: I was married to a guy who was with the DuPont Company, and he was transferred to the Houston area. DuPont was generous enough to send me down to find a house. They gave me two days.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's very generous.

SHANKS: I couldn't find a house that I liked. I'd been living in a gigantic Victorian house across from Niagara Falls, and there's nothing like that around. I love antiques, and I look for that. I found a lot. There's a little lake in the back of Nassau Bay, and I found a lot on a corner that faced that. In those two days, I found a builder and a plan. Because I'd done many houses—too many—I sent him instructions of everything that I wanted: the wallpaper, what numbers, where it went, the tiles, everything. When we arrived to move in he had only made one mistake. He'd put one tile where another—he switched. He said I was the easiest he had ever had to work with. I shook his hand, smiled, and he drove away.

What I wanted to do was set myself up as an artist in the area because that's what I've always been. I started selling paintings when I was in high school. I'd studied with some of the most famous [artists]. Norman Rockwell was a friend of my father because Dad worked in the main office, which was in New York City, and Rockwell did a lot of stuff for the company.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What company was that?

SHANKS: Boy Scouts of America. When I was not even a teenager he would take my drawings in and show them to Mr. Rockwell. I didn't know about it. I wouldn't have known who he was anyway. Eventually my dad got transferred to the Del-Mar-Va Council, which is Delaware, Maryland, and part of Virginia. Norman Rockwell said, "Let me help you set up how she should get educated, because she's not going to get what she needs in high school." He picked out some choices of artists that he had been students with. I was in an adult class nude life drawing at night one night a week and on Saturdays with another famous artist doing still life paintings.

Then the schools and my dad got together and said, “She’s beyond what the teacher is going to try to teach.” They decided I could do whatever I wanted to do. I didn’t have to do what the project was. I would paint what I wanted, and I always got an A.

I give thanks to Mr. Rockwell, who I never met, for getting that all going. I was a pretty advanced artist even as a teenager. When I got to Houston, my goal personally was not just to be a mother of four and a housewife but to further a career as an artist. I was fortunate enough to get the *Houston Post* I think it was, the newspaper, to come out and do an interview. They did a big article in the people section or whatever you call it: a picture of me at an easel with a painting and [an article] about me. That got the attention of the public.

I don’t know if there was even another portrait painter in Houston at that time. I started getting all these commissions. I had set everything up with my easel in the living room/dining room that had a big high ceiling, because I wasn’t given the money by my husband to build a separate studio. It worked fine.

How I met [astronaut] Alan [L. Bean] in all this—I’d go to people’s houses in Nassau Bay mostly but also in Houston. Several people said to me, “Alan Bean wants you to paint his daughter.”

I’m going, “Big deal, his money is no different than anybody else’s.” That’s my thought. Typical. I was teaching a class in one of the apartment complexes. The owners gave me an apartment free. I taught adults there one night a week, and then I taught adults one night a week at my house. One night I was teaching down in the apartments, and when I came home I went into the kitchen. The kids come running down the hall yelling, “Guess who just called you, Mom.”

“Who?”

“Alan Bean.”

See, when he walked on the Moon it was on the TV. I took them out in the front and said, “We haven’t met him, but our neighbor four houses [down], his house [is] around the lake; our neighbor and a citizen of the United States of America is walking on that right now.” They were like [makes face]—when I think of it I get goose bumps.

I thought, “Oh geez, I got to call him back. Do I call him general or captain or what?” I didn’t know. I dialed the number. I don’t know. Did you ever talk to Alan?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, I did.

SHANKS: He has a very distinct kind of a fast-moving voice. You remember that? He said hello, and I said, “Hello, this is Ardis returning your call.” These words, I’ll never forget them. He said, “Ardis, I’ve been wanting to have you do my daughter Amy’s portrait, but I haven’t been able to because I’ve been on a really long trip and I just got back.” Very funny, Alan.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Was this from Skylab?

SHANKS: His long trip was to the Moon.

ROSS-NAZZAL: So this was Apollo 12.

SHANKS: Yes. He said, “Can I come over and talk to you about it?”

I said, “Sure.”

He said, "All right, I'll be there at 8:00 in the morning." I'm thinking I've got to get myself all fixed up by 8:00 and four kids off to school. When it got to be almost 8:00, I'm standing in my front hall, and I have a grandfather clock there, an antique. I hear this Corvette come. You know how loud they are. I hear it coming around and up to the house and stop. I'm waiting because I'm trying to see him. All of a sudden the doorbell rings, and the clock strikes 8:00 at the exact same time.

He comes in, I still have the piece of furniture, it's a French lit de repos. I'll show you later. He came in the living room, and he sat down. He's got his usual big grin on his face. I look at him, I'm sitting in the big French chair opposite. I said, "Alan, I know you are a national and international hero." He smiles even bigger. I said, "But that doesn't mean I'm going to like you." He starts laughing.

He says, "Well, I know you're one of the best painters ever but that doesn't mean I'm going to like you either." That was the beginning of a super friendship that lasted until about four weeks before he passed away. He would send me e-mails. The last one I got he said, "Ardis, I'm doing this space thing." That's all he ever did anyway. He said, "I'm not sure about the background color."

My answer was, "Alan, you are the artist. You make it the way you want it, and you'll be happy with it and so will everybody else." He said thank you, and I guess that's what he did. He passed away four weeks before my birthday, which was May 28th. I've missed that guy. We got to be incredible friends.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I bet. What year did you move to Houston?

SHANKS: Oh my gosh, how am I going to figure that out?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Apollo 12 was in '69.

SHANKS: I don't remember the times for all. Apollo 12, that's Skylab or what?

ROSS-NAZZAL: No, that was when he walked on the Moon, so that was '69.

SHANKS: I'd been there a few years, a couple years anyway. I don't even know how old my youngest son is. We moved there when he and Amy Bean were in the third grade. If you can figure out when she was born you can figure it out. I don't keep up with dates, as you can see. We did such great things.

I got divorced, happily. I'd been planning it a long time, but I needed to get into a situation where I could support my family, because he told me I was going to have zip and that the three younger children and I could each walk out the front door with a suitcase. I believed him. It didn't turn out that way.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's good.

SHANKS: When I was single there for a long time, people thought that I was at home doing nothing, so if they wanted to go have lunch or go do something people would call me. "Hey, Ardis, you want to, you know, today?"

It's like, "Sure, I'll put my brushes down." Alan used to do that too. He'd call me up and say—this is the funniest one of all.

He'd call me up. Said, "I need to go into town today because I want to buy one of those metal toolboxes on wheels." I don't know what you call them. "Will you go with me?"

I said, "Sure, Alan."

We went in his Corvette downtown, and you know what the traffic is like. On the way back, it's loud and noisy. You're sitting almost on the ground, and you can't see any of the dials because they're deep in cans, if you're in the passenger seat. I start noticing we're zooming in and out of traffic. It's really loud. Once he even went off the road onto the dirt and cut back in. I'm getting kind of scared, so I lean over and I say, "Hey, Alan."

He says, "What?"

I say, "How fast are we going?"

He looked back at me and he says, "Oh, just a little over 100." He starts laughing. I went, "Ardis," in my head, "if he can get to the Moon and back okay, I'm sure that he can get me back to my house in Nassau Bay," and he did.

After he said that I said, "Alan."

"What?"

"Aren't you afraid you'll get a ticket?"

"They'd have to catch me first."

He was a gas. He was a pain in the neck in my art class, because he never wanted to do what I was instructing everybody to do. He'd get up against the wall and put his easel so that I couldn't see what he was doing. I'd peek around. He was doing some shot of space. How am I going to teach the basics if he won't—so we had a few confrontations.

I did teach him for quite a while, and he was fun to have in the class. I even have a picture here of him in my class which I'll share with you.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oh yes, we'd like to see that. He hadn't had any experience of painting until [your classes]?

SHANKS: Apparently he had gotten lessons from someone that he wasn't satisfied with. That's what I got from him. I said, "Why do you want to do this?"

He says, "Ardis, when I retire from the space program I want to be able to paint space. I'll be the only artist that's ever been in space, that's painting space. I can make a living doing it." He did.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oh yes. Very well actually. He made quite a lot of money.

SHANKS: I did Amy's portrait. She was about that tall [demonstrates] and blond. My youngest son Scott, he was so cute. There was a little brick wall around that you went through to my front door and a little garden. I kept hearing a little girl say, "Scott, come out! Scott, come out," over and over. Finally I went to the living room window, and I looked out. There's three little girls sitting on the top. I wonder where Scott is. Finally I went back to his bedroom. I said, "Scott."

He says, "I know. I'm not coming out."

I went to the front door, and I said, "I'm sorry, Amy and your friends, Scott is not coming out."

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oh, that's funny. Nassau Bay sounds like a nice family neighborhood. Is that why you picked it?

SHANKS: It was. I wanted to live in River Oaks because they were older houses, and I was coming from a Victorian. I found one I really liked, and my husband refused to move there because it was going to be too long a drive for him to go to DuPont. He said, "We're going to go down to Nassau Bay," and that's how I ended up [there].

That's Alan and that's me and that's other people in the class. [Shows picture]

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oh my gosh. He looks so young there. Everybody does.

SHANKS: Here's a better print of it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Is this photo in your home, or is it in the apartment?

SHANKS: No, that's where I taught. That was my family room. I bought enough easels so that everyone would have one when they came to the house. Then they put them in the garage when they left.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's great.

JOHNSON: That's amazing.

SHANKS: The funny part about it is my education, I'm just an artist. I've got brains from NASA, people who did important jobs that had degree after degree, and here I am just an artist and I'm teaching them. I was very humble about the whole thing, but we had a good time. Do you want any pictures?

JOHNSON: If you want to share.

ROSS-NAZZAL: We can scan them and return them to you, so yes.

SHANKS: Yes. You might want that.

ROSS-NAZZAL: We always like to add them to the transcripts because then it just adds nice detail. ...

SHANKS: I had a party at my house for the wives. ... This was really fun. [Shows photos]

ROSS-NAZZAL: I wanted to ask about that [the patch on the antique car] as well. I understand you designed that for the vehicle.

SHANKS: I painted it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I wondered if you were involved in the decision to go with those Western nineteenth century [outfits].

SHANKS: They came up with that idea and asked me if I would do a patch big enough to cover the tire on the back. Gratia [Lousma] has it. She's not sure where it is.

ROSS-NAZZAL: They have moved a couple of times, so it probably is somewhere. ...

SHANKS: Jack [R.] Lousma has a really neat story about the wives' patch. He was actually sitting right where you are right now when he told me about it. He said that when they got up into space they each had a little [locker] that was for their personal stuff, and when they each opened their door they saw the wives' patch. That's the first they knew about the wives' patch. That was a surprise. He's so sweet. He said, "Ardis, every day I would open that and it would make me happy to see that patch." Isn't that darling of him?

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's sweet.

SHANKS: He's a jewel among men.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Why don't we talk about the patch, since we've got it in front of us. Tell us how the idea came about. Did you know these three women? Why did you decide to design a patch specifically for that crew?

SHANKS: It was because I'd been—is it Ellington [Field, Houston, Texas] where they land?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes.

SHANKS: I'd been over there because I knew space people. I'd get invited to their parties, and they probably got sick of just having space people. Somebody probably said, "For a change let's get a monkey from the Overton Park Zoo." The zoo refused, so they said, "well, let's just get an artist."

I would get invited to these things, and I got to know a lot of these people, and that's why I'd end up going when they'd come back. I noticed the guys got mega attention, which they deserved, and the wives would sit there quietly smiling with no attention. I thought, "By golly, somebody needs to do something for these women. They stay at home and take care of the kids and take care of the house and pay the bills and everything, and nobody even gives them a look."

It turned out that Skylab II was doing Leonardo da Vinci's man with two sets of hands and two sets of legs. I looked at that, and I said, "Holy moly, this is it." I had a young girl who posed for me in the nude whenever I needed that. Her last name was Wah. Her husband was in my son's band. My oldest son was a musician. Cheir was her first name. I said, "Cheir, here's what I want to do." I showed her the real patch. She knew what I wanted, so she did that for me, and that's Cheir Wah right there. [Points to photo] I made the wives' patch. Instead of the last names of the guys, I put the first names of the girls.

I did it as a fun joke for the wives, period, never imagining it was going to get the kind of attention that it has over the years. It just went nuts. I gave gobs of them away. Anybody who wanted them, I'd just give them a handful. I was a little less apt to give people the cloth ones because I didn't have a whole lot of those.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Those are expensive. What did the wives think when you unveiled the patch?

SHANKS: What happened is I had a party at my house and invited them. I had cut them out, because they came from the printer like that. I cut three out and one for me. When they came in, I stuck it on them.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Ah, so that's what that is on their shirts in this photo.

SHANKS: Yes. They just thought it was a gas. It was a big party. It was joyous. I think that's the first time people had given them any kind of credit.

ROSS-NAZZAL: How did you manage to get the patch on board the spacecraft?

SHANKS: I still do not know the answer. The reason is it was very very illegal for somebody to stick something [onboard] that they hadn't approved of on any of those [missions]. Somebody who worked inside that thing, and nobody would ever tell me who, put those on. I wasn't even told that it was done. I didn't know it until I got a picture of Alan Bean on my computer looking at this patch in space. That's the first I knew that it had even happened. Nobody's ever going to tell who did it. I'm sorry, I don't know.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It's worth asking. Obviously you had done the portrait of Sue [Bean] by then. Did you know the other two wives? Were you close friends with them?

SHANKS: Oh yes, Gratia, I'd been to her house. Helen [Mary Walker Garriott] I knew better. She lived in Nassau Bay also, a few blocks from me. She did artwork. It wasn't quite the same kind of stuff I did. You can see some of my paintings here. There's one behind the clock. You can look around and see paintings if you want to. I considered myself a professional artist. I thought her Moon pots were really adorable. It was a different kind of art. Can I put it that way?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes.

SHANKS: Then later on in my career when I moved over here after living in Florida. I did a lot of photography in Houston, splashdowns and things at people's houses and things at NASA, covering with photographs, and I did that in Florida. A guy had asked me to do that so he wouldn't have to travel down from Washington. All that stuff I took pictures of, I knew most of the people. It was easy for me to get good shots. If they didn't know somebody they might just go like that [demonstrates], but for me they'd do everything. All those pictures would end up in 27 French-speaking newspapers in Europe. He never paid me a cent for any of them. It was a favor.

However, one of the things that was going up—I'll think of which one it was. If you go upstairs you can see the picture. I had a press pass. You get a big clearance; it's not easy. They would let you know, and I'd go over. They would load us into a van and take us out to take pictures. I'd have three cameras and three tripods put together so that I had different kinds of film in each one, so I'd get a lot of stuff. It was the [Space Shuttle].

They were really harsh. They'd give you like 10 minutes. If you didn't grab your stuff and get in the van immediately, they'd grab them and throw the cameras with the tripods into the back. When you're working with Nikons, it's not cheap.

That night it was still light when we went out there. When they said, "Load up," for some unknown reason I hesitated. Everybody was running off the hill, and just as I decided to do it the lights came on on the whole thing. I was the only person that got pictures of it with the lights on, and so Jacques, that I was doing this for, sent it to *Aviation Week & Space Technology* and they put it on the cover. Inside it said who took it, and he was kind enough to send me \$200. I can't imagine how much Jacques got for that. That's the full amount I made doing photographs for Jacques.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned that you took a lot of photos. So you went to a lot of splashdown parties in Houston after Apollo missions?

SHANKS: Yes, I'd take pictures to send to French-speaking newspapers. We knew each other. We were friends. I didn't have to say, "I'm Ardis."

ROSS-NAZZAL: Tell us about the splashdown parties. A lot of people tell us that they were really exciting and very interesting, but they don't provide too many details.

SHANKS: My favorite party that I went to there was when they had the unveiling of Amy Bean's portrait].

ROSS-NAZZAL: Tell us about that.

SHANKS: Their layout in their house was a typical Nassau Bay house. When you walked in the front door, you knew where everything was. It was a two-story house. You walked in the entrance and their living room, always tiny—big family room and then a dining room. I walked in, and I looked and hanging over the buffet in the dining room was this portrait.

Everybody was, “Ardis is here.” I’m not good at all that attention. That was a super party. That was my favorite of any that I went to.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I bet. Seeing your work on someone’s wall. Was it a big deal to you that an astronaut had asked you to do portraits? Or was it kind of like [anyone else] asking [you] to commission a painting?

SHANKS: It was a big deal that we got to be such good friends. I’ve done stuff for movie stars and other big deal people. They’re just human beings. I can admire them for what their accomplishments are. ...

ROSS-NAZZAL: I bet you have some interesting stories.

SHANKS: You don’t even want to hear them. But anyway, I felt beyond what he had accomplished and beyond what I’d accomplished, as two people we just understood each other.

He was such a scream. He would call me. My dentist had a cousin, they called him Crazy George, who lived over near the swamps way on the other side of Houston. His hobby

was catching alligators. He'd come over. He didn't work; he just played. He'd take a Harley-Davidson out of Don's garage and come to my house. I'd hear him coming. Those are loud. I'd go open the door and he'd say, "Ha ha, hi, Ardis, it's Crazy George." Okay. He says, "Come on, let's go to town."

I'd be wearing a little halter top and hot pants and nothing else, and I had long hair. I'd jump on the back, no helmet, no nothing, and we'd zoom into town in and out of traffic. One night, I got a phone call from Alan. "Ardis."

"Yes."

"Alan."

"Hi."

"I need to talk to you. I'll be there at 8:00 in the morning."

"Okay, bye."

He comes over, sits down on the lit de repos. "Ardis, I just heard something about you that I need to talk to you about."

"Okay, what?" Look, I was probably the only fairly attractive single divorced woman living in Nassau Bay, and everybody knew who I was. Anything anybody saw me doing was going to be the news of the day. He came over, and he sat down. He says, "Ardis, I heard you're riding on the back of a motorcycle."

"Yes, it's fun, Alan."

He says, "Ardis, I want you to promise me something."

He got [serious], and I said, "What?"

He said, "You'll never do that again."

"Why, Alan? I know you ride on dirt bikes."

“Ardis, if the motorcycle just falls on your left hand, you’re going to be out of business.”

I says, “Okay, Alan, I promise,” and I never have gotten on a motorcycle again.

Then there was the time when I was dating the guy who was the head of sales and service for the Rice Hotel, an ugly old man who breathed through his mouth. The reason that I dated him is he went to all the openings. They would take my picture with him, and it’d be in the newspaper. That’s free advertising. My interest in him was about that much, zero. He came over. “Ardis, you’ve got to stop dating Robert Rice.”

“Why?”

“Ardis, he’s old and ugly. You’re an artist, and you need to date somebody that’s young and attractive.”

“Okay, Alan, I’ll stop dating Robert Rice.” He was always [looking out for me], bless his heart.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, that’s super sweet.

SHANKS: He just was offering his best thoughts. I’ve told Gratia these stories and she said, “Alan did that a lot.”

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oh, that’s nice. When he unveiled Amy’s portrait was he talking you up at the party?

SHANKS: There was so much talking going on, I don’t remember anything that happened, just the vision of the whole thing. The most interesting part about that is Alan always had things

figured out the way he wanted them to be before you discussed [them]. When he came over about it he said, "This is what I want."

My normal size [portrait] was about the size of that [points] but turned the other way, so that it was long. He said, "I want Amy full-length in the center and then I want four little different poses, vignettes, in the corners of her doing something."

I said, "Alan, you're not going to like that."

He said, "That's what I want." That's what I did.

They're on a specially prepared board, they're done with pencils, and they have fixative afterwards. Once you've gotten that far, you're done with that. He came over, and he looked at it. He said, "I don't like it."

I said, "Alan, I told you you weren't going to like it."

He said, "I'm sorry." So I had to do it over again with just Amy's portrait in the middle. I believe I charged him \$300.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I was going to ask you, but I wasn't sure if that was appropriate.

SHANKS: Back then my house payment was \$299 a month. Money was different. A carton of cigarettes was four bucks. When we say \$299, in today's money it would be a lot more. But I never made the kind of money that my brother did.

My brother was one of America's most important artists ever, and I could get an iPad from the other room and show you his work. ... He was very successful. I'm just the secondary artist in the Shanks family.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Let's talk a little bit about Nassau Bay, because I think it's an interesting community.

SHANKS: Oh, I'm sorry.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oh, no, you're fine. We appreciate these stories about Alan Bean.

SHANKS: They're important. The stuff about Alan is important to me.

ROSS-NAZZAL: They are. It is.

SHANKS: I want people to know what a wonderful human being he was.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Absolutely. If there's other stories you want to tell us, we would love to capture them.

SHANKS: One or two were full of themselves but very few. Now you take John [H.] Glenn for example. Can I tell you a story about John?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Sure, of course.

SHANKS: I can't remember whether it was Kansas City, I think it was, that he was from that area. Do you know?

ROSS-NAZZAL: I think he's from Ohio.

SHANKS: Near Cleveland then. My dad after I'd grown up was the Scout executive for the greater Cleveland area. He managed to get a big new wonderful office space built, which I'm sure is still there, in the colonial style, of course, downtown. He got the idea to contact John Glenn and see if he would come and talk to the Boy Scouts, and John Glenn agreed. He went. It was outside the front of this big huge building, and it was just Boy Scouts, massive, all in their uniforms. I can just imagine what it was like.

He gave this wonderful talk, and when he was finished he was signing autographs and answering questions. Two guys came up, I guess they were the pilots that brought him from NASA. I don't know. It was the plane he was on. "Excuse me, sir, but we need to leave right now."

"I'm busy. Wait a few [minutes]. Excuse me, but I'm not finished yet." He would not go until the last kid had been satisfied. That impressed my father so much that that man was willing to take his time to come and talk to the boys like he did.

Did you know the first astronauts were all Eagle Scouts?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes.

SHANKS: You did?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes.

JOHNSON: I think I've heard that before.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes.

SHANKS: I went to Boy Scout camp in the summer. My girlfriends went to Girl Scout camp.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It makes sense. You have to keep it in the family, right?

SHANKS: Those are just stories about two of the astronauts that myself and my family got to know best. They're just such nice human beings.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Had you followed the space program much before you moved to Nassau Bay?

SHANKS: No, not at all.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Was it a big deal that you were moving right across the street from the Manned Spacecraft Center?

SHANKS: No. I was just not happy because I wanted to live in River Oaks.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What did Nassau Bay look like when you moved there? Was there a lot of construction going on, or were things pretty much built up?

SHANKS: Pretty much finished, pretty much the way they look right now. I think some storm took down one or two houses that had to be rebuilt. It was a nice place to live, and I thought the school system was very good.

While we were there my oldest daughter went to [Texas] A&M [University, College Station]. Phil, if you see the picture of the two boys with the hats, the one on the right, he was a musician in high school. The one on the left became a big deal with Chevron. Rex Tillerson fired 7,000 people one day while he was back on leave from Kazakhstan, so they sent him \$1.25 million severance pay. He already had made millions. He's a multimillionaire retired, and he's in his fifties.

Phil went out to Hollywood. When he was a teenager, he played at Fridays. But he and his friends weren't old enough to drive, so I would drive them down to the nightclub, where they would play, and I would sit in there for the evening. He would always do the same thing, it was so cute. The kids got such good vibes living in the Bay Area. No crime. You didn't have to worry about locking your doors.

At the end when all the applause was down he'd say, "And now I'd like you to meet my mother." Now how many teenage kids would do that? Somebody took this picture. Here. I just was so proud of him because I can't imagine teenagers wanting to introduce their mother. I'm the mother. That's him up on the stage.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oh, that's sweet.

SHANKS: After he introduced his mother.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's sweet.

JOHNSON: That's nice.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You raised him right.

SHANKS: A lot of it has to do with where you are. If you're living in Brooklyn, there's so much crime even now that it's going to be hard to keep your kids out of trouble. But in a peaceful place like it was down by the Space Center—in those years a lot of adults and a lot of children were smoking pot. It was real easy to buy it by the pound and divide it up between you and all your friends, but nobody got into trouble.

When he grew up, he went to Hollywood and became a bandleader, singer, guitar player, music writer, and did the music for movies. That was his career until he passed away a few years ago, but he had the life he wanted. His father wanted him to be a DuPont engineer.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, of course.

SHANKS: But see, my mother was a concert pianist, so it sort of runs in the family.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I kind of figured, since you mentioned your brother.

SHANKS: Yes, you'll have to look him up sometime. I'll give you his name.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes.

SHANKS: Anyhow, that's what I felt about Nassau Bay. Where we lived in Lewiston, New York, you can hear the queen's band playing in Canada on Sundays from our backyard. The town was minute, about six stores, period, so it was a good atmosphere for kids too. I was lucky; we never lived any place that was crime-loaded.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Were there a lot of restaurants or places to shop when you moved to Nassau Bay? Or did you go up into Houston?

SHANKS: Honey, I bought my clothes at Neiman Marcus.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oh, so I guess you went to The Galleria. Or was The Galleria even around then?

SHANKS: Yes.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was The Galleria.

SHANKS: I had to dress fancy because I was always getting my picture taken, and I would not pay for advertising. I had this woman in the adult department, smaller lady department, on this corner upstairs, Mrs. Shepard. She would call me, and she'd say, "Ardis, this is Mrs. Shepard."

"Hi, Mrs. Shepard."

“We just got some new clothes in, and I think there may be something that you would like.”

I would go down, and she would have them hanging in a dressing room. If I’d say, “I don’t think I like that,” she says, “My dear, please just try it on.” She always would pick out things. See, I was busy. I couldn’t spend all day shopping like my other friends that lived there. She’d pick stuff out, and I’d go down and buy it.

There was another store on the way into town on that side, a big shopping place. I think it’s not there anymore, where I bought most of the kids’ clothes.

JOHNSON: Gulfgate Mall?

SHANKS: Yes. The grocery store was fine. Downtown on the other side of town was a little Italian market. I loved to cook Italian food. I’d been to Italy. I loved the people and the food.

When you walked in, there was a wooden barrel inside the door and it was filled with snails still in their shells, escargots. I’d always buy a few dozen of those and other things. The funniest part about it, when I’d get them home, you put them in warm water, and that little sealed part melts away, and they wake up. I’d let the kids stick them on the wall in the kitchen, and they’d be all crawling. We had fun, once I got divorced.

JOHNSON: When did you divorce?

SHANKS: Heck. My daughter was 19, and I was 19 years older than her. If you add that up, I was born in ’32, and you would have the answer. Can you figure that out?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Is that '70? I think '70.

SHANKS: I never pay any attention to dates. I'm sorry.

JOHNSON: That's okay. I'm just wondering the time period, because you said you were the single woman living in the neighborhood. Just interesting, because that was a very family-oriented [neighborhood].

SHANKS: When I first moved there I was married.

JOHNSON: Right.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned you were a friend of Al Bean's, but you mentioned other friends as well. Who were some of your friends? Were they all from NASA? Or were they artists like you? Who were some of the folks that would come over, and you would have dinner parties with or go out to lunch with?

SHANKS: When I first moved there I had a lot of DuPont people. I had done the same kind of a deal other places. I like to cook very gourmet. I don't do it as much now because my dog doesn't eat that stuff. I'd have dinner parties. All the ladies would wear long dresses, and it was all very fun and very formal.

The dining room, the chairs were all Queen Anne. I'd bought them in Liverpool, England, when I was on one of my trips to England. The dining room table was sort of Queen Anne style, and I'd bought it from the people who had owned the Victorian house that I had. You could put in these leaves, so it could be big. I'd learned a lot of lessons. My mother did a lot of entertaining.

One of the things I would do is I'd take a little piece of paper, and I would write different subjects on it. I would put it under my spoon. If the conversation went completely silent and everybody's looking like, "What are we going to talk about," I'd pick the next thing on the [list] and say, "Well, what do you think about so-and-so?" I had all these tricks to make the parties, because some of them with the DuPont people were quite boring.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What about the NASA people or the artists that would come over? Were they more engaging?

SHANKS: I didn't know any artists except for Helen, and we were in different ways of thinking. We liked each other. I didn't have a lot of time for buddies. There was one lady that I became lifelong friends with. On the way to Seabrook on the left, almost when you get to the water, there was a shack of a house on this side [demonstrates], and it said something like ceramics or something on the top. Out of curiosity, because I have always loved to sculpt, as you see by these dolls, I pulled in there.

Her name was June. We became friends. Her husband became my friend, and he taught me how to throw pots. They had a potter's wheel in a special room. They had big kilns out in the back. I did some stuff where you buy greenware, and you paint it. That was very boring, but

I did a few things like that. We got to be such good friends, they gave me a key to their shop. They were closed on Saturdays and Sundays. I could go over there and work on the potter's wheel as long as I felt like it, and I did that a lot. I let them have a lot of the stuff I made, and then I kept a lot. I did portraits of her children, all of them, three boys.

He worked for a construction company that built all those atrium buildings downtown, and he was the pilot for the jet. They had a private jet, that company. They told me that there was this guy that was single they wanted me to meet, which I won't go into the long thing, but I ended up marrying. That's how I ended up living on a 32-foot-long motor sailer in the bay down at Cocoa Beach, Florida. That's how I ended up doing all that work at launches.

He was a darling except at night when he got drunk and was violent, and that was every night. He was really violent. There was one really very terrible night, and luckily I got away and that's how I ended up coming to Kerrville. I got a moving van to come while he was at work, because all this stuff is mine. This house is filled with eighteenth century furniture. A lot of it is quite valuable. He had nothing; he had no furniture. My dad would have been furious if I had left that stuff there. I was broke. Dad sent the money here, so that when we got here they could be paid, thank goodness. That's how I ended up in Kerrville.

When I got here, I didn't have a reputation. I hung some things in my son-in-law's office, he's a doctor, and a few people said, "Who did this?" When he opened an office he wanted to decorate it. A couple of girls kept coming over with their kids, and they'd say, "You should be making dolls."

I was just insulted. "I'm not a toy maker, honey, I'm a serious artist." They brought me *Dolls* magazine, and I went, "I can do better than that."

The second show I did, I found in the magazine, was in Washington, DC, three days. I didn't know how you did it. I thought every doll had to be different. I didn't know you could do a series of the same doll. I took a big camp kit case on the plane, and I rented a table, not a booth, and I sold out the first morning. I was like two and a half days, and I'm done.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That's wonderful.

SHANKS: The word got around. There was a line to my stuff. I don't know it was because it was good or because it was cheap. None of them were bigger than that doll [points] that's standing up with the hat on. Some guy came up to me, and he comes like this. [Demonstrates] "Hello. Thomas Baldwin wants to have a meeting with you." I'd read about him in the *Dolls* magazine. He was the most important guy to be a rep for a group. Which would mean that he'd tell you when a show was going to be, where, and he'd have a space for you. You'd go. That was where people that wanted to be getting good dolls would want to go first.

You'd set up there, and he would take a very small percent of what you earned. That's how I ended up doing shows coast to coast, over and over. I had to add this wing on the house that's there to do the dolls, because it's too messy for in the house. I planned it on the plane from the Washington show.

I was down where the messy part is and hot and sweaty, loving it, and the phone rings. This lady says, "Ardis." I knew right away this lady is calling from Russia because I'd made friends with a young Russian doll artist in the U.S. I had had her here even. "This is so-and-so so-and-so. We would like you to come and do a doll show in Moscow." Yay. I'd never been to Russia.

I said, "I'd love to."

She said, "In December."

I said, "In December?"

"Are you afraid of a little cold?"

"No, ma'am." Twenty-five below during the daytime and then at night it got real cold. I've been in five shows there, but never in December again.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I bet.

SHANKS: I've done so many shows and traveled on planes so much. Of course when I built this house every Friday I paid off the workers so that when the last guy left I owned it. All this I've done as a little artist. The patch thing, to get back to that, that was just as a fun little sweet thing to do for some girls. Usually when people want to talk about it, "Hey, it's not about me, it's about them." It really is.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you get to know Sue Bean very well, being such a good friend of Alan?

SHANKS: Yes, and when the mikes are turned off I'll tell you something about that. Yes, we were friends.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I had a couple of other questions that I've been thinking about. I wanted to get your take on it. One of them is I think that the women who moved to Clear Lake really helped to create and build that community because the guys were always gone. They were busy working

on the space program, or I'm guessing in your husband's case working at DuPont. I'm wondering what your thoughts are on that.

SHANKS: Tell me the first part. The women were doing what?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Really helping to build the community. When they got there there wasn't much there, and they were building these homes, building a life. Their husbands were off working at NASA. Is that what you witnessed?

SHANKS: No, when I got there almost every lot was already finished and people were living there. There were a few on the lakeside, the big lake, whatever that big water is as you come in. The grocery store is there, and that water that's out there. There were a few places to build. But it was finished.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you get a sense of the community being unified behind the Apollo Program, the Moon program?

SHANKS: I felt like it was, but it's just a feeling. People didn't go up and say, "I'm unified."

ROSS-NAZZAL: Right. What gave you that feeling? What do you think created that or caused that in that community, in that space?

SHANKS: A lot of people worked there. Most of my students worked there or flew there. It was just all about space there.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you end up going to a church when you moved to that area?

SHANKS: I had always gone to a church before I moved down there. My grandfather was a Methodist minister, so it was a very heavy thing in our family. I don't know why, but I just did not find a church that I felt like I wanted to be part of when I got down there. It didn't stop me from being serious about being a Christian.

When I moved over here, people have asked me, "What church do you go to?"

I say, "I don't go to church, I live in one." Because when I got ready to build this house I found out that they were getting ready to tear down Incarnate Word Convent in San Antonio, which was built in 1889, and I went over and made a deal with Sister Rosita. She gave me a few days, more than a week, to go and tear out whatever I wanted, and then I would give a donation. All these windows, these doors, the altar rail, the floors. More stuff all over the house was all part of Incarnate Word Convent. You can see that doorway is from a house from about 1920 [points] versus if you look over at that door, 1889.

ROSS-NAZZAL: That was a great deal you made.

SHANKS: I lost a lot of weight in there. I'll tell you I had a couple of big strong guys, but I worked my little butt [off]. I lost about a pound a day every day I was over there, trying to get

stuff out. The table they used to cut the habits out is now my dining room table. I'll show you around, if you want to see it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, I'd like to see it.

SHANKS: But back to Nassau Bay. If I had just made a dream in my head, I couldn't have thought of a better place to have my family, if I had to leave Lewiston, New York.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Why would you say it was such a great place for your family?

SHANKS: Because there was no crime. People were friendly. There were no traffic jams unless you got on the Gulf Freeway. My view was of the lake out the front. It just was a good place for kids to grow up.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you ever have any problems with tour buses coming in wanting to see the home of Al Bean or some of the other astronauts?

SHANKS: No. The community would ask me, the garden club and other [groups], they'd do house tours. I think they made money doing them, I'm not sure, and they would ask if they could put my house on the tour. I would let them. Because people knew who I was, I'd have crowds coming through. There'd be someone standing in each room to make sure there weren't shoplifters and to explain the different things that were in that room.

Then I'd have something that I had made on the back porch, some Christmas decorations hanging on strings from the ceiling, that they could purchase. I didn't take the money, I gave it to the garden club or whatever it was. That was my giving back to my community, because they were a pain in the neck if you want to know the truth.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned that you were divorced, and you were the only single woman. Did you feel like you may have been the only feminist in the area?

SHANKS: I never even thought about feminists.

ROSS-NAZZAL: No? Okay.

SHANKS: I don't think that was an issue back then.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I'm going to ask Sandra if she has any questions for you.

JOHNSON: The only thing, you were talking about those tours. I was just curious why they wanted to use your house? Was it because of the antiques and the way you had it decorated? Or was it because you were the artist and people would come to see?

SHANKS: Probably all of the above, because people that had been to parties at my house knew about paintings that were hanging on the walls and artwork and eighteenth century furniture. My house was more interesting inside than a whole lot of the [subdivision].

JOHNSON: That's what I was wondering.

SHANKS: I'm thinking of one of the astronauts' wives I won't mention right now, that had a house sort of similar to mine. Run-of-the-mill furniture, nothing interesting, just stuff. A lot of the houses were like that. Mine was always like this, wherever you looked there was something that might interest you. That was probably part of it.

JOHNSON: That's what I was thinking, at that time period the style of homes and the furniture was very different than what you have. It was more that midcentury [style].

SHANKS: See, I learned about collecting antiques when I was a little kid. We would go back from up North to Oklahoma and stop at antique stores. On the way home, I would be sitting with a table leg sticking out over where I was sitting. We'd be packed. I learned. Before I was 12, I could spot something and tell you about when and where it was from, which I guess most kids can't.

I started collecting early on, as soon as I got married. My first piece was a disaster, and I learned a lesson. I bought a table with a marble top, took it to my dad's house. "Dad, I got an antique." He comes running out all excited. He looks at it, and he goes [makes face]. I looked at it, and I said, "Oh my gosh, it's Victorian." I kept the marble top, and I put it on a piano bench for a coffee table. I threw the table in the garbage. I learned. The beginning of Victorian is—after that it's a no-no if you're a serious antique collector.

JOHNSON: Interesting.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I didn't know that.

SHANKS: My favorite things are around the eighteenth century, 1800s, a little before, which is like that piece over there [points] with a cabriole leg. Then that's transitional, that piece there [points], where it's still curvy a little bit. Louis XVI has a straight round leg, and I don't like that.

I was fortunate enough, during my first marriage, my father-in-law was sent to England to be the head of Vauxhall Motors. General Motors owned it. That was the biggest car company in England. He had a Vauxhall Viscount and a chauffeur and the whole nine yards. He would send tickets for me to go with my children and spend weeks at a time.

His chauffeur, after he'd take Pop to work, would come pick me up, and we would go to junk shops. That's what they called antique shops. They were antique shops but they call them junk shops. Have you been there?

JOHNSON: No.

SHANKS: We'd go to auctions, for example, and I never could figure out the pounds. I'd tell Jim in dollars how high I would want to go on a piece. He'd stand behind me, and he'd bid. Then sometimes he'd tap me on the shoulder, and he'd lean over. "We've got it, ma'am." Then the company would send a lorry out to pick it up. I'd buy stuff all over the place, top to bottom, up

and down. General Motors, at their expense, would ship it all back to my house in the U.S. Many things that you see in this house I got that way. It was so inexpensive.

JOHNSON: The other thing I thought about, did your kids belong to Scouts since your father was so involved in Boy Scouts?

SHANKS: Both my boys were Scouts, yes.

JOHNSON: Were the Scout leaders men in the neighborhoods or other people that worked for NASA? Were they involved?

SHANKS: Oh, no. It was mostly when we lived up North that they were in scouting. I know my oldest son went on an overnight camping trip with a sleeping bag left over from my dad. It was in the middle of the winter, and he was in the snow in this thing. They had interesting times.

JOHNSON: When you came down to Nassau Bay, they weren't as involved?

SHANKS: No. Not as involved.

JOHNSON: I was just curious. We know some of the—

ROSS-NAZZAL: Some of the wives were heading those up.

JOHNSON: —wives were doing that and some of the husbands too. Some of the astronauts were somewhat involved in scouting. Like you said, so many of them were Boy Scouts too.

SHANKS: The first group of astronauts were all Eagle Scouts. My dad was very proud of that.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You mentioned taking your kids out on the front lawn and pointing out Apollo 12. Do you have any memories of any of the other missions from Apollo?

SHANKS: That's the only time we ever went out and looked up. It was on TV, and so I said, "Come on, let's go look." If I'd seen some other missions that you could actually see that they were up there I would have taken them out. They were very interested in all of the space stuff. I think most kids that lived there, how could they resist being interested?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you ever get to go over to NASA and tour? See what was going on over there?

SHANKS: Honey, I went over constantly taking pictures to go send to Europe.

JOHNSON: Oh yes.

SHANKS: Some important person would come and make a speech, and I'd have to be over there. I was the only woman and the other people, press from all over the place, they were so rude to

me. If I'd get there first, they'd push me out of the way until I was at the very back. It was always like that.

When I took that picture that was on the cover of *Aviation Week*, that all ended. That's when I was married to my second husband. He took a picture and had it put on a T-shirt, big, of that cover, and in big letters M-I-N-E. He says, "Now the next time you go over to take pictures you wear that." Guess what? They were always polite to me ever after that. If I was in front I stayed in front.

It was hard. I recognize that they were all trying to make a living. They just thought I was some little fluff. Oh, I covered everything. Splashdowns that were on TV, I would be invited to one of the wives' houses to take pictures that would all end up in the local newspaper.

A lot of important people came down and gave talks. I went to every one, after I met Jacques. What he did is he lent me five Nikons, and he would send me a package about that big [demonstrates] that was full of film. He'd say, "Now Ardis, keep it in your refrigerator, and then load up." There'd be a black-and-white one, print ones, and slides, and at different speeds, and I'd have to remember which camera was what. One of them I really liked. You'd press a button, and it'd run the whole 36.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you ever take any shots of what was happening over at the Manned Spacecraft Center during a mission, or was it always after? The splashdown parties?

SHANKS: You mean in Nassau Bay are you talking about? Or at the Space Center?

ROSS-NAZZAL: No, over at the Space Center. When Apollo 11 might have been going on or another mission. Did you ever go over there?

SHANKS: No. What I'd do is I'd get invited to go over the night before and take pictures, and then the day of the launch I'd go over and there were people all over the place. There were bleachers for the important people. I'd sit usually up at the top of that and take pictures of them.

If I spotted some famous person in another [area], I'd say, "Sir, may I take your picture?" I was all over the place. They had boxes down there, so that when the launch went off your camera would automatically take pictures. I could be with others going around. One of the funniest things that ever happened, I was on my way out. There was this big wide walkway, and a whole bunch of people were coming. They were trying to interview some guy in the front. I was on the side as they came [by]. I walked over, and I said, "May I take your picture?" He starts doing all this. [Demonstrates] I said, "And what's your name?" He looked at me. He was the governor of California.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Oops.

SHANKS: I didn't recognize him. That put him in his place.

ROSS-NAZZAL: How did you get the invites to the splashdown parties from the wives? Just because you knew all those folks?

SHANKS: Because they couldn't get a monkey from Overton Park Zoo, but we were friends. I got invited to things. I invited them to things at my house too, as you know.

Have you had enough questions? Would you like to see a little bit around the house?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Sure, that sounds great, yes.

JOHNSON: That'd be good, let me stop this.

[End of interview]