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In order to preserve the integrity of their audio record, these histories are presented with limited revisions and reflect the candid conversational style of the oral history format. Brackets or an ellipsis mark will indicate if the text has been annotated or edited to provide the reader a better understanding of the content.

Enjoy “hearing” these factual accountings from these people who were among those who were involved in the day-to-day activities of this historic partnership between the United States and Russia.

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**SCOTT D. GAHRING**

**July 31, 1998**

Interviewers: Rebecca Wright, Paul Rollins, Summer Bergen

*Wright:* Today is July 31, 1998. We're speaking with Scott Gahring with the Shuttle-Mir Oral History Project. Scott served as an ops lead for the Increment Seven. We'd like for you to begin by telling us your roles and responsibilities with that area.

*Gahring:* Started with training with a crew member in the science training things, and then procedure validations, pulling together the time line. These are all the things that happened the year prior, the procedures, getting to know the science, getting to know the crew member, and then working as a back-up operations lead on some of the other increments. I've done some of that work. Then head over to Russia to head up the operations team that was in place for Increment Seven.

*Wright:* How long was your training period?

*Gahring:* I started with David Wolf, because he was originally the Increment Seven crew member, or was supposed to be. He started training a year ago in January as the Increment Six back-up. So he started then.

*Wright:* Were you almost like his shadow? Did you go and do everything that he was doing?

*Gahring:* For the U.S. portion of his training, yes. The way it worked is, you were supposed to follow them when they were here in the U.S., and then you spent some time in Russia with them during the final portion of their Star City training.

*Wright:* What do you learn by being so close?

*Gahring:* You figure out how tightly wound they are, how they go about solving problems, how sticky they are about what the procedures need to say, what kind of answers they're looking for.

*Wright:* I guess this helps you communicate with them when you're on the ground and they're in the air.

*Gahring:* Yes, hopefully. Hopefully you can hear things in their voice you might not otherwise be aware of.

*Wright:* So at what point did you have your astronaut switch?

*Gahring:* I think that was August of last year when we switched.

*Wright:* Was it like starting over, or were you able at least to take some of your experiences and apply them with Andy Thomas?

*Gahring:* It was just different. It wasn't really a big deal. Didn't need to be anyway. They're very different people, but the work's pretty technical, so it doesn't make it a whole lot of difference. There was some.

*Wright:* So it was just one more example of being flexible?

*Gahring:* Yes.

*Wright:* Was that a key word in what you did during your time as an ops lead?

*Gahring:* Yes. Yes, the whole program had a real short schedule, everything was pretty intense. When I came in, I was kind of surprised how tense people were, and just needed to relax a little bit. Well, that's why I always said, "Everything's going to be fine. Just relax. Nobody's going to get killed. It won't really matter."

*Wright:* They look for you for reassurance as well.

*Gahring:* Well, in anything, you have to figure out what job you need to play, and if that's just being a speed brake, that's okay.

*Wright:* How did you get involved in this position?

*Gahring:* I had been working in ISS [International Space Station], the station program office, and I got a little burned out with that because we weren't doing anything with real hardware stuff. I went over to be Captain Culbertson's technical assistant. I had known him from my previous life in the Air Force. I was in his office just attending meetings, and they came in and were having problems getting people to go to Russia for five or six months doing that, and they kept coming in and saying this over and over again, and one day after one of those meetings, I just said, "Well, you know, I could go do it." And there I was. He said, "Hold that thought."

*Wright:* [Laughter] And you did for the next year.

*Gahring:* Yes. That was actually like two years ago, probably by the time--

*Wright:* Did you get involved right away after you made that--

*Gahring:* Pretty much. Yes.

*Wright:* Frank wasn't going to let you change your mind.

*Gahring:* No. No. At the time I wasn't even sure I had used my outside voice to say that. [Laughter]

*Wright:* Frank heard you.

*Gahring:* Oh, yes, he did. He doesn't miss stuff like that.

*Wright:* So what happened from there? You volunteered for this assignment and then your activities started right away here, or were you sent right away to Russia?

*Gahring:* It started here. I think at the time, that was right before Colonel [John] Blaha launched. So there was plenty of time. I think I had just about more time, because of the way the time line worked out, more time than anybody else to get ready pretty much. It was all evolving pretty fast, but pretty much right away started following things, and then we did training like in January, the first Increment Six backup training, and then in March I went over with Tony Sang for Increment Four to work over there for about six weeks.

*Wright:* Was that your first visit to Russia?

*Gahring:* No. I had gone quite a bit as part of my station work. I had gone several times, and the last time I went, I said I would never go again. [Laughter]

*Wright:* Never say never.

*Gahring:* Yes, I'm not going to say that this time.

*Wright:* At least you had your first impressions of Russia behind you and you knew what to expect. Was it different being part of ISS compared to being part of Shuttle-Mir?

*Gahring:* It was because, when you're having to do operations, you don't have as much time for posturing or any of that stuff; you just have to do something. When you're doing something like ISS, there's plenty of

time, and everybody knows it, and they kind of pull each other's chain quite a bit.

*Wright:* So what was your average day like when you were the ops lead? Can you give us a couple of days, or just something so you can explain to us what your responsibilities were when you were in Russia?

*Gahring:* You work either a week of days or a week of nights, and you work six or seven days a week, eight-, ten-, twelve-hour days. If it's a morning, you get picked up by the van at the Volga take the forty-minute life-in-your-hands trip out to the TsUP. That's always interesting, because you're sitting in this van weaving in and out of traffic, and seeing Russian scenery go by and they're usually playing American music on the radio, including one morning, "Don't Worry, Be Happy." It was like minus twenty outside. It was just terrible.

You get there, walk in past the token security person there, and get the timelines for the day, take a look at the timelines, see what time your passes with Andy are, or the crew member are. Then decide which Russians you're going to argue with when. It depends. Some days would be good, some days would be bad. You'd usually have a pass with Andy in the morning and one in the afternoon or evening, and most of the day, before the com pass you make a list of things that you're going to talk about, or that you need to talk about, things you're expecting from him, things that he needs to know for today that have changed. Make sure everybody is entertained in the room there. Some days it's not so much operations management as adult supervision. Get all that ready, go down and talk to Andy, scratch off everything you had thought you were going to talk about, because he has a completely different agenda, and then you go to take care of that.

In the afternoon, Houston starts to wake up and starts to call. I'm sure you've heard Frank calls first.

*Wright:* No, that's the first time we've heard that.

*Gahring:* Oh, really. [Laughter]

*Wright:* [Laughter] You've let us into a whole new insight of how this will happen.

*Gahring:* Oh, yes. He calls every morning, no matter where he is, whether he's on vacation or what. He was getting better towards the end. And then Jim [VanLaak] calls.

*Wright:* At least there's some consistency in your job.

*Gahring:* Then maybe Tim Baum calls, and then we're having the morning meeting where we're supposed

to tell everybody that's happened, although by that time almost everybody knows. Then the afternoon shift comes in right before then, so we do like one big handover with everybody. Then you go home.

*Wright:* It sounds like at least everybody that was working the team communicated.

*Gahring:* Yes, pretty much. Very dysfunctional occasionally, but that's okay.

*Wright:* Was there so much going on sometimes it was hard to communicate everything? Or was it almost opposite where maybe not enough was going on communicate?

*Gahring:* Well, I think because of the past problems they had, our increment was pretty easy. I mean, we didn't have any major catastrophes. But because of the things that happened on the previous increments, and because the press then finds out things so quickly, everybody in the management chain requires instantaneous knowledge of what has happened to the current configuration of things, and everyone has to know more than anybody else. And they do not want to find out by watching CNN; they want to have heard it from you. So if anything of any potential significance happened, you wake them up.

*Wright:* I guess that all fell on your shoulders being the ops leader.

*Gahring:* Oh, it's not that bad now. Just another additional duty.

*Wright:* Just the responsibility. Speaking of communication, I guess Andy Thomas was glad to talk with you on the ground.

*Gahring:* I hope so.

*Wright:* I'm sure after working with him that long you could tell if he was glad to hear a voice from Earth.

*Gahring:* I think he was pretty isolated up there, so I tried to keep it relatively light, entertaining, and informative.

*Wright:* Your time in Russia, I'm sure, was full with this job. Did you have time to do anything else, anything that you wanted to do while you were there?

*Gahring:* I took my family over with me, and when we could, we'd go out and do other things. I kind of filled most of the squares and all the travels over there before seeing all these things, but I got to see them again taking the kids and go check them out.

*Wright:* How old were your children?

*Gahring:* Eleven, nine, and four.

*Wright:* How did they adjust to being there? Did they enjoy it?

*Gahring:* Overall, yes, I think so. They'll appreciate it a lot more later.

*Wright:* So you were there prior to the wintertime.

*Gahring:* Yes, we got there in January.

*Wright:* That's real wintertime then.

*Gahring:* Real winter, real cold. Yes.

*Wright:* What did they enjoy being there? Did they enjoy seeing the sights?

*Gahring:* Well, it started out, they're pretty much Southern kids, so they hadn't been around snow. So that was pretty good. Took them down to Red Square almost immediately, but they don't have the same appreciation for being in Red Square. They just don't get it at all. But we did go down there, and I took them from Red Square over to across the street from the Bolshoi, and it was snowing, and there was a statue of Karl Marx over here, and I turned around, and my son was making a snow angel on the sidewalk by Karl Marx. [Laughter]

*Wright:* It's nice to have children's expressions no matter where they are. [Laughter]

*Gahring:* It's not something I would have thought of.

*Wright:* I'm glad he felt free to do what he wanted to.

*Gahring:* Yes.

*Wright:* How were your dealings with the Russians? You were the main focus, I guess, on this increment, so they came to you and you went to them.

*Gahring:* I had felt pretty frustrated with them from previous increments. I thought we weren't really getting our money's worth, and I kind of wanted to make it a point that we were going to get our money's worth this time. I also felt like we didn't get treated equitably, shall we say, and I wasn't going to let that

happen. I expected to get treated as a customer and as a future partner on the ISS. We had some degrees of success, some days more than others.

*Wright:* Did you deal with one person in particular, or did you have a whole array of Russian officials?

*Gahring:* Mostly the shift flight directors, and occasionally Victor Blagov. It depends on what you're working, who is the most effective place to go for what you're trying to take of.

*Wright:* So I guess your back-up training the times that you were there with Tony really served you well.

*Gahring:* Yes, that was good. I thought that was excellent. That was an excellent way to train people for following increments. I don't know who thought of that, but that was great. It was really a good idea.

*Wright:* I'm sure no day was dull, but at least you had a few surprises that were already out of the way, because you could see how it worked.

*Gahring:* Right. Just getting there and knowing in advance, we sit here, this is how we talk, this is--well, except I went over on Increment Four when Jerry wasn't talking to anybody. [Laughter] I hadn't actually seen anybody talk to him. You know who the shift flight directors are, you know where the room is, and all that. That was good.

*Wright:* Is there a way to train somebody for this position? I mean, if there was another increment, say, Increment Ten, and you were put in charge of getting the ops leads ready, what would you tell them that they needed to know to work this job and do it successfully?

*Gahring:* They ought to spend a lot more time getting Russian language training. You don't need it on the job very much, but you have a life outside, and it's almost impossible to operate outside without speaking the language. It's just easier if you can get around. It helps to know what the flight director's *really* saying, because you get the filtered translated version, and you're not sure if somebody's adding some political correctness, or if he said, "Well, tell this dummy this," which I would like to know.

*Wright:* Was that an adjustment, itself working with translators?

*Gahring:* I had done it before, but you forget--if you're going to make some long statement and you're really mad, and you have to pause every few words, it's really hard to maintain your train of thought, especially if you're trying to make a point.



*Wright:* Loses that impact.

*Gahring:* Well, you forget where the heck you were going. [Laughter]

*Wright:* That may be some training for future work.

*Gahring:* Yes. You kind of wind -up thinking -I had a point to make but], man, I was mad when I started, but I cannot remember where I was going with it. [Laughter]

*Wright:* That might be a great topic for a psychologist to work on that one. [Laughter]

*Gahring:* You wonder if the other guy's sitting there just saying, "I don't know what this guy's talking about."

*Wright:* And then the poor translator. They have to sit there.

*Gahring:* I wish they would tell you, "You're looking like an idiot." [Laughter]

*Wright:* They're just doing their job.

*Gahring:* Yes, usually, unfortunately, just being a translator.

*Wright:* You mentioned earlier that you had military training. Was that a little awkward for you at first to work with the folks that you had been trained at some point in time they were your enemy?

*Gahring:* I had pretty much gotten over that. Pretty much. Early on I had a kind of hard time with them. I didn't care for them much.

*Wright:* Was that from the ISS?

*Gahring:* Yes. But once you get to know them, it's not so bad.

*Wright:* Was there a time during all this period that you were working, kind of a low time that maybe you wished that you hadn't told Frank, "I can do this"?

*Gahring:* Yes, in March or in April, when the experiments were just really going south. The Russians were being very difficult, and Andy wasn't getting his e-mail, and I was burned out and tired. I think somewhere in there I offered to quit, too, because I just felt like nobody back here was listening. It was worse than just not listening; I felt like I was getting fought along the way, and I just told Jeff Cardenas,

"Go find somebody else. I've had it."

*Wright:* How was it resolved for you?

*Gahring:* Well, part way through that I thought, "I cannot leave, because that would really screw over Andy, so I can't leave." If they could find another lead, somebody else could take all the flak. So I'd really had it then. But things worked out. And I was right.

*Wright:* That period got over and something else happened.

*Gahring:* Yes, we found out what was wrong with the experiment, found out they didn't know what they were talking about.

*Wright:* Was that a challenge itself to coordinate all the different disciplines that were now under your supervision? You had all these different people working different projects.

*Gahring:* It wasn't too bad, really, because the science people we had were overall pretty good. But there's a lot of things. People don't want to be confrontational, or they are burned out from working all the increments all along, so you end up with all these open questions, or some stupid idea comes down the pipeline that gets all the way to you, and you're the one that has to say, "No," or you're the point at which things get resolved, and after a while you think, "Couldn't somebody else apply a neuron to this somewhere along the way before I have to do this?" Then you've got this in-fighting going on over there, and you just want to choke the--my God. I'm sure it's just fatigue over there, partly, but it's resolving all the different disciplines. The technical side of the job is not that hard; it's dealing with all the people.

*Wright:* Everybody seems to have their own level of responsibility and I guess they feel like it's the priority.

*Gahring:* Yes. Oh, yes. Yes. [Laughter]

*Wright:* Was that a nice way of saying it? [Laughter]

*Gahring:* Yes. The science guys think there shouldn't be any--what else could possibly have priority? Then depending on what day it is, Frank or somebody else might think, "Why are you working on science? The first thing you're supposed to be doing is this." "Oh." That's the way it has to work. Everybody pushes as hard as they can for their little sliver of the world. Somebody has to be the umpire. It's fun being the bad cop for a while, but after a while you don't think anybody really cares; they just want

somebody to be the bad guy and handle it.

*Wright:* Was it easier to know that you knew there was a set amount of time you were going to be there, that it was only four months?

*Gahring:* Five months.

*Wright:* Five months.

*Gahring:* Yes, I don't know. It was good that there was a horizon out there. Yes, somebody would have gotten hurt if I had to stay on. [Laughter]

*Wright:* [Laughter] Maybe it's good you had the last increment.

*Gahring:* Yes, I think it is.

*Wright:* Did you feel from the Russians any hesitation from them that before you, there was another ops lead, and before that person there was another ops lead? Did they treat you the same as they did the one before? Or do you feel like there was some time in there that they had to get to know you before they treated you with respect?

*Gahring:* I think they test everybody that comes in. They just see how much they can get away with. You should expect that going in. They get away with varying degrees of stuff with different people. Some of it, I think, they try on purpose, and some of it is just natural creep back to the way they want things to be unless told otherwise. But I think there is some of that. I personally think we should have somebody there in station, have somebody there for a longer period of time just for consistency, because that's the way their culture works. They've got to get to know people. When we're sending a person in every time, they know you're only there for so long, too. They're just as sick of you as you are of them.

*Wright:* Most of the folks you were working with had long tenure with their careers as far as the Russians are concerned?

*Gahring:* The Russians?

*Wright:* Right.

*Gahring:* Oh, jeez, yes. Most of those guys were ancient, had been doing the same thing forever.

*Wright:* And the average age of your team members?

*Gahring:* Yes, like in the low thirties, probably, maybe younger.

*Wright:* At least you had enthusiasm.

*Gahring:* Yes. [Laughter] That's a good thing.

*Wright:* And some of your team members, they had been there for a long time, or they just had returning trips?

*Gahring:* Well, my increment, it was a lot of the same people that had been rotating, so they were all pretty experienced with being there. I didn't have to deal with any of that.

*Wright:* Well, that helped.

*Gahring:* Some of them were new, but overall the experience level was pretty high, and they all were fairly autonomous.

*Wright:* How is your Russian?

*Gahring:* My Russian stinks. It's okay, it's survival level. I can't get a cheeseburger with no pickles or something. I can get along.

*Wright:* Is it something you'd like to pursue and get better at?

*Gahring:* If I was going to go back I would want, but I don't plan on that. I'm not saying never.  
[Laughter]

*Wright:* You have learned something from this job.

*Gahring:* Yes.

*Wright:* Let's talk about your family experiences, because you were fortunate that at least you could home at night and have the comfort and warmth of your family there.

*Gahring:* Didn't have to make dinner.

*Wright:* You made dinner?

*Gahring:* No way.

*Wright:* [Laughter] Did your wife and kids have friends there?

*Gahring:* Many. The kids really had it hard, my wife did, too, because they have quite a network back here. They found some friends over there, a few. And the kids miss out on Little League and dance and all that. After a while I think that really wears on them.

*Wright:* How about education? Did you put them into Russian schools?

*Gahring:* No, I wasn't going to do that. They could have gone to the embassy school if I'd given up my per diem. I wasn't going to give up my per diem because I wanted to take them Europe, and I wasn't going to be able to afford that without per diem, so we home-schooled them while they were there.

*Wright:* Well, that's a challenge in itself no matter where you are.

*Gahring:* Yes, well, that was my wife's. She handled that with varying degrees of success.

*Wright:* That's school, though, in general.

*Gahring:* You just don't treat your mom like you do your teacher.

*Wright:* Were you able to go on to Europe and be able to do that?

*Gahring:* Yes, we went to Germany, Austria, Italy, just kind of a little drive.

*Wright:* And that was pleasant?

*Gahring:* It was most excellent. It was very good. My wife came home and said, "I save \$500 from flying Aeroflot." I said, "I don't think so." I said, "I work with these people every day, deal with their customer service every day. I'll pay you \$500, I want to be on Lufthansa. I want to be treated like a customer. I don't care what it costs."

*Wright:* And you were glad to get home.

*Gahring:* Yes. Well, it was good to go to Germany. It was good to get back. It was kind of hard going back to Russia after that, but then you knew you only had so much time left, and then it was great to get home.

*Wright:* You haven't been home very long then, have you?

*Gahring:* I got home in early June. I went to the landing, which was like on the tenth or twelfth, I don't really remember.

*Wright:* Twelfth, I think.

*Gahring:* Twelfth. And I came back here on the fourteenth, and I came in the morning of the fifteenth and put in a leave slip, and I came back to work, whatever the first Monday in July was.

*Wright:* Getting back into some kind of routine.

*Gahring:* Yes. Back to the land of ISO 9000 and staff meetings.

*Wright:* But you're not listening to Russian every day.

*Gahring:* I'd almost rather listen to Russian. [Laughter]

*Wright:* [Laughter] You were fortunate enough to be able to go to Russia with ISS, and then you were part of the Shuttle-Mir, and now you're back in the land of whatever norm is. How do you feel the Shuttle-Mir Program will benefit the ISS Program?

*Gahring:* I don't think we could have done it without it. All those things that you do first. Air Force has Red Flag and the Navy has Top Gun, and one of the philosophies behind that is they said they found out if a fighter pilot survives his first ten missions, then he's probably going to do okay. I think Phase One was like our first, a way to walk through those first gripping experiences without having total responsibility for the whole station, and getting to know the Russians. Coming up against these crisis points with the Russians, and seeing how they react, and seeing what we do, without having all of the responsibility for resolving it, and learning how to work together on those things, that was invaluable. I don't know if many people really know. We've gone over a lot of those first humps without really--

*Wright:* It seems like a lot's been accomplished in such a small amount of time.

*Gahring:* Yes. It'll be a long time before people really appreciate it. Some people never will. They don't care.

*Wright:* We've talked about the lowest point of your term there. Is there a time that you remember as you

were really glad that you volunteered to do this, that you felt the success that you knew that that position could have?

*Gahring:* Probably like three-quarters of the way through, after we'd gotten past our major problems, and the light was out there at the end of the tunnel, and you start thinking about what you're going to have to go back to, and you start thinking, "You know, this is a pretty good job." You've got a small team of people who pretty much know what they're doing, other than being a little dysfunctional family, and some points we're getting to go to this foreign country, you've got a small team, you're in charge. It's a relatively noble goal, and you're getting to report at a high level, although it isn't appreciated by a lot of the middle management, or a lot of people didn't really think Phase One was that much, but it was a good program. It was a good thing to have done. I don't care what anybody says. It was a nice way to serve, a nice thing to do.

*Wright:* You have to admit, it was different.

*Gahring:* Yes, but that's a good different.

*Wright:* Did it meet your expectations, or did you have expectations when you walked into the job?

*Gahring:* I think overall it did, yes. It wasn't too hard. We didn't have any of the crises of some of the other missions, major. It was not too bad.

*Wright:* I'm sure most people involved were glad that this one was kind of a calm one.

*Gahring:* Yes. Well, I wasn't. I didn't want anybody to get hurt, but it would be nice to have to go up against something.

*Wright:* Well, Andy might differ with that. [Laughter]

*Gahring:* Oh, yes. I'm sure he felt like he was up against plenty. [Laughter]

*Wright:* I'm going to ask Paul and Summer if they have any questions.

*Rollins:* You said something about you and Frank knew each other in a former life; you were Air Force and he was Navy. How did that turn out?

*Gahring:* I was the lead flight director in Sunnyvale for a DOD [Department of Defense] payload, and he

was the pilot for STS-38.

*Wright:* So this was working with him in a totally different capacity.

*Gahring:* Yes, but it was good. I knew Jim VanLaak quite a bit from before, too. He's the one that hired me on MOD into station. They both saved me. I was going to leave after ISS, because I'd had more than enough; I was burned out. If it hadn't been for Phase One, I'd probably be gone.

*Wright:* This is like shock treatment? They put you into Phase One to keep you going?

*Gahring:* It was great. I'd much rather be on an operational program, doing real things than talking about stuff.

*Rollins:* Or shuffling papers.

*Gahring:* That drives me nuts. Arguing about stuff that doesn't matter.

*Rollins:* What time of day was it when they'd call up? Would it be at eight o'clock here in Houston?

*Gahring:* No, it'd probably be six-thirty or seven.

*Rollins:* How long would y'all talk?

*Gahring:* Not very long; ten, fifteen minutes. You just wanted to know. He cheats. [Laughter] He calls and then he goes into his staff meeting and asks his people what's going on. And then he says, "No, that's not what's going on. This is what's going on."

*Wright:* [Laughter] Sounds like a move of a smart manager. He knows his people well.

*Gahring:* He's pretty wired, yes.

*Wright:* He's a commander from all aspects, I guess.

*Gahring:* Yes. I like him a lot.

*Wright:* Summer, do you have any questions?

*Bergen:* No.



*Wright:* Well, would you do it again?

*Gahring:* No. I won't do it again. I think it was an excellent thing to do once. If I had that to do over again, I would do it again, actually. I won't go back.

*Wright:* You think the position and the way that the team was set up in Russia, is that a necessity for ISS, or would you suggest making changes? Or is it too early even to predict that?

*Gahring:* Well, it's not going to be nearly as much fun in Phase Two, because there's way too many people involved now. Everybody in this whole thing is so Shuttle-centered. Now they'll all pile on, there will be a lot more people involved, and you won't have the same autonomy as before. The team will get bigger. It won't be the same again. That was fun. It won't be fun anymore, I don't think.

I think there are some flaws in the way it's set up. Because you're there for five months, five months is almost as bad as you can get. You can't sell your house, you can't let things drop back here, but you're gone, and it doesn't pay to change your address and all that stuff, but you're going to have to deal with your bills and your mail and everything else, and the kids in school. I can pull them out of school and home-school them once. I can't continuously yank them in and out of school. I just can't do that. You're going to have to be single or divorced or about to be to keep doing that. You just can't do that.

*Wright:* Are they adjusting well being back home now? They fall right back into a routine?

*Gahring:* Oh, yes. We had hoped that they would learn that they don't need nearly as much, they would see that other people are getting by. All they did was pent up a little capitalism and head straight to the mall when we got back.

*Wright:* [Laughter] Went to the grocery store to buy the things that they want to eat.

*Gahring:* Yes, and drive around in their own car, go where they want when they want.

*Wright:* The traffic a little more tolerable here?

*Gahring:* Oh, yes. [Laughter] There's no oncoming cars in your lane, no dead pedestrians.

*Rollins:* Do you feel that the crew members on Mir were safer than you were in that van?

*Gahring:* I'd like to think so. There's a whole group of people looking out for you. You've just got this driver who doesn't even speak English. Oh, my God.

*Wright:* Did y'all feel safe when you were there?

*Gahring:* No. I mean, overall yes, but it's not Kansas. It's a dangerous place. You get hurt, you can't just turn to somebody. If you come up in the middle of a fight, you don't know who the good guy is or the bad guy is, and you don't know if this is about to go asymptotic. You don't know what you're in the middle of. Some grungy over there might be the safest guy on the road, and this well-dressed guy over here might be a mafia guy. You just don't know.

*Wright:* Did you personally feel, when you got home, there was something specific you wanted to do as soon as you hit Houston? Something you missed?

*Gahring:* Actually, I took care of that when I was in Florida. I wanted a big old steak and a baked potato and a salad, and I didn't want to have to worry about what the word was or what I wanted. I just wanted to eat it.

*Wright:* And be happy. [Laughter]

*Gahring:* Yes. Go to the beach.

*Wright:* I guess maybe the word is you were able to relax once you got home?

*Gahring:* Yes. Well, as soon as the wheels leave the ground in Moscow, that's a major emotional event, number one. Then when you land in the U.S., if you just get to the U.S. you can handle any problem. I can pull out my Visa or my American Express, and I can fix anything. I can tell you what I want, or I can pick up the phone and it'll work, I don't have to have eighty different kinds of tokens or count rubles.

I went to the grocery store when I was in Cocoa Beach to buy a Pepsi, a twelve-pack of Pepsi. I went in there at it was like \$2.89. So I went, "Okay, what's that in dollars?" So I divided by six, and I went, "That ain't right, let's multiply by six." I multiplied by six, and I thought, "God, that's too much. Oh, it's \$2.89."

*Wright:* No wonder your brain's kind of tired.

*Gahring:* Yes.

*Wright:* Nothing was simple.

*Gahring:* No. Everything's a chore.

*Wright:* We hope that the next few months are somewhat relaxing and you can enjoy the rest of the summer and get back on some routine with your family.

*Gahring:* Oh, yes. We're already back.

*Wright:* Well, we're glad that you took time out of your schedule to come visit with us. We appreciate it.

*Gahring:* No problem.

*Wright:* Thank you again.

*Gahring:* Good thing to do.

*Wright:* Thanks. [Tape recorder turned off; then activated again for the following.]

*Gahring:* Andy [Thomas] called down and he said that he had picked up the photo TV check list, and he had looked at the contingency page, and he had gotten quite a laugh. He appreciated that because it was the first good laugh he had had in months. I said, "Oh, that's great," but I had no idea what he was talking about. [Laughter] So I called back to Houston. I said, "What's in the photo TV checklist?" This is the photo TV checklist, contingency tab. This is the picture they took at the last training session, the last NASA-7 training session. It says, "Everything will be fine." It's got this pull tab. The photo TV people put that thing up.

*Wright:* That's terrific.

*Rollins:* That was always your definitive statement.

*Gahring:* That's right. "Everything's fine. Just carry on." Kept telling Andy that in orbit, too.

*Rollins:* That's great.

*Wright:* And it was.

*Gahring:* Yes. Good thing.

*Wright:* Or you'd have to have your picture replaced.

*Gahring:* Yes. Come back and have scars drawn on it and stuff.

*Wright:* Well, maybe Andy will hang that in his house. Or maybe you can hang that in your house.

*Gahring:* Yes.

*Wright:* It's a good thing he read that, or it could have been one of those secrets that nobody would able have been able to know.

*Gahring:* Well, we tell him every now and then, "Refer to photo TV checklist contingency tab."

*Wright:* Secret code. Thanks.

[End of interview]