Mr. Jay Barbree

Oral History

Kennedy Space Center

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Interviewer: Dr. Patrick Moore

Transcriptionist: Sharon Youngquist

Moore: Today is Friday, June 14th, 2002. I'm Dr. Patrick Moore. . .

Barbree: Twenty-oh-two.

Moore: Twenty-oh-two.

(Laughter)

Moore: I'm Dr. Patrick Moore, University. . .

Barbree: By the time they are looking at this Dr. Patrick Moore we will be using as we use seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty. And we will not be doing two-thousand-two.

Moore: We'll keep our fingers crossed. University of West Florida, Public History Program and summer faculty fellow with Kennedy Space Center and I'm here today with Jay Barbree, the NBC correspondent who has seen every human space flight that has come from this center and we're going to talk a little bit about his experiences today and kind of how he views the relationship between the public and the center. How are you today?

Barbree: I'm fine Patrick.

Moore: Good. Tell me a little background briefly. . .

(Laughter)

Moore: . . . about what was it in your life, where you are originally from, what schooling did you go through that made you end up here for the first flights?

Barbree: Well I was born on a farm in southwest Georgia and stayed there until I was about fourteen years old, went to Kentucky, went to high school in Kentucky, then off into the Air Force, finished my schooling there. Attended Metropolitan Air College in East St. Louis, became a pilot and then when I got into journalism I took a course from Columbia University, Dr. Norm Lewis, on journalism, which I think was one of the finest courses available in those days. So after starting to work, after the Air Force I started to work, believe it or not, I was only twenty-years-old when I got out. I lied about my age and got in the Air Force at age sixteen, got my mother to sign. Being a Baptist woman from South Georgia she would not lie so she told me she says, "If you will write the figure seventeen on a piece of paper and put it in your shoe when they ask me I will say you're over seventeen and won't be lying." So this is a true story, I do not exaggerate. So when I got out of four years in the Air Force I was twenty-years-old, I got my journalism course from Columbia as I was telling you, from there I went to work for Channel 10 in Albany, Georgia, came here in 1958 after a couple of years up there. I've been with NBC news since July 21st, 1958. Started as a stringer. Worked it into a staff job after a couple of years. And right now I'm full speed ahead to do fifty and run somebody off that does weather that's been around for fifty years on NBC. I can't think of that guys name, anyway you seen him out of Washington every once in a while.

Moore: Just marking the time for you to take the top spot.

(Laughter)

Barbree: Yeah, well if he doesn't leave, I'm gonna have him shot. (laughter) You know, something. His name is Willard I think.

(Laughter)

Moore: Well, we'll just hope that he's . . .

Barbree: Willard Scott.

Moore: . . . not doing your birthday party for you.

Barbree: Who used to do. . . really Willard Scott, he's a good friend. I'm just kidding. But Willard used to do the space story for NASA. He was the announcer for the space story for NASA and all, but he's been with NBC for over fifty years.

Moore: What brought you here? You kind of went through it, but there was certainly. . . how, what were the sequence of events with NBC that led you . . .

Barbree: Well see, I've always been interested in flying and interested in space and on October the 4th, 1957 when Sputnik was sent up by the Russians I was at Channel 10 in Albany, Georgia. So

immediately my friend at the time, we were working there together, went to school, was Dr. Gene McCall who happens to be right now the chief scientist of the Air Force, he's a Princeton physicist at Einstein's school. Went through Georgia Tech on a straight-A average, very bright guy, you know, I hate him, but anyway Gene and I are very close friends and we ran around Albany that night in a car chasing girls and wondering about Sputnik. So I got him his first job down here on Atlas when he was at Georgia Tech and he went on to be a doctor working for Berkley California at Los Alamos, he's a fellow at Los Alamos, father of the GPS system, I could just go on and on and on. . .

Moore: What was his name?

Barbree: His name is Gene McCall.

Moore: McCall.

Barbree: He is on contract from Los Alamos to the Air Force as their chief scientist and he works out of Peterson at Colorado Springs right now. But anyway, we were driving around that night talking about space so I wanted to make the move to come down here and I came down here with a local radio station, three or four months later I worked it into a job with NBC.

Moore: How did you convince your, you came down here with radio, you were already employed by the radio station?

Barbree: Yes, I came down here and got a job with the radio station.

Moore: Down here?

Barbree: Down here. I left the job with the TV station in Albany, Georgia and came here because they had no TV station here except Channel 2. I did work for Channel 2 out of Daytona and Orlando for a few months. But the job was open at NBC. I wrote a one paragraph letter to William R. McAndrew, who was the executive vice president of NBC news then, saying I cannot understand why the nation's number one network in news, which they were and they still are today, didn't have a representative here. My services are available. My phone number . . . just that simple. I got a call a week later from an editor on the desk and they tried me out. Then they I worked for them for a while as a stringer and then got a staff job and I've been with them ever since.

Moore: And that was down here? So you packed up essentially and left a good paying job up in Georgia just because of your. . .

Barbree: I wouldn't say it was good paying. (laughs)

Moore: Well at least a paying job . . .

Barbree: You have to remember those days, fifty dollars a week was average, you know, I was making about sixty dollars a week or something like that at Channel 10 and I came down here for seventy-five dollars a week.

Moore: But it was a desire to come down here because of space?

Barbree: That's why I wanted to come. Because what most people don't realize, going back, Cape Canaveral in the late-fifties and 1960's, see NASA did not exist then, it was born in 1958 but had no facilities here. It was all the Air Force, the Navy, and Marines got in on it, on some of them and we had an IGOI program, International Geophysical here that we were participating in with the Vanguard program and the Navy ran that. NASA came along in August of 1958 but this place was the most exciting place in the country. It was the cutting edge of science at that time and when after about five years the median age here was 27 and all these young people who knew absolutely nothing about space came here and went to work. For example, when the Mercury Seven astronauts were selected in April of 1959, I believe that is correct, April '59 yeah it was, they were selected, Gus Grissom, one of the astronauts, called up Sam Beddingfield who was an aeronautical engineer at Dayton, Ohio up there at Wright Patterson, where he has been stationed and says, "I want you to come down here and work with us on the space program." And Sam says, "Gus, I don't know anything about space." He says, "I'm an airman, aeronautical engineer." Gus says, "None of do. Come on down. You'll fit." Well he came down here and rose to be the Shuttle program manager and everything, one of the greatest guys around here ever. In fact, he put these guys in the capsule, the early Mercury guys in the capsule when they left. He put Gus in his and all . . . so that's the way it was. People were coming from everywhere. It was sort of akin to the gold rush days or anytime that you had a boom town going, but for young people the exciting place in the late-fifties and early-sixties was Cape Canaveral. It was jewel set down here with all of its beautiful lights at night on the gantry's, you'd fly in and you could see it for miles away, just these beautiful lights, you know, better than before Disney World and better than Disney World from the air. And people. . . what was

happening here and there was nothing more exciting. Astronaut Alan Shepard made his first flight on May the 5th, 1961.

Moore: Now we're jumping ahead. When you were in Georgia and they launched Sputnik, the United States space program, they anticipated that they were far ahead, that they were going to be able to put it in, and it was somewhat of a surprise. Were you familiar enough with, with at least the progression of where we were in terms of this technology?

Barbree: Well, we were nowhere because simply that we had joined, President Eisenhower had signed us up for the IGY, the Vanguard program. They were down here working on the Vanguard but it was a pitiful effort of what the Russians were doing.

Moore: But, were you familiar? Did you know in Georgia. . .

Barbree: No, I did not know. I didn't even know we were participating in the IGY. But I'd always been interested in space and interested in rockets and I knew they had five down here because when I was in the Air Force they fired the first one, Bumper, from here in July 1950 and I had just gone in the Air Force at 16 years old then, so anyway we knew it was called the Air Force Missile Proving Grounds and so we knew what was going on down here. So when I came here everybody began to think about we've gotta catch up, but what a lot of people don't know is in 1956 Dr. Wernher von Braun, who had developed the Jupiter C which was a Redstone rocket with a spin bucket on top of it, he rolled that to the launch pad and was going to put it in orbit but because we were participating in the Vanguard program a Lt. Colonel by the name of Asa Gibbs who was the Cape Canaveral Air

Force Station manager says, “You’d better get it off this pad doctor.” Because what he was gonna do was launch it, if it went into orbit it was going to be an accident you see. The same rocket, the same rocket that they took back to the hangar, the same _____ spin bucket that went on top, not the same payload, same everything was what we used on January the 31st, 1958 to launch our first satellite into orbit Explorer 1. Now Explorer 1 was built by Dr. Pickering out of JPL, Jet Propulsion Laboratory and Cal Tech was involved and that later became you know NASA out there with JPL and all. But we also discovered Van Allen, Dr. Van Allen out of Iowa had an experiment onboard, discovered Van Allen radiation belts a couple of thousand miles up around Earth that we didn’t know was there, also discovered the Earth as more pear-shaped than a perfect sphere, which I can’t say, that’s a perfect ball, okay, but anyway. _____ went back out there and he did it then.

Moore: You came down here, got this job, but this was predominantly this was Navy, or uh, military protocol, DOD protocol, they weren’t sharing information right off the bat. How was it that you as a reporter working for NBC were able to get the information out?

Barbree: Well, now you’re going back to the days where we had to go sit on the hill out there and watch them and all that. Now that was actually before my time.

Moore: Okay, so you . . .

Barbree: When I came here Jim Kitchell of NBC in 1958 had just negotiated a deal with the Air Force that we would be briefed on Friday, all the reporters agreed to it, that we would be briefed on Friday at four-o-clock by General Yates, who was the two-star, it was Donald Yates who was the two-

star in charge here and we would not reveal what we were told until fire in the tail. Well those days were the days that reporters were reporters and they had honor and if they gave you their word they would honor it. We don't have that today. There's no honor left in the media today, none whatsoever. People today, journalist today, they, most of them can't even spell journalism let alone know what the hell it is so today you could never get away with that because we honored it; our word meant something. And we went out there and we covered everything. But in 1957 the only way the reporters who were here a year ahead of me could cover was to go out and sit on the beach and they would look up and they would look and see whether or not the big red balloon was raised, the ball was raised at the port. We would listen on shortwave radios. We had to do that later after I was here because you know some of the tests were secret so to keep up with the secret ones and all, which we did, so we still had to cover a lot of the military the same way that we went and got out here for that we would for most of them see in doing fire in the tail. But there were a lot stories and all about that that went on. In fact, on December the 18th, 1958 probably the most secret launch that went into orbit took place, it was called Project Score. Eighty-eight people in the country knew about it. And what it was was that we were launching, we had been launching our small satellites, the Vanguard and the Explorer and here's Russia launching these huge two-thousand, three-thousand pound satellites. The reason was very simple. In our nuclear program we had miniaturization was full-speed ahead for us, we had smaller nuclear warheads so we didn't need but three-hundred-sixty-thousand pounds of thrust to go intercontinental where they needed a million pounds of thrust to get their big warheads over here. So they were using million pound thrust rockets to put their satellites up like Sputnik and the Vashods and all of them that followed. But anyway, they decided because our first intercontinental ballistic missile was Atlas, to get it five-thousand miles you would have to get almost to orbital speed at the peak of the trajectory, at sixteen-thousand-something miles per hour to reach

that five-thousand miles. So the theory had always been with the Air Force that if you strip this rocket down, carried nothing onboard, that you could put it into orbit. So they wanted to do it as a publicity stunt and they took a tape recorder made by RCA that had a seasons greetings message from President Eisenhower and here's this two-ton, or four-ton, I forget which, rocket that we could put into orbit and lay claim like that we had like a four-ton satellite in orbit, but in order to do this they had to strip, they had to strip it. They had to turn and go directly east because the Earth rotates to the east at a thousand miles per hour so if you go directly east in launching then you're already moving a thousand miles an per hour before you leave the launch pad so you only have to expend enough energy to get up a plus sixteen-thousand miles per hour to get up to seventeen-thousand-three-hundred/four-hundred miles per hour to get in Earth orbit okay. So they stripped this Atlas down, hot-rodded it. There was eight reporters that went out there and we covered it. Had it not worked we would of never known about it; maybe in later years. But prior I knew about it and brought in a camera crew. Now here's how I knew about it. I was out at Building 425 at Patrick Air Force Base at the public affairs office and we were waiting to come out here for a static test. I went to the Men's room and I'm in the Men's room on the commode in the stall and I hear these two people come in, one of the voices was very familiar, I knew it was General Don Yates, and he's talking to this guy who turned out to be an ARPA guy, Advanced Research Project Agency, a real spook, spy guy, you know, black operation, and they're talking about Project Score and no one knows about it and Yates says, "I'll take care of the range safety officer," which he did. And the guy says, "Well what if the press gets hold of it?" Well they're not gonna be able to report it because if they know what's going on they'll know that we're not gonna announce it if it doesn't go into orbit." See and so they're just talking openly about this. So they talked for about a minute and finally the guy from ARPA says, "Is this place clear?" See, they didn't want to talk in his private bathroom because his secretary and all might

be coming in and people like that, not in his bathroom, but you know different people that walked in, there's too much traffic so he wanted to go down . . . and so he says, "I'll check it." So I pulled my feet up around my ears and he looks down and everything and they continued with the conversation. So I went out of there, I went to my RCA sources and found out about the tape recording. So I got a camera crew back down here. I knew about it. So we went out, the eight of us, and the rest of them left, but when we were out there and this thing took off it went directly east it went off of the range safety parameters and General Don Yates reached over and grabbed this Captain's arm and said don't blow it, because his job was to blow the rocket up if it went off of its trajectory because it could hit some parts of Africa, populated parts of Africa and everything. He says, "I'll take full responsibility." And his range safety officer is arguing but General and he physically held his wrist to keep him from doing this. Well Project Score made it into orbit and two hours later at a dinner in Washington President Eisenhower announced it. I already had my report on film setting at Channel 12 in Jacksonville that went on the air at eleven-o-clock, the eleven-o-clock news on NBC. We would do a hot feed to most of our stations in those days and so we did it. I was the only one that had it but we had Project Score and we would have never known about it had I not been sitting on the commode (laughs) in Building 425 when they walked in and talked about it. But this is the way a lot of things will happen. Now we went out there to cover it, but we were told that it was a regular development launch of the Atlas. See?

Moore: Now this was in December of '58?

Barbree: December the 18th at 6:02 PM, 1958 and that was Eastern Standard Time because it was right after sunset and that thing flew up into the sun and we were dark here on earth and

everybody thought, “Jesus Christ is returning”. That was the most awesome looking trajectory of a, of a rocket going into space. It was terrific.

Moore: Was that your first big scoop, if you will? Your first big story that kind of broke there?

Barbree: Yeah, well, yeah. I mean that was a good one. I also broke the story about the rendezvous of Gemini six and seven because we had lost the Atlas/Agena for Gemini six to, for it to, you know rendezvous with, which was supposed to be our first rendezvous. Gemini seven was to follow and be for two weeks, so that they could check out astronauts withstanding weightlessness for two weeks, long enough to go to the moon and back. And so Frank Borman got the idea, he was the commander of Gemini seven, got the idea that he and James Lovell would be up there for two weeks so they would have time to put six back on the pad and launch six after the Agena fell, take six off the pad, put seven on, launch seven as scheduled for two weeks, put six back on the pad, and, you know, about eight or nine days into the mission, wherever it was, then they would launch Wally Schirra and Tom Stafford. And they went up and they rendezvoused with them and they also played, they did a UFO story up there, that was a classic, you know what I’m talking about, about Santa Claus? Yeah. So Wally is playing on his harmonica Santa Claus and Tom comes on and says, “Mission Control, this is six” and they said, “yeah six”, “We’ve got an unidentified flying object here” and they start talking about it, says, “I can make it out now. It looks like a sleigh being pulled by reindeer.” This was on Christmas Eve and, you know, says, “Oh Yeah, looks like a jolly man in there,” and Wally’s playing Jingle Bells on the, on the little harmonica he had. Every Christmas Eve for like the next twenty years I did that same story on NBC radio. I would do it and I’d say, “Mission Control is on the Santa watch tonight,” and, you know, we’ll see if the astronauts see anything and

then here it would come and we would play it and it was cutesy that we did, you know, for twenty years after that. But I had Gemini six and seven. Then we were fortunate, we, the NBC space unit got the Emmy for Apollo eleven and ten, for the landings on the moon. The computer drop out, I was on top of that when it happened and whether or not they were going to abort. They were right on the. . .

Moore: This is Apollo eleven?

Barbree: . . ._____ aborting. I wrote, was the lead writer on the book, Moonshot, which was a project I put together in, it was introduced by Neil Armstrong and it was done with Allen Sheppard and Deke Slayton, myself, and a good friend Howard Benedict, who was with the Associated Press and, anyway, we got working with Neil Armstrong then, we got, Neil said to me coming in a limo to the airport. We were all headed back, leave Turner, in Atlanta, CNN, in Atlanta, Turner Publishing published the book. And Neil Armstrong would never tell anyone anything about the landing. He had very little to say, the quintessential college professor if you will. And he had very little to say about it and, but he would often laugh about, well that's not right, but he wouldn't tell you what was correct, you see? And, the other fellow, Buzz, wrote a couple of books and in one of his books, Buzz put that after they landed they slapped one another on the shoulders. Neil said, "never happened, never happened", you know, so we get this guy an attitude, so he made this statement to me in the car, so when I wrote, after the prologue we open with the landing in Moonshot, which incidentally went to number one, bestseller, published two book clubs, published in seven overseas countries. Anyway, he made that statement to me, so when I finished I had the best records available, best everything I could get, made it as accurately as I knew how to make it. So I sent it up

to him. With a cover letter that says, “Dear Neil, remembering what you told me in the car, there’s no excuse for making a mistake. You are the only person on this earth that can critique this and let me know if it is accurate. Please do. Make any changes and send it back.” I had him trapped. He could hardly refuse me, because after he had scolded me for not being accurate. So he was very gracious and he did that and I have it in my files today. So in the account of the Apollo eleven landing in the book Moonshot is the only written narrative that I know of, the only written narrative that I know of, that was edited and critique by Neil Armstrong.

Moore: That’s a pretty _____ (ringing) endorsement, isn’t it?

{Laughter}

Barbree: He has yet to do a book. We tried to get him to go more, but he agreed to introduce it, but we couldn’t him on that book either, with it, but he’s a great guy, you know.

Moore: Let’s go back a little bit to your time and the first human launch, Al Shepard’s launch.

Barbree: Right.

Moore: . . . and kind of that experience. Share with me a little bit about that relationship when, when it went up what was NBC looking from, looking for from you, for you to share with the rest of the world.

Barbree: Well. What we did mainly, we did have TV coverage, but TV could not do what radio could do. And we were on a worldwide hookup with radio. We had the BBC, we had Armed Forces Radio, we got like sixteen radio networks hooked up to NBC radio networks, so all the servicemen and people all around the world were listening to us. And what they really wanted was, they wanted a standard radio, on the scene, report. So this is what I tried to do. I tried to describe exactly what was going on. And it was me and Marell Muller. Now Marell Muller was, he's been dead some time now, but he was one of the great World War II radio correspondents, like Ed Murrow and all. He was on the deck of the battleship Missouri when the surrender was signed by Japan. He reported that by radio out of Tokyo Bay. Anyway, I can remember Marell saying a classic line after the Mercury Redstone faded from view; a classic line where he says, "He looks so lonely up there." And at the time it did. He looked so, just a tiny dot, then he was so alone, that that was a classic line, but we tried to paint the picture of what was going on and what a lot of people don't realize is that every automobile within this area that was on the highway, I don't know if I'm getting out of your shot, but, but every automobile stopped and people got out and they watched this and people had already lined the beaches, lined the causeways and we had thousands at the site, you know, on the launch site itself. But the church's doors were open and people were literally inside churches and fell to their knees praying for Alan Shepard because we had gone through several years that these rockets would blow up quicker than they would fly straight, however the manned rockets had been cared for more tenderly and had been checked out better so they were a little more proficiently rated, a little better, a little more true to what they were supposed to do. So, anyway, that was the kind of atmosphere in which you launched at. Now today, when they launch the Shuttle, even though we've had the Challenger, one accident, people really expect it to go. And people treat it somewhat like an airliner, but it's far from that. The statistics are that you'll lose like one in seventy-five Shuttles, right

now, and we have flown, we just flew the 141st mission, we had 31 before, so we've flown a 110 Shuttles and we lost one them, the Challenger, which was the 25th flight, you see. So, it's still a dangerous profession, because with everything that has to work I think it's really amazing that they are as safe as they are.

Moore: It's remarkable.

Barbree: And that they have the record that they have, you see. But it was a different atmosphere altogether, a different atmosphere.

Moore: Go back to that atmosphere. With Gagarin's launch months prior, what was the, what was the feeling down here. Was there a sense of urgency in making this happen?

Barbree: Oh yeah. In fact Shepard should have beat Gagarin in space, because Gagarin went up, if memory serves me correctly, April 12th of 1960, and he went in May. Check that date, I think it was April 12th. But, I know Alan went May, 5th, '61, okay, and Gagarin went April, 12th, '61. All, all of the flights with the Mercury Redstone had been made when he went, but on the last one, before, that was supposed to be the last one before they had a pogo effect, if my memory, if my memory is correct. They had a little oscillation on it and, Wernher wanted to flight one more test flight. Well Alan Shepard got down on his knees and he begged Wernher to go ahead and fly it because the engineers had figured out what it was from was the sloshing of the fuels. So they knew if they put baffles in there that they could take care of it and so they'd already engineered them, run tests on them, and they were working, so they were confident that everything was going to be fine. And had

they done that, then Alan Shepard would have flown in March, the same flight that he flew in May, but Werhner wanted to get another one on there, test it, fly it and Werhner was god, whatever Werhner said, they did. So, that's what it was. That was adding that one additional flight, one he would have beaten, you know, Gagarin into space, not into orbit.

Moore: Tell me about the orbiting. Was that a shock for the people down here?

Barbree: No, they knew they had a big enough, they knew they had the size rockets to go into orbit. We had to use the Atlas to get into orbit. We knew they had the power to get into orbit because they were putting the satellites there. And they had already put a dog up, you know, because it was just a matter of putting a guy in there and flying him around one time around the earth and bringing him back. So they knew that and they expected it when they were ready and they knew that they were getting ready. So they expected them to go into orbit, but we went with suborbital because that was the fastest that we could get to, you see. And we were supposed to fly like four or five suborbitals, but after two, and you already had Gagarin and Titov in orbit. They went directly to the Atlas, you know, and. . . Did you interview Tom O'Mally?

Moore: I have not.

Barbree: He was a test conductor. Do you know who he is?

Moore: I know who he is.

Barbree: Yeah. He's a test conductor. You ought to call TJ up and interview him because he was a test conductor that launched Glenn into orbit, you know, and he came here about the same time, but he could tell you more about what was physically taking place right there. You know, you talk about you had to have one huge set of gonads to do what he did and he's a good friend of mine. He's a good guy. And he's retired and living on Cocoa Beach. He's in the book, T.J. O'Mally, in the book. Give him a call.

Moore: Now your anticipation, though, you recognize that you were going to go, you could have gone, that they had the bigger lift capability, we were getting there with the Atlas. That the competition was much less dire than what the public perceived, but you were the go between. How was it, what was, what was it that came into communicating what was taking place and the overbearing fear on behalf of the public suddenly, Gosh, they put a man into space what else can they put. Different knowledge base here from what was outside. How did you communicate that?

Barbree: No, if it hadn't had been for national prestige we wouldn't be doing what we were doing. That was during the cold war and we were in a race with the Russians so we were taking chances that we would never take and that was the type of atmosphere. It was sort of like a football game, if you will. We had to win the game. We were going for the Superbowl. The Superbowl was landing on the moon. In fact Kennedy had asked them after the Shepard mission, what goal can we set and beat the Russians there. Do we need to go to Mars, or can we do it to the moon? And the brain power at the time decided we can do it to the moon and he says, can you do it in this decade, yes, we can do it in this decade. Everybody thought the Russians would beat us to the moon. In fact, they were going to try after they lost the big rocket that blew up on the launch pad that we didn't know

anything about, they were going to try it in 1968, you see, because in 1968 they were getting ready to put a Zond around, fly it around the backside of the moon and bring it back to earth and they could say, we went to the moon first. They weren't going to land. They weren't going to go into orbit around the moon. They were going to do a fly around and bring it back. But then, for the history books, they would have been the first to have reached the moon. So we, our intelligence, they had a rocket on the pad, we knew this was about to happen. So even though we had only flown a Saturn V, had only flown twice, you see, and hadn't flown a man on it yet, astronauts on it yet, they put Apollo 8 and said, we've decided that we're going to go to the moon and go into orbit and come back and Frank Borman went along with it and James Lovell and Bill Anders I believe was the third crew member. And they went along with it and that's what they did over Christmas 1958 and nobody could understand why are they flying over Christmas?

Moore: '68

Barbree: I mean '68, yeah, '68, correct. Why are they flying '58, not, no.

Moore: Amazing.

Barbree: Yeah, yeah, big difference, in '68. So why are they flying over Christmas? Well, the reason they were flying over Christmas was that there was a Russian rocket sitting on the launch pad and it was a propaganda feat. So if we got there then the Russians couldn't say that they beat us to the moon and so once that we went and did Apollo 8 around the moon and came back the Russians

quit because they did not have the ability at that time to land on the moon. All they could do was fly around so there was, and come back.

Moore: Assuming they could get the rocket off the pad.

Barbree: Yeah, right. So, anyway, that's why they started then working on the space station. You know, so we went ahead and landed on the moon and we followed Apollo 8 with Apollo 9 which was a checkout of the lunar landing module in earth orbit. Then from that we put Apollo 10 up there. They went within nine miles of the moon. They took the landing pads off because they knew damn well that Tom Stafford and Gene Cernan would have, they'd have gone ahead and landed, accidentally landed it on the moon.

Moore: Accidentally.

Barbree: Accidentally landed on the moon.

Moore: Like Von Braun accidentally put something in orbit.

Barbree: Yeah, right, that's it. So they, they knew what they would do.

Moore: Did they really take the pads off?

Barbree: Oh yes! And I tell you Gene Cernan and Tom Stafford would have landed it on the moon. Okay? Now Tom never got to land on the moon. See, he commanded Apollo-Soyuz after that, but Apollo 10 within nine miles. Gene Cernan, who was the lunar module pilot on that, came back and commanded Apollo 17, our last mission with Harrison Smith, the scientist. So anyway, once that, then Apollo 11, and nobody thought Apollo 11 was going to land on the moon. They didn't, we wouldn't, everybody was sure we'd have to abort the first try. It won't happen. So they really thought that everybody's sort of favorite astronaut, Pete Conrad, everybody loved Pete, would actually be the first man on the moon. He went on Apollo 12. Well, they landed 11 on the moon so Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were the first there.

Moore: How did you view all these people, all of these astronauts, these American heroes which were totally different than any we had had before and certainly different than any we've had since?

Barbree: Well, as Deke Slayton said, and Deke was a wonderful guy, and Deke says, he turned around and looked at Alan Shepard sitting before the press in Washington when they first introduced him and being that both names started with "S" they sat side by side. And Deke looked at Alan and said, "You believe this? We're already heroes and we haven't done a damn thing." But they were just the fact that they would get in. I was at Wright Patterson Air Force Base going through the same tests that the Mercury astronauts went through with a tape recorder for a radio program we had on NBC then on the weekends called, Monitor. And I did twelve packages of inside this test, that test, took the same that they did when they were announced, so, I said earlier, Gus Grissom was stationed at Wright Patterson then, so we, the crew and I, we hopped in a car and went out and interviewed his

wife and his two sons and ran back to our affiliate and fed a spot to the Huntley Brinkley Report, you know, from Dayton, Ohio when that happened, but they were instant heroes and they hadn't done a damn thing. But everybody viewed them because they had gone through this long sequence of qualifications. They had to have so many hours of jet time. They had to be a test pilot. They had to be married. They had to be college graduates with engineering degrees. You know, all of these credentials that they had to have to go there. They made sure they didn't get a flagpole sitter, you know, that they got somebody up there that was a responsible person. Of course, these guys were, they were responsible people, but again on the other hand, they were fun loving. They were the most exciting people and they just loved life and they lived it to the fullest and, yeah, you got to know them and all and like Alan Shepard, before he went, one of the stories we tell in Moonshot, was, the guy that was running the show, I can't think of his name. . . Walter, Walt Williams. Walt Williams was a no nonsense type person and he was in charge of the Mercury program to do all the launches and the guy, the director, was Bob Gillruth, but he was the director of flight operations, Walt Williams was and everything. And so Walt was everything, you know, go, go, go, everything serious, serious, serious, never a smile and so these guys are meanwhile out here running up and down in their Corvettes given to the by Chevrolet through Jim Rathman who won the 1960 Indianapolis 500. He'd got them for them down here. Jim's still down here, now. I talked to him yesterday on the phone, great guy. And, so they're out here racing one another and they're doing things to them, like they're changing the gear ratio on their Vet's so the other one could win without them knowing about it. See they did that to Shepard. Shepard was getting beat all the time by Cooper and Gordo had Jim Rathman, when he took his Vet in for servicing, to change the gear ratio on it just a hair, so that Gordo's Vet would always be just a hair faster and he'd always right at the end beat him and it would just, you know, tear, being so competitive, it would tear Shepard up. Well anyway, they go to the pad and

they're getting ready about two weeks before Alan's launch and Walt Williams says, "I'm supposed to speak before the Kiwanis club at the Holiday Inn today at the lunch and all, I'm committed, my car is back over at the office. I've got, how can I get back over there, I got to get there. I'm running late." So Shepard says, "That's okay Walt, take my Vet." So his Vet was there at the launch pad. So he takes Walt down there, gets him behind the wheel, gives him about a five minute course in how to drive his Vet because it was so souped up and hot and he jerked it all over the place and stop and start. He finally got it off of the launch pad and out on the road and he headed for the south gate. Well Alan Shepard goes to the phone and picks up the phone and calls security and says "Security, This is astronaut Alan Shepard. Some son of a bitch just stole my Corvette so stop him at the gate." They said, "We'll get him, we'll get him, you know, Commander Shepard." Then _____ so as soon as he got there, they yanked him out. They didn't know who he was. They yanked him out of the Vet, threw him up on the back of the Vet, you know what I mean, and held him there, and he's yelling, "Get Charlie Buckley," who was in charge of security. They got Charlie who said, "Let him go. He's the director of flight crew operations for Mercury. It's Walt Williams." But astronaut Shepard called, you know, and they finally and then Walt wouldn't talk to him for two weeks. But this was the kind of thing that these guys, they're just pranksters and jokesters and everybody loved them. It was just exciting. It was the most exciting place, as I said, you know, in the country in those days.

Moore: You're the person who is communicating who these people are.

Barbree: Yeah.

Moore: And you're getting to know them. You're getting to understand them. You're getting to see them in a different light than the public was. How was it that you, you, in light of not only who they were, but in the light of the fact that they're heroes for a very important cold war, national pride, prestige, competition, etc. What was it, maybe this is a question you've never thought about before or how you went about doing it, but how was it that you presented these individuals through your reporting.

Barbree: Well, I presented them for what I felt they were and the things that you just mentioned. First of all, they were family men. They were test pilots. They were engineers. They were the best that America had to offer and they were risking their lives and it was all for country, exactly what it was. It was national prestige and they were willing to go out there and do that. Now I was willing to do this and I got the confidence of three or four of them, that I got to meet, John Glenn, Alan Shepard, Gus Grissom, and Scott Carpenter, and Wally Schirra, too, and Gordo Cooper. There's a story with Gordo Cooper, for example, I'll tell you in just a minute that kind of comes home with me being a Georgia boy. He's from Oklahoma. But anyway, I tried to tell the story of who these people were, what they were doing, and the program. I did not try to rake mud over them and they knew this. In fact, Gus Grissom made the statement one time, when he was asked by a person in the public about the press and he was putting down most of them, couldn't stand them, didn't want to be around them. And she says, "How about Jay Barbree?", and he says, "Well, there's an exception." Says, "You can trust him." Well, what he meant was, there was a running joke going on, a young lady who happens to be a friend of mine. She's married to a real nice guy in Mobile, Alabama. There's a rumor that Gus was running around with her. Well, he was not. There were just friends. There was never any love making. He did not cheat on Betty or anything like that. I saw them coming out of a restaurant

together and I said, “Hi Gus,” and he says “Hi Jay” and then for two or three days he sat back and waited for it to come and it didn’t. There was one, I won’t tell you which one it was, but there was a private investigator around here who had managed to tape, audio tape, one of them in bed with a person, kind of a loose woman. He shouldn’t have been in there, but it wasn’t affecting what he was doing but it wasn’t my job. And this guy brought the tape to me and says, “Jay, do you think NBS would buy it?” and I said, “Leave it with me and I’ll let you know. Let me play it.” He left and I erased it. I didn’t know if he had another copy or not. I called him back up a little bit later and said, “They’re not interested. Come get your tape.” He came and got it and he called me back to say, “Hey, there’s nothing on the tape.” I said, “You didn’t take that by the Radar stations at Patrick did you?” He says, “yeah”. I said, “My God, man. It’s magnetic, it’ll erase everything. Never take tapes by there.” Anyway, that’s what I did, because it had nothing whatsoever to do with what their jobs that they were here, you see. Had they done something that affected their job I would be the first guy on them and I think they knew that and we had, you know, we had no problems and got along good with the guys and everything like that, but it was a fine line to walk because I’m trying to objective as a reporter and trying to play the role as, of a reporter, you see, and not get in bed with the subject that I’m covering and so it was always a fine line to walk. For example, here today we’re sitting in, we’re sitting in an auditorium here where we’re doing this. It says the John Holloman auditorium. Okay. Now Daniel Goldin who was an administrator of NASA dedicated this the John Holloman auditorium after John killed himself in an automobile accident. Now John’s a fine man, you understand. I like John, but John was a general purpose reporter. He covered stories everywhere. He probably was here like seven or eight missions, but he liked Dan Goldin. He got in bed with Dan Goldin. They had lunch together, blah, blah, blah. He referred to Dan Goldin on the air as my buddy Dan Goldin. His objectivity was gone. Dan Goldin the administrator likes this so he comes and does this. Now I

resented it. Every person that's been here for a long time has resented it. Why I resented it, there was a lady by the name of Mary Bubb, she was a very good reporter here back in the late fifties and sixties when they were, you know, there were no women reporters, but she covered every news conference in this auditorium. When I was too lazy to come out here and I would listen to it and ask questions, Mary would be sitting here asking the questions. If anybody deserved to have this auditorium named after them, it was Mary Bubb who put in forty years, instead of a handful of flights. You follow me? Now, it's okay ethically to name this auditorium after John Holloman because he's dead, but NASA has given awards to journalists who are still alive and covering this program. When they wanted to nominate me for one I says, "No. I cannot. It's unethical." And they went. . . It's unethical. How can I being a journalist and a reporter accept an award from someone whom I'm covering? You see? You can not walk over that line. You see, like, we , I made the statement a while ago, it was back when we had journalists. I was taught by Dr. Norman Lewis at Columbia University, that a reporter's first obligation is to report a story when he has it. Okay? Now, you might get disagreement if you, I don't know, does your school have a journalism course? Okay. This I'd like to tell all journalism professors in this country today. If I find out that something is happening on the Space Station that is news worthy it's unethical for me to sit on it, it is now 2:40 in the afternoon, until Tom Brokaw show comes on, which is our main show. People do it because that's where the bucks are. This is the number one show. You hold it. No, you don't, if you're ethical. You do not. We've got MSNBC, we've got other shows. We can break in on the network. You report it. If it's worth reporting you report it. That's your first obligation. What happens on all TV stations in the country today, every evening you're sitting there and I like to use this when I'm speaking, they come on and say, "Crazed killer loose in one of our neighborhoods, six dead. We'll tell you which neighborhood at eleven." Your audience is going crazy trying to figure out if they got a crazed killer in

their neighborhood. That is called a tease in order to get people to tune into your show. They will often use a tease like that all evening and put it in the back end of the show to force you to watch the whole show. That's unethical. News should be news. You should report it as soon as the mic opens. It's the inverted pyramid system. You go with the best story and you keep going down. It's like always eat the best food in your house and you're always eating the best. Once you eat the best then you go to the next. But anyway, that's what we don't do today. And today you interviewed Howard Benedict back in those days when we went on the air we made our mistakes. Howard would catch me in a mistake, I couldn't wait to get back on the air and correct it. Howard, if I caught him in a mistake, he couldn't wait to get on the wire and send out a 95 correcting it. For all newspapers, disregard blah, blah, blah, error right here. Okay? Today if somebody makes a mistake, you call them, first thing they want to do they want to argue with you about it. (In a derogatory voice) – "Well, that's. . . .", No matter, you can't reason with them. They can't be wrong. So when you finally convince them that they're wrong then what do they do. They stop broadcasting it. They don't go back and correct it. They leave the misinformation out there. Now I told you a while ago that in the early days here we accepted from the General information for the next week to make our jobs easier if we would keep it until fire in the tail. It was a good working relationship. It helped everybody. We tried that like twenty years ago or twenty years later and everybody goes out there and agrees with the Air Force and signs a piece of paper saying we won't break it until you tell us. The next morning the agreement we signed, the story and everything, is in the Florida Today Newspaper and I went and I grabbed the reporter literally by his collar and I said, "You son of a bitch, you gave your word." He said, "Well, I confirmed it with another source." I said, "I could have confirmed it with thirty other sources. That's not the point. You gave your word." You see? So, they said here the other day, like this mission coming up with the Israeli astronaut that they would think about, think about briefing us in

advance on a hold for release, if we would agree to it. And everybody said, “Oh, yeah, yeah,” and I raised my hand and I told the guy that was in charge, and he came from secret service, in fact I knew him when I covered President Carter, you see. He was a young secret service guy even then. I said “You better get the guy that owns the candy store to sign it, because,” I said, “there’s no honor among the press anymore because whatever you tell them you’ll read about it in the Florida Today the next day.” And his eyes got big and Bill Harwood, who’s with CBS here and everything turned around and said “Well, thanks Jay.” I said, “You’re welcome, Bill, but I’m speaking the truth.” I said “These people aren’t going to honor this agreement.” I lived here when they did, but they’re not going to do it. Now you get the publisher of the paper, the man that owns the candy store to sign it, and if that guy knows that it’s his job if he breaks it, then that’s the end of it, you see. I don’t know how we got off on all of this, but I’m just trying to give you an idea of the difference between the press then and the press today.

Moore: Do you think this changed the relationship that Kennedy Space Center had, and well the Cape, and Kennedy later, had with the press. How did this evolve? Certainly there was, there was an interplay you had a solid working relationship for a long time. . .

Barbree: Sure.

Moore: . . . with Kennedy and perhaps that, and I know that after Challenger, I understand, that changed. Was this part of that, how was it that the press viewed you and how was it that you viewed the Center, etc?

Barbree: No, it didn't change that much after Challenger. Now I broke the Challenger story. And you were asking about scoops a while ago, that's probably the biggest, one of the biggest ones that I had. I did it on Tom Brokaw's show two days after it happened. But NASA was not prepared for a Challenger disaster. They just went silent. No one did anything. Hugh Harris, who was in charge of the press here, Hugh immediately started grabbing the tapes and holding them together and telling top officials, hey you've got to speak. You've got to say something. You've got to talk to the world. Because, you see, I was doing radio and we had a guy down here who had been here like once, didn't know anything for TV and they put him on and five minutes later he'd said everything he ever knew about space. So, TV comes over to grab me. Brokaw wanted me to go on with him and I said, "I'm not leaving radio. I'm assigned here. You clear it with. . . ." They had to get the president of NBC news to tell, you know, the vice president of radio wouldn't let me go, the vice president of TV wanted me, to get me over there. And I said, you know, "I'll do whatever you tell me to do, but I'm not going to get up and walk away from the assignment I'm on until I know I'm doing the right thing." So, I started running back and forth and everything because they just went dead. There was nothing. There was no information. There was nothing and we had to stand there and we had to fill and not only that, I'm standing under that exploding Challenger and all of this fire and debris ringing down, raining down I should say, raining down on the Cape and the ocean and everything and I wouldn't close the one phone line that I had. I wouldn't close that at all and now we're trying to fly armies in here and it's me, my daughter, thank God, worked over at the VAB at the time and she got off and came running over and knew I would need her, so she started answering phones. So we had armies in here within about four hours, you know, after the Challenger blew up. But there was no information, so they decided, NBC decided that, Ok, Jay's got the best sources so we will cut him loose from any hard news reporting and you are our investigative reporter to find out what happened

and start concentration on that. Of course the old war horse that I was, I was still filing radio reports and everything and they called me up and chewed me out and said, “We don’t want to hear you on the air, until you tell us what went wrong.” I said, “Okay, you’ve got a deal.” And, you know, they’re both paying me big bucks, so I went out and 48 hours later I had it nailed. As soon, as soon as NASA knew, from looking at the north camera, two hours later I’m on the air with it. I had it nailed down and I’m on the air with it with Tom Brokaw. It just worked out for Tom Brokaw and in fact I went through this situation that a lot of grunts like me in the field go through. First thing they said to me, we had Bob Bazell down here, our science reporter, that I worked with, the first thing this producer in New York said, they think that only people in New York can do something, so he says, “Well I would like for you to give this story to Bob.” And I said, “I would like for you to kiss my red neck you know what,” and he said, “What did you say to me?” I said exactly what I said to you. I said, you know, “I’m a working journalist. I broke this story. Now, if you don’t want it, I will do it for NBC radio. I’ll turn around and give it to radio. “Well, no, don’t give it to radio.” I said, “You’re an hour away. I got a radio newscast coming up. It’s my obligation to go ahead and put it on the air.” And so then they got the vice presidents calling me and everything else and he backed off and they chewed his, his rear out. I mean can you imagine how insulting. I mean here you are, a professor, right? You write a thesis on anything. You work on it. It’s your knowledge. It’s your expertise and they say, give it to the dean and let the dean put his name on it. That makes you happy, doesn’t it?

{Laughter}

Barbree: I mean, this is what this klutz, he was asking me to do. Of course, I’ve written seven books and I’m financially independent so I mean I don’t mind telling them, you know. Okay,

Moore: We've got to switch our tapes.

Barbree: Switch it.

Moore: This is tape two of the interview with Jim, Jay, Jay Barbree, June 14. . .

Barbree: That's Jay John Alvin . . .

Moore: . . . Jay. That's right, where did I get Jim?

Barbree: Jay John Alvin Joseph Thomas Chenault Alberdeen Textile Melodie Barbree. Jay John Alvin Joseph Thomas Chenault Alberdeen Textile Melodie Barbree.

Moore: I was going to stick with Jay.

{Laughter}

Moore: June 14th, 2002 we are continuing our interview. . .

Barbree: And this is good moonshine.

{Laughter}

Barbree: This is west Florida, right out of Pensacola. It's great stuff.

{Laughter}

Moore: You were just telling me about, about the journalist in space program. Certainly, a follow-up to teacher in space. . .

Barbree: It was before the teacher in space.

{simultaneous speaking}

Barbree: Let me tell you about it.

Moore: Sure, sure.

Barbree: The first civilian to go into space was to be a journalist. They, NASA entered into an agreement with the National Association of Schools in Journalism, I'm not saying it, getting the association right, but it's all the schools of journalism throughout all the colleges in all of the country. And at the time the dean of journalism at North Carolina at Chapel Hill was the president of the association. His name is Cole. I'm trying to remember his first name. Anyway, they put together a packet that you had to make application for the things that you had to follow and it was pretty tight and there was some cute things in there. So you had 1765 and filled out this application. Well they

had a board of peers that went through these, were journalism professors from different universities and also a peer group from the press made up of about 20 people. And they selected primarily from your essay that you put in there and your background and all the top one hundred. And then that top one hundred was, twenty of them, there were five regions, so the top one hundred, there was 20 in each region. The next step at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill went for a interview, you did like we're doing now, they interviewed me on Challenger. Challenger had just happened. And you went before a board of eleven, with, they had six university professors of journalism.

Moore: Challenger just happened?

Barbree: Yeah. This is right after Challenger happened. See, we were doing this before Challenger happened. . .

Moore: But the preparations. . .

Barbree: Yeah, yeah, we'd already, we'd already been taken, we were in the hundred, we were in the twenty, okay? And then Challenger. . .

Moore: But they continued, they continued the search?

Barbree: Yeah, okay. Challenger, okay, happened and then we went ahead up to North Carolina a month or so later and went ahead and did that. So they reduced those to eight national semifinalists. Okay? Well, I made it; I was the only one at NBC that made it into the eight. Okay?

So we're down to eight finalists, so they decided then, what they were going to do was, that they were going to, Dick Truly was the NASA administrator. They were going to suspend the program, put it on hold, until they felt it was safe to fly a civilian again. At the same time they made the commitment that no civilian would fly in space until Barbara Morgan, the backup to Christa McAullife, the teacher, would fly. Now, the journalist program was before the teacher program, but somebody by the name of Ronald Reagan needed the teacher's union he thought for his second election and he went to the teachers. He's a big union man.

Moore: He, he already had the journalists?

Barbree: No, no. You see.

{Moore laughter}

Barbree: He didn't have the journalists, oh no. Now you're, and by the way I'm a Republican, I'm a conservative, I'm a Republican. You see, so I, you know, things, but I criticize them all. Anyway, he decided to go with the teacher in space first and then the journalist. So he overruled NASA and so they had ten thousand applications of teachers. Okay. So they come down. . . and Christa McAullife was a jewel, she was terrific. Barbara Morgan, too, I mean. But that flight of Challenger was supposed to have been a journalist and there's a slim possibility it could have been me. If they hadn't of gone for the journalists, you know, the teacher in space.

Moore: So did they ever get it down to the final, the final pool, eight, ten?

Barbree: No, they got down to eight.

Moore: Eight.

Barbree: Eight, okay, in each of the regions which would have been five times eight is forty. So they go it down to forty national semifinalists. The next step was five and we get it down to five then NASA would select two of the five. That's the way the program was set up. And then those two would train, a prime and a backup. Okay. So we were suspended at the national semifinalists. Okay. So I'm one of the eight in the southeastern region. There were two in Florida, one in Virginia, the, and five in the Washington, D.C. area, see? So we're in the Washington, D.C. area that made it in, eight here. And then there's eight in the northeast, eight in the Midwest, and eight west, you know and southwest. So anyway, we were promised that Barbara Morgan would be the first to fly. After she flew then the journalist would go. Well it just kept going on and on and on and on and on and nothing happened. So when Truly left Dan Goldin came in and there was no way in hell that Dan Goldin was ever going to fly a civilian. That's why he got into trouble with the Russians when they put Tito up there, the millionaire, the first one. They finally just thumbed their nose at Goldin and said you don't run our space program. I think he thought he run everything, see. So anyway, I was not a Goldin fan. Anyway, there's no way we were ever going to fly, so this has been on hold all this time. Now all of a sudden a guy by the name of John Glenn, ever hear of him? He was a senator. So he wanted to go back. . .

Moore: _____

Barbree: . . . and fly. Okay? Now so technically they were flying a civilian because, see, they had already flown a congressman, Bill Nelson, who is now one of our senators and they had flown Jake Garn, a senator from Utah. So they'd already flown two politicians the flight before Challenger was Columbia and Bill Nelson, one of our U.S. senators was on that. So anyway, they were going fly Goldin. The president says, you're going, you want to fly Glenn, the president says your going to fly Glenn. So Goldin says alright. Now we're stuck out here on a promise that the first civilian that's going to fly is going to be Barbara Morgan. So how do we get around this? So he goes and he makes Barbara Morgan an astronaut, now Barbara Morgan is an astronaut and she's going to fly next year on the Shuttle. She's been out there training for a while. See? So, anyway they were talking about Barbara Morgan and I asked the question, what about the journalist in space. In which the man, who is now Sean O'Keefe, the NASA of, of, the NASA administrator laughed. He thought it was funny. I didn't think it was funny. I still don't think it's funny. So I'm waiting to see if NASA lives up to its word. You see. I. . .

Moore: Are the forty still waiting?

Barbree: Yes, but I think the only fair thing to do, would be to go back and revisit the forty and say, "who is now interested to continue", to open it up again to people who were not eligible at that time, who are now eligible.

Moore: It's been a few years.

Barbree: Right.

{Laughter}

Moore: A couple of people are eligible now.

Barbree: You see what I mean. Yeah, yeah, but you've got to honor the program that you had. You've suspended that program and you've told the participants that when Barbara flies you will fly. That's what you said. Okay? That's your word. That's NASA word. Okay. Now personally I would not go. I would not go. You know, now.

Moore: If they called you tomorrow and you said. . .

Barbree: I would not go. The main reason is the bloom's off the rose. Okay. If I had been able to go in the eighties, that was '86. If I had been able to go in the eighties, then it would have been worthwhile. I could. . . I was going to write three books. I was going to write one for adults, young adults, and children. I, as a book writer, as a, as a reporter for Time Life, I wrote Time Life reports when I was a stringer for NBC, I _____ for them. I also subbed for the AP. I've written for AP. I've written newspaper stories. I was editor for Gannett, for one of their books during the seventies and so I've got printed, I'm a printed, I'm with the printed media as well as the broadcast media. So I could of covered everybody up there, you know, I could have done, I think, a pretty good job for every outlet of the media. I think those were the credentials that I brought. But since a Japanese journalist has flown on the, had flow to the Russian Mir, it's gone today. There's too many civilians that's gone

up there. I think it would just be something that would kind of go unnoticed. The only problem is, that I think that NASA has word out there, an obligation, and if they're going to start flying all of these people, you see what I mean, I think they ought to acknowledge the fact that they had this program and talked to us forty and say okay guys, we left you hanging out here. What's going to happen? You see. I don't think NASA's administrator should sit and laugh about it when he's asked the question. I think it's a legitimate question and it follows Barbara Morgan and I don't think it's very laughable, because a lot of guys spent a lot of time, they put a lot of effort in, writing the essays, being interviewed, filling out the application, making the travels, going places, to be the first there. And they did what NASA told them to do and what the national association school of journalisms told them to do, and communication, journalism and communication. We did our part. Now come back and say, "Guys, we're going to have to drop this program. We're going to have give you certificates. They already gave us one certificate. I have a certificate. It says that, you know what I mean, something like this, and it's from the national school association as being a national semifinalist. Okay? So anyway, they got to do this, if they, you know, they got, they got to do something. They can't just start flying these people and, and it's not a laughable matter. I think it's a very serious matter that they said that the first civilian that would fly would be a journalist. Then they backtracked and made it a teacher. . .

Moore: But with the codicil that you would go after the teacher.

Barbree: Right. And then, after the teacher was on Challenger and we lost the teacher, they put us on suspension, then we were told we would go after Barbara Morgan. That she had the right because of the loss of Christa McAullife, and nobody disagrees, to go. But good God, what are we

talking about now. How many years has it been? We're talking fourteen, sixteen years. You know what I mean? So naturally you got to give the other guys an opportunity, too, to go. But as I say, the rose is off the bloom, and I personally would not be interested in it, but I would like to see. . .

Moore: Some journalist do it.

Barbree: . . . Do it, yeah. Now Walter Cronkite, for example, is one of the forty and Walter, I'm sure, he's too old to even think about it. You know. Yeah. But anyway, that's, that's the story on the journalist in space if it ever comes up.

Moore: Certainly though, the Challenger disaster changed the relationship, for a lot of things, certainly put the press . . .

Barbree: How did it change the relationship?

Moore: Well, that's the question I'm going to ask you.

Barbree: Yeah, well, see, I don't subscribe to that.

Moore: Do you think it doesn't?

Barbree: No, I don't it changed. . .

Moore: Now, we're talking the relationship between, between the press and between KSC and NASA.

Barbree: No.

Moore: Did you, there wasn't, no?

Barbree: Don't think so, because we had a professional that was in charge here, by the name of Hugh Harris, who was excellent and if it hadn't of been for Hugh they wouldn't of saved what they did. Now, because he was the engine driving this, then the relationship, when he had to get his own agency in step to deal with the press. But no, we've had pretty much the same relationship. A good person like Hugh Harris, the first thing that he tries to do is make sure as a spokesman for a, if it's a spokesperson for the White House or if it's for NASA or if it's for the Weather Bureau, your first obligation is to make sure you never lie to the press. You never lie to the press. Okay? Hugh Harris never lied to me except once. And he didn't know he was lying to me because he was lied to. Two local divers found the crew module for Challenger and when they found it they were running out of air and they came up and they left a buoy for it. So they went out there with a salvage ship and they pulled it up. Well I knew the codes so when they started broadcasting the codes that it was found I went on the air and said they found the crew module. Those Coast Guard came in and the Coast Guard divers start going down, down to set up the salvage operations. They made video of it.

Moore: The Coast Guard.

Barbree: Yeah. So the video was brought in and Bob Crippen and Bob Obermeyer were in charge here for NASA. They were the astronauts watching. Crippen took the video and put it and locked it in his safe, told Hugh Harris there was no video. I found out there was and I go back and say, you lied to me, and Hugh said, went back and Crippen admitted it. Now don't get me wrong. I admire Bob Crippen. He's a good man. I can understand him doing that, trying to keep his cohorts, their mangled bodies and whatnot, because I know what was left and I've never used it on the air and I won't, but some would. And when we did for example, when we did Moonshot, they did four hours, Turner did four hours TV program after the book. They wanted the audio that I had from the Apollo I fire, of those guys dying in that capsule.

Moore: Because you had recorded it from the. . .

Barbree: I got it from a source who had recorded it out here, okay, on a console in the blockhouse. So I had that audio. I never used it. It would serve no purpose to use it. It's a question of taste and judgment.

Moore: And sensationalism, for. . .

Barbree: Right, I'm not going to be part of it. So I never used it on NBC. NBC never said one word to me about using it. But Turner wanted me to turn it over to them and said, "They, we feel we have the right to listen to it and make the judgment of whether or not we'll use it." And I said, "Fine, Get it from another source." Even though we had a, they had a contract with me, no way, stood firm, would not give it to them. You see? So there're things like that that you got to do and, and if Bob

Crippen would simply said, “Yes, we do, but out of respect to the families I’m not releasing it. End of subject.” Then, what happened after he found out about it, New York Times and all of them went to court to get it and they didn’t win. You see? Now there’s a big difference between the fight that you had over Dale Earnhardt’s body and everything for newspapers to see, examine, but would not use the pictures. That’s to keep NASCAR honest. You see? Now there, we had enough information here that there was no way that anybody did anything, you see, that we didn’t know about. The fact that they launched after they were warned, you know, about the cold and all of this. It was the engine driving that was trying to get up to 26 launches a year which is ridiculous. So they had promised Congress, Congress is at fault. There are so many people at fault here. Congress says, “Okay, you go out here, you take. . . ” What they should of built was a solid fuel rocket, booster rocket, that was one piece, but that was a little more expensive, so they made them built it in joints and bring it in here and splice it in the field. That’s what killed Challenger, blew up Challenger, when one of their field joint splices blew through the o-ring. Had they done what they should have done in the right place and that’s Congress’, nobody else, it’s Congress, had Congress done the right thing to begin with we’d of saved, not only seven lives, we would save two and a half billion dollars it cost to replace it. It was peanuts to do the right thing, but where they had to turn around and replace Challenger, two and a half billion dollars to replace Challenger. Okay? But in their wisdom, you know, but Congress is like the press, they never have to stand in judge. . . , I mean, they don’t have to stand and answer to people. See they can always fade back into the background and they had nothing to do with it and they can criticize other people. They can keep the criticism going. You see?

Moore: Sure.

Barbree: But they never have to stand before the bar.

Moore: Well speaking of this. . .

Barbree: Cause I just, just say one thing. . .

Moore: Sure.

Barbree: Just one thing most people don't know. Every law written by the Congress of the United States applied to every citizen except one. Who is that?

Moore: I don't know.

Barbree: Members of the Congress of the United States. They are an exception in every one. Did you know that?

Moore: I did not know that.

Barbree: Yes, sir. If you're a congressman, you're an exception. The law applies to every citizen but that person, that person. Every law written by the legislator, the legislative branch of our three governments, {laughter}

Moore: Puts immunity . . .

Barbree: Yeah, yeah. It's an exception. In other words, they can call everybody before them, but you can't call a Congressman before. . .

Moore: Oh, I see what you're saying.

Barbree: Yeah, every law that's written. . .

Moore: Right, right, right. Okay.

Barbree: . . . if you're a member of Congress. Now, once you leave Congress you don't have that anymore.

Moore: I understand, right, right.

Barbree: You understand. Okay.

Moore: I understand.

Barbree: But they write for themselves as part of our government they're excepted. That's the exception right there. See? Now they don't write it for the judiciary branch and they don't write it for the executive branch, but they write it for their branch.

Moore: Just the legislator.

Barbree: {laughter} Yeah. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Moore: No, that's. . .

Barbree: That has nothing to do with what you're interviewing me for.

Moore: No, it's an interesting piece of the puzzle, though, so.

Barbree: Yeah.

Moore: Ummm

Barbree: Go ahead. It looks like they got quite a, I don't know what's going on out there, some flag. . .

Moore: I think there's a flag ceremony.

Barbree: Yeah. They cut us off behind me. No they just went blank.

Moore: _____ were returning.

Barbree: Yeah.

Moore: The issues, the relationship, as you said, didn't change between the way that NASA treated the press, etc. from your view which is refreshing to hear that, in talking to Hugh. . .

Barbree: No, no.

Moore: Harris though there. . .

Barbree: What did Hugh say?

Moore: . . . in some sectors. Well come see my tapes.

Barbree: Oh, okay.

{laughter}

Moore: I think, I think Hugh's vantage was similar in some ways saying just what you did from the other side.

Barbree: Well, I think I'm speaking from the press now.

Moore: That's right. That's why I'm asking you.

Barbree: See. It didn't change for us, but I know what Hugh is talking about.

Moore: Sure.

Barbree: Because the, the center director, Dick Smith, was angry about several things and some guy came in here from Newsday who had never been here before and he was walking around, looking, and every editor is saying, you know, advance the story forward, develop something new, and everybody's trying to develop something new.

Moore: Well, that's what I want to ask.

Barbree: And, and

Moore: Prior to. . .

Barbree: Yeah. Let me finish just this.

Moore: Okay.

Barbree: So this guy goes out to Dick Smith's house and knocks on his door, catches him at a weak moment, gets in and interviews him in his living room and Dick Smith unloads all of his unhappiness onto this guy. Four hours later he's thinking better of it and he calls the guys up and he

says, “Look.” He says, “Maybe we’d better not use this. We’d better not use that.” And the guy says, says to him, says “Well, heck no. It wasn’t off the record. I’m using everything.” So he used everything and then Dick’s days were numbered. His career went right. . . and I told Dick, I said, “Dick, some of us you know. You want to vent a little anger. Vent it with a guy that you know that’s going to be here and has to live with you. You don’t do it with this guy. He’s a carpetbagger. He’s in and out. You don’t do that.”

Moore: Well, and that’s. . .

Barbree: But, but now, that changed, that itself changed from NASA’s side, it taught a lot of their executives the mic is always open, that you don’t do this, you know, and so from that standpoint, I’m sure that that changed, but as far as our ability to come out and cover and relationship and everything wasn’t really a dimes worth of difference afterwards. Go ahead, I’m sorry.

Moore: Well, actually you just kind of answered my question. Whether or not there seems to have been in the eyes of people, both inside and outside, from the press side and from KSC side that the way the press viewed NASA and the KSC operations before Challenger changed from what it was after, that there was a different focus. Now maybe, do you see that?

Barbree: No, I think I know what, what you’re going there for. You see. But. . .

Moore: I have to ask the question in such a way. . .

{simultaneous talking}

Barbree: I'm thinking, I'm thinking from an operational standpoint. You understand. Now perhaps some press members who came here and would accept everything that NASA tells them and all the releases and everything like that, would go with it and trust it totally, perhaps that happened, but I've never done that. Not that I distrust anyone, but I am very solid about two good solid sources on something. When I broke the Challenger I had two solid sources. Hugh Harris I was trying to make number two, but when I walked him and told him about it, he didn't know what the hell I was talking about. You know. He said, "I hadn't heard it. I don't know what you're talking about." So I'm running around for the next 30 to 45 minutes and I finally nailed a second source. I knew my first source was good, there was no question in my mind. I knew that I had it with the first source, but I had to deliver the second source and the guy in New York says to me, "Give the story to Bob Bazell," and he also says to me, "Now who are your sources." And I said, "I'm not telling you my sources." Well, we have a policy and I said, "Fine." And he's talking about the Tom Brokaw show policy. Fine. You know. And he just, you know, going, how can this guy talk to me like this? I'm not talking to you anyway, I'm just telling you. I'm a working journalist. I don't give you my sources. I don't care what your policy is. And I don't give my story to another guy because, see, we have gone like I said, I'd shared an Emmy for Apollo 11, but on Challenger I broke the number one story of the year. You know how many awards I got. Ziltch. Wasn't even put in for an award, because now we got the star system. Katie Couric. Tom Brokaw. These are the people that they want to get the awards, because it's a business. This is what they're doing. Okay. So, I mean, it's not even anything, you know, any legitimate journalistic award. You follow me. Any legitimate Peabody, Pulitzer, Emmy, that's your peers. You know, that's the reason I was talking about getting an award from, for example, if I cover,

I go to Detroit and I cover the automakers and the automaker's association gives me an award and a new Cadillac, what does that tell you? Huh?

Moore: But you won an Emmy, you shared an Emmy for Apollo 11?

Barbree: Apollo 10, 11, and 12. For that year.

Moore: Who did you share it with?

Barbree: The space unit. I was the correspondent. See, so the guy that went to the Emmys and accepted was Jim Ketchal. I have a, I have a statue and I have a certificate. But the guy who went and accepted was Jim Ketchal, who was the executive producer, see, but our space unit got it for special continuous coverage of a news event. That's what we got it for.

Moore: Tell me a little bit about, shifting gears almost completely. . .

Barbree: _____ (oh, God.)

{laughter}

Moore: Tell me. . .

Barbree: My nose keeps itching and I mean. I've been on the boat. I got a new boat and you might see I'm a little tanned, but I've been on a boat so much my nose is itching from being out there and, you know, and all. But, go ahead, I'm sorry.

Moore: You are the go between as we talked about before. You're the one that won the Emmy because of the continuous coverage for these three launches at an important time. . .

Barbree: Well we did, the unit did.

Moore: Right, right.

Barbree: And I mean it wasn't. . .

{talking simultaneously}

Moore: You is collectively.

Barbree: You is plural.

Moore: The American public, the people out there that you're communicating what happened to, what was going on from Mercury through the Gemini program through Apollo, Skylab, on through the Shuttle years. You've covered every human space launch that the United States has ever conducted.

Barbree: 141 of them.

Moore: 141 of them. The country has changed. Our view from the public, when we were going to the moon, when we were preparing for these various programs we had cold war issues that came in. During the Shuttle years that changed. Who's our competition, different set of issues that came about.

Barbree: Sure.

Moore: Share with me a little bit about your perception as you're the voice, you're the focal point if you will, that's talking to the country about what's taking place with this incredibly important, and I'm certainly would be the last to argue that what took place during the Apollo years is any less significant than what's taking place on STS-111 with the astronauts that are up there right now. Tell me about this evolving relationship of the public with the space program from your point of view.

Barbree: Of course public has more interest than the media gives them credit for having. As I said we started out in competition with the Soviet Union in the cold war. It was a national prestige issue. Had it been important that we, that we went to the moon, had that been important, we would not have had abandoned the moon. We went there and abandoned it, okay, so it wasn't important that we go there. Outside of the fact of saying, okay, physically we can do it. The difference today is very simple. We no longer have a competitive another country, or government, or anything. The question is, "Why is the Shuttle program, the international space station, why is that important?" It's

one of the most important things that we can do. Why? Because the law of nature is very simple, something is born, something grows, and then it dies. It's that simple. That's the law of nature. What our present NASA administrator doesn't have a clue about, and I asked him this question, he is a bean counter. NASA today is being run by bean counters. You no longer have, "Hi Shawn", {Moore starts laughing} we no longer have the visionaries.

Moore: Should we turn the camera {unintelligible then laughter}

Barbree: Where have the visionaries gone. Now this is not just NASA's fault. This is the administration's fault for making this a second rate agency. You see. Now, I'm going to tell you something that is very surprising to a lot of people. When he came on they made astronaut Shannon Lucid NASA's chief astronaut, I mean chief scientist, a staff position. She's not a scientist. I think she's a biochemist or biologist or something, but she's not a scientist. NASA doesn't have any scientists. They use the scientists in the universities. The Air Force has scientists. Dr. Gene McCall is one of the best in the country. He chairs about everything. He physically does science. You see? Now, what the space station should be, it should be the first building block, the cornerstone to the first orbiting space city. Two decades from now there should be two three thousand people up there in a city twenty, thirty times the size of what it is now. This should be the stepping off point of the evolution of the human race to continue out in space and develop lunar bases, bases on the asteroids, on out to Mars because we found plenty of water on Mars. We may have even been there once. Go back, who knows, because this planet is four and a half billion years old. That's the solar system. Since the big bang they're figuring now the universe is around fourteen billion years old, but our solar system formed about four and a half billion years ago. Our star probably has another four

and a half billion years to go. Now we certainly don't have to worry about that, but in the four and a half billion years that we've been on this planet, the human race has been here only, only, at a maximum of two hundred thousand years and that's going back to the earliest resemblance of anything that was a, was a human. So if we're going to survive and you think about all of the climate, the climatic changes that this planet has gone through. If we're going to survive this planet, if we're going to survive as a human race, then we're going to have to continue to develop and explore and move out into this universe we live in to other homes. That's what got to happen, but more important right now is that we have a population out here who likes to debate everything and talk about all of these rights and wonderful things that we have and everybody's entitled to their opinion which is the dumbest thing that anybody ever came up with. It's like saying Jay Barbree has a right to have his opinion on how to do open heart surgery. I don't know ziltch about open heart surgery so what qualifies me to have an opinion on it. Anyway, what's taking place right now which is so obvious is there are evil people that's trying to create a nuclear bomb that would be very happy to put it on a cargo container and put it in the port of New York. We've got to stop these people. We've finally got a president up there that'll do something. Not what we think or debate whether we're concerned about whether this guy's rights are being protected. Should we spend 40 million dollars to defend this terrorist that we have in jail? You see? What we better get on with the thing about is, okay, let's save the human race. Let's save the human race and let's permit it to grow. The vehicle of space is the greatest driving engine that we have to save the human race and that's what the space station should be. The space station should be the cornerstone of the first orbiting space city and from there you go from the orbit, you learn how to live in space, you have people born and die there that go on to lunar bases, that go on throughout. And whenever, the, you know, this planet might last another four and a half billion years, but, we've got nothing to say its climate will support us that long. Its climate may

not support us, but for another hundred years or two hundred years. How do we know? Because so many things have happened in that time span, because, you see this, what we are, we're all passengers on a space ship. The space ship is eight thousand miles in diameter and it has a life support system that's ten thousand feet deep. That could change so easily and we're gone. So it is not about whether Suzie gets to go up and grow little plants on the space station or Johnny gets to go up and go around and say, "Hi Mom," on the space station. It's not about that. It's about part of the our race, the human race. It's about developing where we're going. It is as ridiculous not to go into space as it would have been as ridiculous not to have left Africa, where we were born. If we started in Africa, if we're all still right there, how ridiculous would that be? What have we done? We've constantly moved and changed and we're three primary races. We're Caucasoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid and then there're branches out of that. And that's all that the different climates that did that, because we're all originally one developed out of Eve, they say now, the first woman that they found, and we developed with climate changes. That's why we're different, because of the different climates and everything like this. We have to continue to grow. When the growth period is over nature says you die. So if we stop growing, we're going to die. How do we grow? We grow out into space.

Moore: Then the two questions that _____

{laughter from Barbree}

Moore: . . . one, and this makes sense, do you see that NASA understands that long term mission. . .

Barbree: I don't think so. I don't think they have the visionaries that see it. I sit in this news conference and I ask questions and I ask, the first question I asked Sean O'Keefe, what do you see for the mission of the space station? Well, he gave me a five, a ten minute answer, you know, that he double talked, he is good at it. He never came, never gave me an answer, but what he was saying was, "Well there we see that the space station we're going to go on" blah, blah, blah, bah, blah. Hey, I said, "Is the space station the beginning of an orbiting space city?" What's your vision for the space station? He has none. NASA has none.

Moore: Do other people, are there engineers, are there people clearly within the NASA organization that recognize that?

Barbree: Oh sure, they were, but most of them have been run off. The visionaries have been sent packing. They set the dogs on them. They've cut back down right now to engineers and bean counters. In other words they have set up the quintessential bureau {laughs} and they're after doing one thing, the survival of the bureau. Now, if we didn't have a space station NASA would have absolutely no mission. You see, but the thing is this, you can not continually tell the American public that this is worthwhile when they see all of these flights going, okay, so we've got a space station up there. What is it doing?

Moore: So how do we do that?

Barbree: So what is its purpose?

Moore: How do we do that? How does NASA do that?

Barbree: Ok, how NASA does it is to set up the vision that I'm talking about. . .

Moore: Well, there, but. . .

{talking simultaneously}

Barbree: They, in other words, most people, alright, now I could do it

Moore: The question is not how could they do it, but what are they doing?

Barbree: Alright. . .

Moore: From your view.

Barbree: The question, the question right now is, if you go and you ask any American citizen today about the space station, Oh Yeah, we're going to build that. Well what do you thinks going to happen to it? Well one day they'll crash it back in the Pacific Ocean. See? Why are they building the space station? Oh to show it, to show that they can do it. Well, we've already done that. We've already shown we can build a space station. If that's our only purpose why are we spending this money? Let's just ground the Shuttle fleet and stop. See? Now, if NASA comes out and says, "Okay,

we hope by getting this space station up there that this will be step one and we hope to move from step one to step two. This is how we do it, that we start building a city." See, what most people don't realize is the first Martians are already here. Did you know that? Now, you're a professor and you don't know that the first Martian's are already on this planet? Huh. The first Martians are the people of this planet that will go to Mars. They're the first Martians. The people in grade school today should be the first Martians, to go.

Moore: Okay.

Barbree: So where's the vision? You follow me? Where's the vision? Most politicians want to sit there and what they want to do is they want to say, "Okay, on my watch I'm going to keep everything neat and tidy and that's it and I'm going to give it back to you just the way you got it." We had that in the service when you were put in charge of all the spoons, the forks, and the dishes, and all of that and there wasn't, all you want to do when you signed for them, you wanted to make sure if you had to have three hundred dishes that they were there when the next guy signed for them because you wanted to get them off of your ledger. That's what we got running NASA today. That's exactly what we got running NASA today.

Moore: So what is it going to take. . .

Barbree: Alright. Who was the first visionary of NASA?

Moore: Wernher?

Barbree: Wernher. Followed by? Robert Goddard.

Moore: Preceded by Robert Goddard.

Barbree: Yeah, preceded, I mean, preceded by Robert Goddard. And he was a student of Robert Goddard. These were visionaries.

Moore: So what is it going to take?

Barbree: They wanted to build a rocket to go to the moon.

Moore: What is it going to take then to go the next step?

Barbree: The next step is to get a visionary in charge of NASA with other visionaries that look out and say, “Okay. This is where we’re going. This is what we see doing.” And to sit there and sell the American public and believe me, they would buy it. They would buy continuing to build a space station that was going to be a space city. That if they can see it’s always going to be up there. In other words, we’re investing in something solid that’s going to last. We’re not going to fly to the moon and abandon it. We’re not going to build a space station, say, “Look what we did, Mommy.” Tear it down and throw it back in the ocean.

Moore: Well, we’ve done that twice before.

Barbree: Oh sure.

{laughter}

Barbree: That's what I'm saying. So, you get past that point of saying, "Let me see if I can build a space station. Let me show you I can." You've demonstrated that. What's the next step? "Huh?" "Well we're going to finish this, right now it's the size of two football fields. Well right now we don't have the money that we can put seven people on board because we can't build an escape capsule or pod. We can't, can't do. . .

Moore: X-38

Barbree: X-33 or 38. We can't do any of that stuff. Right now we'll just have three people up there." You want to sell the American public that? And you're talking to a guy who still goes live with practically every launch, still asked the questions. I'm asked questions like the other day, I'm asked the question, "Why are we doing this?" by the anchors, "What good is the space program?" And I said, "Well, what's, where you're concerned, you have a job. You wouldn't have a job if there wasn't a space program. Right now we're coming to the public through a satellite." They look at you. MSNBC wouldn't be, wouldn't exist, if we never had a space program. You wouldn't have a job. That really brings it home to them. But you can only do that so much. I can only go out and make speeches and argue and everything like that, but when I suggest things like, okay, you know, is this the first space city? Where are we going with this? What's the vision there? {laughter} You're

laughed at. You see? "Well, we don't have anything like that." Now can you imagine if you stopped and looked at it right now? Can you image if I had to go out and sell this program to the American public from the get go if there was no NASA and I had to go out and tell the American public I want to build a NASA and what it's going to do is it's going to build a space station and when that's done it's going to dump it in the ocean. "But what will you do you after that?" I don't know. We'll sit around and we'll decide. Maybe we'll go back to the moon. See? It should be a continuing vision. You see? You don't take your child and say, okay I got him here if I get him in the first grade I'm happy. You don't do that. You look at that child and you vision all sorts of things for him. You're, the best colleges, whatever he wants to be, he's the best at, everything you vision. This is what you got to have. You got to have visionaries. You see? Visionaries today are highly lacking in, in the government. They're highly lacking.

Moore: Do you think a visionary can survive in a, in a government structure like NASA now?

Barbree: They better or NASA's not going to survive. You need the visionary up there talking. You need a Wernher von Braun talking about going to the moon. You need the visionary. If you don't have the visionary, you're not going to survive. It's just not going to happen. They're going to pack it up, put it in the closet, and go home, because. . . Let me ask you now you've been doing this work, let me ask you, what's the mission of NASA?

{Moore laughs}

Moore: You're not supposed to ask the interviewer a question? This is an oral history.

Barbree: No, I'm asking you. What's the mission of NASA?

Moore: Well, to advance space and aeronautics.

Barbree: What are they doing? How are they doing that?

Moore: That's what I'm finding out. {laughs}

Barbree: See, I mean other words if you, wait, wait, let me tell you something. . .

{talking simultaneously}

Moore: _____second interview today.

Barbree: When Martin Caidin, who wrote 150 books, I've written seven, Martin Caidin said to me one time, "I've got a good idea for a book and I'm all over the place, you know, all over the place, I'm putting up all of this stuff." He says before you start your book, sit down and write in one line, what is the book about. You've got one line. See, when you had to write your essay and fill out your application to be the first journalist in space, the first thing I saw I threw it in the trash can because they boxed you in, give me one paragraph about this. I'll give you an example. Give me three people who are qualified to judge your work. You know what most applicants went out and did? They went out and got the three most known people. You see? But they got people not qualified to judge their

work. That was the key. And it dawned on me. These guys are pretty smart at our universities. They thought this thing out. They want an essay to cover this subject and to be one page. They don't want it to be a page and a paragraph or a page and a line, they want one page. They want a paragraph here. That's what they want. So who did I get as the three people who could judge my work, Dixon Gannett, Gannett newspaper chain, Martin Caidin, who was author, that I was author with, and a guy named John Chancellor {pronounced "Chance-ler"}, who was out head guy at NBC news at the time, anchor man. See? Now, could John Chancellor, or Chancellor {pronounced "Chance-ce-lor"} as he liked to call himself. Could he judge my work? Of course. He taught me an awful lot. You see? Could Martin Caidin judge my work? Of course. One of the best aviation space writers ever. Could Dixon Gannett judge my work? Yeah, one of the biggest newspaper chains in the country, Okay? Could the government judge my work? Not really. Could general judge my work? Not really. Could John Glenn? See they went out and got people like John, what could John Glenn see? He's a great test pilot, astronaut. What the hell does he know about journalism? You know. So this is what I'm talking to you about, you see, this is exactly what I'm talking to you about and today the problem is that when I got out and I speak for, speak, you know, and I speak about coverage and I was supposed to be the keynote speaker at the Southern Association of Schools meeting in, in Disneyworld and the speech was July 19th. They asked me a year ago to be. I said I will agree if there's nothing happening with the Shuttle. If I have, if not I'll get you someone that backs me up that'll be a good speaker. Guess when the next Shuttle mission's on? July 19th. So I had to call them the other day and I got them Bill Larson who is anchor guy with ABC, a good friend of mine. He's a much better speaker than I am. He'll entertain them a hell of a lot better than I would. But anyway, Bill's going to go over and he's going to do it. See? But again on the other hand if I have to go before a group like them and they ask me the question, "What is NASA's mission?" I can't tell

them. It has no mission and I'm a fan. I'm not agin' them, I'm for them. You know what I mean? But I try to be objective and I try to walk that line and I'm a journalist and I try not to get in bed with them. I don't accept anything, you know, like an award or a free night here or anything like that. Don't do that from any company, no payola, no nothing. You see. I'm very clear about that in my own mind. I would love to be able to stand up and say, "NASA's doing a great job because they're now building the foundation to the first orbiting space city for this planet where we're going to do great science in the future. We're going to cure diseases in the future. We're going to grow as a race and this is the stepping off point that takes us to, takes us to the moon for permanent colonies and to the asteroids and to the other planets. They are talking today in the paper that they discovered a star like our star, a medium grade star with other planets. It's forty-one light years away. Well that's right in our neighborhood as far as the size of the universe is concerned, so it's not unquestionable that couldn't get there. Because people, see I wrote the book, "A Journey Through Time," and I tried to explain how they could take the Hubble Space Telescope and look back to the beginning of time because they're seeing images that are fourteen billion years old. When those images occurred it took them fourteen billion years to travel across space at the speed of light to get to the lens of the Hubble. See, and people find that fascinating because I always like to start out and I say, "Hey, you don't see anything live. You can't even see this is not even live. That's a nanobit of a second of its travel at a 186,000 miles per second. I'm not looking at you. I go outside and I look at the moon. The image I see of the moon is one and three quarter seconds old. I look at the sun, it's about twelve, eleven twelve minutes, I'd have to figure it out exactly 93 million miles. . .

Moore: Like supernovas, we didn't know until twelve minutes later.

Barbree: But our own local, but our own local newspaper will put pictures in there and say, you know, this is an exploding. How do you know it's an exploding? It's twelve billion light years away, it was an exploding whatever then.

Moore: Twelve billion years ago.

Barbree: Right. You don't know what's there now. You have no idea. See. But very few people, you know, really think they understand that. So, that is really great when you think about it and what Hubble is doing. So, the great mission of Hubble you can sell and what you're seeing. You follow me? But we're talking about the human space flight part of NASA. No vision, no vision, none whatsoever. The visionaries are gone. The visionaries are gone. The politicians are in. The bean-counters are there and the engineers are there and all that. They want to build a great little ship. They do it. They want to do other things. Unless that you can get some sort of vision of where we're going and we need that vision not only for NASA, we need it for the human race, because, see, people said, okay, if the government hadn't had gone to the moon we would have never gone. No. We would have gone, it would've taken private industry fifty years later, but we would have gone to the moon. Private industry could do it fifty years later. The time will come private industry will go to the moon if the government don't do it, but it's not just the United States government, it's not just the American people, it should be the whole world. This should be the international space city. You see. And we should go there and, and we could do it, because the world right now is going to be so small that no longer can you live with people on these different cultures that you have, because this guy has been taught all his life that a woman is a second class citizen and that all he has to do is honor Mohamed and he doesn't have to know to read nor write and he's got to do this and if a person don't

do that then he's an infidel and you should kill him. Now, you bring all that together, what the hell is going to happen? It was okay when it stayed over here in its little section of the world, see, and everything like that. So, you know, this is what we're talking about, we're talking about getting people living together, moving on out and going, you know, going with the vision. There's no vision. What is the vision? And I sat right over there in that chair and I asked that man four or five different ways, "What is your vision for NASA?" He never answered it. He has none. You know what his vision for NASA is? Whatever the Bush administration tells him. That's his vision. See now, Bush Senior reviewed my book, "Moonshot". Got a good quote out of him. Still got the paper he typed himself on his own little portable typewriter. He sent it to me. So anyway, I think that if these people had time to think about this and talk about this that, you know, that they might get somewhere with it. They might start thinking, but they got to get past right now I'm in charge and all I want to do is make sure that I came on board, there's three hundred plates and I want to make sure when I leave there're three hundred plates. Yeah.

Moore: Well, this has been great.

Barbree: I've been running on and running on and running on.

Moore: No, no, it's been fabulous. I hope that, I think you've added a lot to where we need to go and certainly some good insights and I hope that if we have more questions that we can get back together next month.

Barbree: Oh sure. Well anything about what, you know, as far as the history is concerned, I'm being very happy anything to give you my memories, anything like that, you know, but. . .

Moore: Great.

Barbree: Yeah.