

12-2-2002

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**Mr. Manny Viarta**

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**Oral History**

4

**Kennedy Space Center**

5

**Held on June 24, 2001**

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**Interviewer: Dr. Patrick Moore**

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Transcriptionist: Sharon Youngquist

1 Moore: Today is Monday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2002. I'm Patrick Moore, University of West Florida, Public  
2 History Program and Summer Faculty Fellow at Kennedy Space Center. I'm interviewing today, Mr.  
3 Manny Viarta, who has been here at Kennedy Space Center with the press facilities and VIP relations  
4 for a number of years. Let's start off. Give me a little bit about your background. Where did, where  
5 were you born, where did you grow up, what brought you in your earlier years to Kennedy Space  
6 Center.

7

8 Viarta: Well, I was born in Washington, D.C. And I lived and worked up there and went to  
9 school. When I got out of the Army I completed my studies, came down to the space center to visit  
10 my parents, who had moved here from D.C., retired, saw STS, I'm sorry, saw the Apollo 17 launch  
11 when I was visiting. And we came, my wife and I came down several times and we decided it might  
12 be a nice place to move too. So I came out here on an Easter break in 1974 and applied for a job  
13 and I took a summer job in 1974 and I've been here ever since.

14

15 Moore: Tell me going back to this. So you were in D.C. the whole time. Your parents brought  
16 you down specifically to see the Apollo 17 launch?

17

18 Viarta: No, I just had come down to visit and when I visited it happened to, to be the time they  
19 were going to launch the last Apollo, which at that time we didn't know was the last Apollo because  
20 they had planned to have twenty Apollo missions and they stopped after seventeen.

21

22 Moore: So it was just random. What were you doing, just vacationing?

23

1 Viarta: Just vacation.

2

3 Moore: Did you know people down here?

4

5 Viarta: No, just, just the people that my mother and father had met and some other people that  
6 moved here from, from Maryland and D.C., which wasn't very many, probably a handful.

7

8 Moore: This was kind of the tourist destination spot.

9

10 Viarta: Yes.

11

12 Moore: So, you came down in 1974 with your wife?

13

14 Viarta: Yes.

15

16 Moore: And vacationing once again?

17

18 Viarta: Right. She was a nurse and she could get off and so we just came down on vacation.

19

20 Moore: What was the tie, saying, I like it down here, I'd like to work for, for NASA? Was it the  
21 launch that inspired you?

22

1 Viarta: Well, I wasn't one of these people unfortunately who decided to work for NASA when  
2 they were little, that was their ambition, but my sister worked for NASA, back when it first started up in  
3 D.C. and when I came and saw a launch it was kind of interesting and I wanted to move here and  
4 actually I was a school teacher and the school teachers in Brevard County, at that time, made less  
5 money than I would make if I went back into the government. So I applied for a job as a school  
6 teacher and then this, this opportunity came up and so I looked at the pay scale and the pay scale  
7 and the potential and I decided to take a job with NASA and see how that worked out.

8

9 Moore: What was the job you applied for?

10

11 Viarta: Actually, it was a, it was a summer job in the training department, which, which kind of  
12 tied into my educational background, teaching, and I took that job in '74 just for the summer and by  
13 the end of the summer they, they decided to convert me to permanent and I became a permanent  
14 employee and I've been here ever since.

15

16 Moore: In the training department, tell me about this position. What were you doing, who were  
17 you training?

18

19 Viarta: Well, actually it was for the, for the NASA employees on the center. We developed and  
20 sometimes bought in canned programs that would enhance the people's skills on the job and  
21 education and worked with a, a group of people here that had been here for a number of years before  
22 me and it, so it was kind of a good learning experience and I set up some programs while I was there.  
23 I, I actually got a award for what they call a Silver Snoopy and I developed some Russian/English

1 tapes for the Apollo-Soyuz Program to enhance the, the Americans who didn't speak Russian and the  
2 Russians who didn't speak English so they would have a little more knowledge of some of the  
3 vocabulary and I worked this with Brevard Community College, a professor there that was Russian.  
4 And for that effort I received a Silver Snoopy which is a, a very prestigious award here at the space  
5 center.

6

7 Moore: So this was actually, did you get you, you got this position because of your teaching  
8 background.

9

10 Viarta: I think so. I think so. I'm pretty sure that was it. I'm sure a lot of people were applying  
11 for jobs at that time and I guess I was just fortunate to get it.

12

13 Moore: Now this was a time, 1974, the ASTP is coming up dealing with Skylab issues, but  
14 things are starting to wind down in a direction. Had they, they already made the determination that  
15 they were going to all, the final three Apollo launches had already been cancelled by the time you got  
16 to . . .

17

18 Viarta: Right. They had already cancelled those. We'd already launched Skylab. We had  
19 already had three missions to Skylab. Apollo-Soyuz was coming up the following year.

20

21 Moore: So this was early in, this was summer, or spring?

22

23 Viarta: Right. I came in June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1974.

1

2 Moore: Now this is a time when there's, the mission of the institution, perhaps not the mission  
3 itself, but the overall mission of perhaps NASA is starting to shift in a new direction and downsizing  
4 people are departing and you're coming in at a time when everybody seems to be packing up and  
5 leaving.

6

7 Viarta: Right. That was one of the considerations. NASA went from about twenty-four  
8 thousand people, NASA and the contractors, to, eventually got to down to about seventy-nine  
9 hundred and I became aware of that because a lot of people had already left the area and their  
10 homes were vacant so there, homes were very cheap here, very inexpensive and I was able to  
11 purchase a couple of homes during the first couple of years I was here. But then I, I was shifted to  
12 the staffing branch, which is the recruiting area, after about a year or so. They had asked me to go  
13 over there and then I really got involved with the numbers and where we were going. We were at a  
14 transition, as you said, from one program and the next, so we were actually transitioning into the, the  
15 Shuttle program. So even though we were laying people, we were, we were starting to hire people  
16 for the next mission, the next program.

17

18 Moore: Tell me about this shift over to recruiting. You were essentially in personnel recruiting  
19 for the Shuttle program.

20

21 Viarta: Yes. Actually, the personnel department, the training department, and the classification  
22 department were all part of personnel under one director and it was very easy to work with these  
23 people across the Center and I guess they felt that there was something there that, that I had that

1 they wanted me to go out and recruit people for NASA so they asked me to switch over after about  
2 thirteen months on the job as a, as a employee development specialist and went into as a staffing  
3 specialist. And I did that for about five years here. So a lot of the people here that are engineers,  
4 secretaries, I hired them, and there're still quite a few of people around here, who when, when they  
5 say, Manny hired me.

6

7 Moore: That must have been kind of a fun experience. Tell me a little bit about, did you, did you  
8 actively go out and recruit, go to college campuses, find young engineers, this kind of thing?

9

10 Viarta: Went all over the country and that, actually Puerto Rico. We were the first federal  
11 agency to go to Puerto Rico back in 1997 I believe and we were looking for minority engineers and  
12 they had a very fine school there which is actually five years, most schools are four years, and some  
13 of those engineers that I recruited, females and males, are actually high level managers here now.  
14 And they've gone, gone to other centers and gone back to Puerto Rico and so forth, but it's been a  
15 good relationship for, for the agency and for the college in Puerto Rico.

16

17 Moore: Did that pose a challenge, trying to actively recruit minority candidates for positions?

18

19 Viarta: Yeah, it did, because NASA traditional, the government, doesn't pay as well as private  
20 industry for the top engineers, scientists, and people like that. The higher graded college students,  
21 they actually are recruited better by the private industry and there's probably about a five thousand  
22 dollar difference just for entry level. So that was part of, of the sell job, that, that, you know, we had to  
23 really convince people that there was, was really a future to be with the space program. That we

1 were going to be doing some things that, very unique and a lot of people had that enthusiasm prior to  
2 me recruiting them. They had already seen NASA on television. They had seen the space program  
3 and they were quite interested and some of them would have come for actually less money than we  
4 offered them.

5

6 Moore: Why? This is a, this is one of these PR questions we come back to, what was it about  
7 this program that inspired them versus going to perhaps one of the contractors who may not be here,  
8 but doing some things in space, North American at the time, I guess, was still around, Grumman,  
9 Boeing, these kinds of things?

10

11 Viarta: Well, basically I think it's the exposure. Seeing the men walk on the moon, that was  
12 NASA. A lot of the early programs, the lifting bodies, when we dropped airplanes from airplanes and  
13 the men going on the moon, obviously was the, was the highlight, but then we had the mission with  
14 Mars. I'm sorry, the mission with the Russians, and, that was international and, it was just a lot of  
15 exposure and I think a lot of people wanted to part of that and say, Oh, I work for NASA. And people  
16 knew what NASA was and if you say, I work for Grumman, I work for Lockheed, it didn't, it didn't have  
17 the same impact.

18

19 Moore: This is at a kind of changing time in the cold war, certainly the Apollo program, this was  
20 a cold war driven, even Kennedy himself has later, you know, illustrated this was purely political and  
21 kind of wanted to back away from it at a later point, but it wasn't going to happen, much to our favor.  
22 Did you sense that, was there any kind of play in the fact that you had an important mission  
23 internationally that brought people in to join you?

1

2 Viarta: Oh, sure. Like I say, the international exposure on television and the newspapers,  
3 NASA was, was always in the news. Unfortunately, we had a few bad things that happened that were  
4 very tragic, like the Apollo 1 fire in '67, and then many years later we had the, the Challenger accident,  
5 but people knew what NASA was. And a young engineer coming out, even engineers that had  
6 worked for a while, you know, they kind of realize that it was something that they wanted to be a part  
7 of, that we were going to making history, we were doing, sometimes, cutting edge, and they just  
8 wanted to be a part of that. And so the sell, the sell wasn't very hard. I always had full schedules at  
9 all the colleges and universities. I even talked sometimes to people after hours in, in large groups  
10 where ideally a one to one interview is what you prefer, but in order to have a chance to take  
11 applications and talk to large groups we, I talked to sometimes ten people at one time and, and try to  
12 give them information, and gather information, and consider them for a job with NASA.

13

14 Moore: Must have been quite a time. Now you did this up through 1980, is that . . .

15

16 Viarta: About 1980.

17

18 Moore: Five years.

19

20 Viarta: '81, somewhere in that area. And then they asked me try something else so I went to  
21 the classification area and I worked with about 360 people which was a block of NASA employees  
22 called payloads and these were the people that were processing the payloads both on expendables

1 and in the, in the Shuttle. So I went to, went to work in that area and I was working directly with these  
2 350 people.

3  
4 Moore: In the classification section?

5  
6 Viarta: Well, basically what happened is. . .

7  
8 Moore: Was payloads underneath classification or is that essentially what it. . . ?

9  
10 Viarta: As a classifier you actually classified position descriptions and, for instance, if  
11 somebody wanted to be a GS-13 and they were a 12, well you had to have a classified position that  
12 warranted that grade in pay and the duties had to be comparable to support that, so this was just one  
13 part of the job, but it, I took care of the people from when they were hired to when they actually retired  
14 or died, if they happened to die of, after they retired or while they were on the job we had to take care  
15 of that paperwork and so forth, so. It was a, it was just like a, a birth to a death type of thing, their  
16 birth year at NASA or their, their coming to NASA until they left NASA.

17  
18 Moore: Now that is kind of a change. You were doing a lot more traveling, a lot more kind of  
19 outreach. This is a very internal kind of thing.

20  
21 Viarta: Right. It was, it was pretty much back, back in the office working with, with a group of  
22 people, the same people, people that you hired in, things like that. But it was very, very little going

1 back out to campuses across the U.S. and southwest, northwest, and so forth. It was, it was a lot of  
2 fun, but, it was, it was a welcome change I think.

3

4 Moore: You were ready for it?

5

6 Viarta: Yeah, I think so. I was, I was always looking for different things to do, new experiences.

7

8 Moore: How did this opportunity arise? Just. . .

9

10 Viarta: My, my management decided that, that they needed, I think, I think we had some  
11 attrition, some people retired or left and they had some openings and they decided to. . . It might have  
12 been, who knows, I might have been being groomed for a management job or something and, getting  
13 exposed to the different branches of the directorate was one way to do that. {background voice} Let  
14 me turn this down.

15

16 Moore: Now how long did you do this classified position job?

17

18 Viarta: Classified from about '80, '81 until 1985. And the whole time I was here at NASA I had  
19 volunteered to work for the public relations or public affairs office and that included the Apollo-Soyuz,  
20 some Titan launches we had to Mars, that they launched two Titan rockets to Mars where we found  
21 the Viking landers and so forth. So I had done all kinds of public relations type things as a volunteer  
22 basis when, when my regular job would allow me to. {background electronic voices, then sounds of  
23 tinkering} Hopefully that will take care of it. Let me, see if we can get all these. . .

1

2 Moore: Now, when you say your volunteering, you were coming out during launches and, and  
3 activities in bringing people around?

4

5 Viarta: Yes. Yeah, what happened is, we had, we had different activities like Delta launches,  
6 this was prior to the Shuttle launches and they needed people to take VIPs, or they needed people to  
7 (phone rings) take tours, excuse me.

8

9 Moore: You're a popular guy.

10

11 Viarta: Just right now. Manny (answers phone). . . Where were we at?

12

13 Moore: We were talking about your volunteering.

14

15 Viarta: Oh yeah. Public affairs was just a small organization, which, which usually personnel  
16 and public affairs have the least number of employees; they try and operate, so they rely on  
17 volunteers. We still rely on volunteers today in this office. We couldn't, we couldn't do the job that's  
18 required without volunteers. So I volunteered, as, as others did, and I took VIPs around on tours in  
19 between launches. On launch days I, I escorted groups of people. I might just be at a, at a bleachers  
20 where people would come and I would just direct them to the stands and direct them to the busses  
21 afterwards. And if there were some kind of accident or contingency direct them to the proper place.  
22 So I became exposed to the public affairs management and in 1985 they had asked me to come work  
23 for them fulltime because they had some openings and basically they put me in the protocol office

1 which was pretty similar to what I had done as a volunteer, working with VIPs, taking people around,  
2 movie stars, rock stars, and so forth, touring the space center. It was, it was a very fun job. So I said,  
3 you know, well ok, I was always open for new experiences so I took a job with them. My personnel  
4 office was reluctant, I think, to give me up, but they realized that, you know, it was a team effort and  
5 the center needed some expertise in that area. So I started working the protocol office in '85 and I  
6 worked there until 1988, January, and then again management asked me to come out here and work  
7 with the news media, because at that time we had about four people leave and go off to different  
8 places. I think several went to the space station office up in Virginia. And I think one, one lady left us  
9 and went to Boeing, public affairs, and another left us and went to Space Camp and ran that  
10 operation, so we had a void here. So myself and a couple of other people came over here and  
11 started working with the news media.

12

13 Moore: In 1988?

14

15 Viarta: In 1988.

16

17 Moore: So, so much for the jumping around and you've been here ever since?

18

19 Viarta: I've been in this, this job since 1988.

20

21 Moore: And still happy with it?

22

1 Viarta: Yeah, pretty much. It's, it's a lot of fun. There's been some, well some down times,  
2 when we lost the Challenger was not a fun time to be here, but pretty much most of the time it's pretty  
3 good. We, we've had some other failures where some of the rockets unfortunately had a contingency  
4 or problem and blew up, but the only one that was manned was the, was the Challenger, back in  
5 1986, so. That actually happened prior to me getting here, but I was working that mission. I was, I  
6 had five busloads of secondary family members, the aunts and uncles, and so forth. I was in the  
7 protocol office at that time.

8

9 Moore: We'll come back and talk about that in a minute.

10

11 Viarta: Ok.

12

13 Moore: Tell me more about this, this volunteering process, taking people around. What kind of,  
14 when you would give these tours, and this goes back from you very, the, you essentially arrived and  
15 started volunteering right off the bat. . .

16

17 Viarta: Right.

18

19 Moore: . . . was there, was there a learning curve of figuring out what was going on that you  
20 could try to share this with the people?

21

22 Viarta: Yeah. Basically, a lot of it was OJT, since I . . .

23

1 Moore: OJT?

2

3 Viarta: On the job training.

4

5 Moore: On the job training.

6

7 Viarta: Yeah, you learned from going with other people and listening to what they had to say  
8 and where some of the key places were. And they had books, fact books and so forth that you could  
9 read, The NASA Story, and so forth and you learned a lot of factoids and things from those, those  
10 reading materials and then on the job training. Later on they had some formal training for escorts,  
11 which was good. And, I think everyday out here you pretty much learn something new, it's  
12 unbelievable. I still learn things when I go out, different facts about the Shuttle, or about the space  
13 program from people who were here, people that I get exposed to, you know, that I haven't seen,  
14 even though I've been out here for 28 years. You run into people sometimes who've been out here  
15 for 28 years and you never crossed paths and you get talking about things and you go visit their, their  
16 operation, where they work, and you get to talk and you hear, you hear things that are very  
17 interesting. It's like history relived everyday.

18

19 Moore: When you were bringing these people out here, what were they looking to see? What  
20 were they searching for in their visit to the . . .

21

22 Viarta: The media types were looking for specific things. The people that were here, VIPs and  
23 so forth, they, they didn't have a clue. I mean they were just here, they knew, they heard about

1 NASA. They knew that we launched people into space, we've sent men to the moon, but other than  
2 that they didn't know what we did here and NASA's a big place. To a lot of people, especially  
3 foreigners, NASA is the Kennedy Space Center because that's where we launched the men to the  
4 moon and that's where we had the Challenger and so forth so that's the only NASA Center. But  
5 basically, they had a variety of expectations, I think, when they came. And you kind of have to feel  
6 what they're looking for and, and kind of provide them what, what they want. You usually don't ask  
7 them up front what do you, you know, what do you expect, but you kind of talk to them and they say,  
8 oh, well, you know, I heard about NASA or I've always been interested in NASA. So you can kind of  
9 get an idea of how much they wanted to digest and, you know, how little or how much they, you  
10 know, wanted to be toured that day or those few hours.

11

12 Moore: Big difference between the first project you worked on, the Apollo-Soyuz project all the  
13 way up through Shuttle and the ISS. Did you sense that, that the focus changed or did it remain, for  
14 the visitors who really don't know what's going on, did it remain pretty much consistent all the way  
15 through?

16

17 Viarta: I think it got more sophisticated even though we had a broad coverage for the Apollo  
18 Program and so forth, I think after that there was more exposure. The total communications field  
19 opened up, there was just more exposure to NASA for people. There was more television sets, there  
20 were more computers, there were more media to, to get the word out to people. So I think they were  
21 probably a lot more knowledgeable when they came. It kind of made my job a little easier but I just  
22 think it became more sophisticated, the, the media.

23

1 Moore: This is going to sound like a stupid question, which was more fun to, to tour, VIPs or  
2 media folk?

3

4 Viarta: Probably the VIPs. They almost always would say thank you. I mean they were just so  
5 appreciative and so, they were just so awed by what they saw, the vastness, the size of things of  
6 what we did here. They had no idea of the behind the scenes type things. The news guys, a lot of  
7 them were already knowledgeable. Some of them were appreciative for taking them out to do the  
8 story, but a lot of them had a lot of knowledge about the space center anyway and, and they were  
9 mostly just to do a story. They were more focused on an area. They didn't try to absorb a lot of  
10 things, you know, you didn't really go out and tour them, you just took them to an area that their story  
11 was centered on and then, the media were quite different than the VIPs, they were more open. The  
12 VIPS were just, I think just generally were, they're a lot more fun.

13

14 Moore: Did you still have the, the oh wow, gee whiz, kind of factor?

15

16 Viarta: Actually I do, most of the time I do. I, I sometimes I, I don't realize that I do, but, I  
17 guess, when I talk to people and I'm touring them, they tell me that, wow, you still, you still are very  
18 enthusiastic about the space program. You can tell by what you talk and where you take people, and  
19 where I take people and so. But I didn't realize, I thought to myself, it was, you know, I've been to  
20 these places a thousand times and I didn't perceive myself coming across as being very enthusiastic  
21 sometimes. And I guess basically, you just, it's there, it's there, you know. And I think I feed on  
22 people when they're enthusiastic and they're like, gee wiz and wow, I think you get back into that, you  
23 kind of feed on it. An example of that was Tom Hanks. Tom Hanks has been here several times for

1 the Apollo 13 movie. I worked with Tom Hanks on that, Earth to the Moon, and he even came a  
2 couple of times in between for some launches and took him on the roof of the VAB. He viewed a  
3 launch from there, actually he viewed two launches from there. Second time we took him up he had  
4 brought some other people in the movie industry and he was just very enthusiastic, like, wow, when  
5 you see this, this is going to be unbelievable, it was a night launch, this and that. And after it went up  
6 it was like he was, you know, just, pretty much jumping up and down and the people were excited, but  
7 not as excited as Tom, so it was like, you know, he was just really pumped. That was, that was  
8 exciting.

9

10 Moore: What a great opportunity to work with people like this.

11

12 Viarta: It had been, yeah. I've worked with a lot of them, well all of the movie companies that  
13 have been here since I've been working with the news media. Contact with Jody Foster,  
14 Armageddon with Bruce Willis, and all that crew, Space Cowboys, Earth to the Moon with Tom  
15 Hanks. Clint Eastwood was in Space Cowboys. So it's been a lot of fun. It's a job and it was a lot of  
16 hard work, but it also was fun because you could see your efforts on the, on the finished product, the  
17 movie.

18

19 Moore: What, what made it difficult? Were they demanding, were they. . . .

20

21 Viarta: Well, there was a little bit of that, but basically if you take, just for instance, Jody  
22 Foster's movie. She was only here for three days, but one of the scenes that they shot was on the  
23 causeway. The causeway normally holds about 8000 cars, we had about 2000 cars, about eighteen

1 hundred people, which were extras. They had wardrobes, they had trucks, they had a helicopter, and  
2 they were shooting a scene there. It took all day from like seven thirty in the morning 'til five o'clock  
3 at night. And all these people had to be escorted. They had to be under escort, they had to be  
4 badged. They had, security had to be aware of it. . .

5

6 Moore: All the extras. . . ?

7

8 Viarta: All the extras, we had to bus them in and so forth, so that took a lot of coordination and  
9 we were getting pretty good at it and that time. So we had those people there for the day and,  
10 honestly, after they left, and they fed these people breakfast and lunch. They had wardrobe there,  
11 they had all these crews, they had all these trucks, water, everything, sodas, food, and when they left  
12 there was not one piece of paper on that entire causeway. All the trash was bagged up and taken off  
13 that day by our local services. I think at the time it was EG&G, a contractor company. And the place,  
14 when I left the place about 5:30 it was spotless. And that in itself was to me an accomplishment, not  
15 just to me, but the people that I worked with, they worked with me, the movie company people, they  
16 said, you know, we're going to clean this place up. You won't even know that we're going to be here,  
17 that we were here, so, that was, that was good.

18

19 Moore: That's, that's remarkable. Unfortunately you don't here those kind of stories working  
20 with people . . .

21

22 Viarta: No you don't, you don't.

23

1 Moore: . . . that often. Were the people themselves, now, were you actually, I imagine it wasn't  
2 just you escorting all these people. You must have had volunteers from the center.

3

4 Viarta: We had volunteers, we added people in our office. We usually work like twelve hour  
5 shifts. The people, generally the actors were very amiable. Some of them were actors, you know,  
6 they were, they were very egotistical, but, not so much where they were rude. It's just that, you know,  
7 you could tell that they were, they were the stars, and they had certain requirements, like Bruce Willis  
8 didn't want any pictures taken, didn't want to sign any autographs. He did through a cast party, they  
9 call it the end of the shoot, down at a restaurant in Port Canaveral and even there he didn't allow any  
10 photography, he didn't sign any autographs, but he did talk to people, shake your hand, come around  
11 and, and say hi and thanks for, for helping out with the movie.

12

13 Moore: Did they give notice that this was his requirements before. . .

14

15 Viarta: Yes, yes.

16

17 Moore: he came, so?

18

19 Viarta: They gave the notice so you didn't bring your cameras and so forth to the, it was  
20 actually on the invitation. So that was just, just one case. But all in all it's, it's been a pleasure  
21 working with the movie people. One thing they do which surprised me was they come to a location,  
22 they going to shoot like in this building, and they're going to move some things, they're going to  
23 change some things, actually physically paint over and so forth and they will take pictures of the area,

1 all over, before, so when they try to put it back the way it was, they have a picture that shows if there  
2 was this here or there was that there. And that was different. I didn't realize they had done that. I  
3 just thought they, you know, they go in, they tear up somebody's place, they leave it, but in fact  
4 basically try and put it back the way it was.

5

6 Moore: Now are all the movie companies pretty much like this.

7

8 Viarta: All the movie companies. Yeah.

9

10 Moore: Well that's, that is interesting

11

12 Viarta: It is. It is . . .

13

14 Moore: Now, would. . .

15

16 Viarta: . . . quite a tribute to them.

17

18 Moore: Yeah. You yourself, who did you escort? Were you escorting the top people, being  
19 kind of the. . . ?

20

21 Viarta: It varied, sometimes I just escorted the, I say just escorted, I escorted, the real workers,  
22 the ones that come in hours before and set up the lights. Somebody would have to be here like four  
23 o'clock in the morning. That would be the food people that come in to start fixing the food. Then we'd

1 have the lighting people come in and the workers. By seven o'clock you had all of those people here  
2 and that was thirty, forty, fifty, a hundred trucks, it just depended on what, how much they were  
3 bringing equipment, a couple of hundred people. And the starts wouldn't come until they were all set  
4 up. And so sometimes I'd worked at four in the morning until four in the afternoon and then I'd go and  
5 somebody else would take over because they would shoot all day. And then when I'd come back the  
6 next evening these people were getting ready to go home from shooting all day and they would be  
7 leaving at one and two o'clock in the morning with a return to the set at five or six o'clock, like four or  
8 five hours later. So they would, they would, we'd have to have somebody here, we'd take them off,  
9 the last man out, I'd be like the last man out, take the last truck, they'd drive off, go to some hotel  
10 somewhere, four hours later they'd be back. And it was, it was quite hectic, it was very grinding.  
11 Fortunately the longest we shot any of the movies was eight days and that was an eight day stretch  
12 with Armageddon. They shot in several locations, the VAB, excuse me, the Vehicle Assembly  
13 Building, the Operations and Checkout Building, the launch pad, so it was, it was quite extensive and  
14 I think Jodie Foster's movie only shot three days. Clint Eastwood's movie, I think, shot two or three  
15 days.

16

17 Moore: Now, with Tom Hanks and, and Apollo 13, were you here for a long time for that, was  
18 that?

19

20 Viarta: No, that was a short period of time too. Now they did come and do some "recis", what  
21 we call, they go out and find places that they think they want to shoot and see what it looks like,  
22 locations and then they'll set up a date to come and shoot. And basically that's what, what Tom and  
23 them did, Gary Sinise and all. In Apollo 13 they needed a location where they could see the launch

1 pad and the ocean at the same time. Well, fortunately, there is a spot on the, on the ocean,  
2 beachside, because most of the dunes are too high and you can't see the ocean, but there is one  
3 spot out there. And fortunately I knew where it was and we knew where it was so we took them out  
4 there and they said, yeah, this is it. So they actually spent about four or five hours shooting a scene  
5 with Gary Sinise there which in itself was probably only a minute or less in the movie, maybe two  
6 minutes, and. . .

7

8 Moore: With his car?

9

10 Viarta: With his car and that took about four or five hours, a couple of cameras, thirty, about  
11 thirty trucks, I don't know, a couple of hundred people, and, it's just amazing that it takes that much to  
12 do something that, that short a period of time.

13

14 Moore: Now was Ron Howard involved in this entire process?

15

16 Viarta: Ron was here a few times. He wasn't involved in the entire process. They had a  
17 couple of producers that would come and, certain days they all would be here. Ron was here, I think  
18 when we shot the scene with the crawler transporter and Tom Hanks. And, that was, that was kind of  
19 exciting, you know, and that part of it because you see that in the movie. But, they were just very  
20 nice to work with. Tom Hanks, Ron Howard are very, probably the, one of the easiest people to work  
21 with. They, they have some very, I guess they're very people oriented. They, they treat people like  
22 people. They're not very demanding and they have some high standards and I really enjoyed  
23 working with those, with those two guys.

1

2 Moore: Now they came back for, for the HBO series, Earth to the Moon.

3

4 Viarta: Right.

5

6 Moore: Did they do a lot of work here for the . . . ?

7

8 Viarta: They were here for over eight months.

9

10 Moore: So they had. . .

11

12 Viarta: Not every day, but over a period of eight months they were here one or two days or  
13 three days a week. They'd set up a shoot schedule. We'd, we'd coordinate all the security, where  
14 they're going to meet, how long they're going to be here, what they're going to shoot. It involved quite  
15 a bit. We even took the old Apollo astronaut van, that's in the visitor's complex, which is at the Saturn  
16 V Center now, the real van that took the astronauts to the launch pad, they got to use that. Got it out  
17 of moth balls, put gas in it, and actually drove that in the episode on Apollo 11, which was kind of  
18 neat.

19

20 Moore: Which, and really the reason for asking all these questions, it makes sense in terms of  
21 public relations, creating movies like this, it's, it exposes the greater public to what takes place here.

22

23 Viarta: Exactly. Or what took place, a lot of times it's past, but the. . .

1

2 Moore: Apollo 13 and Armageddon.

3

4 Viarta: Armageddon was a futuristic type thing.

5

6 Moore: (laughs) In its own way. How do they go through getting approval for this? Obviously it  
7 doesn't go through here, but where. . . ?

8

9 Viarta: It's evolved. We now have a person in Headquarters who is responsible for  
10 productions, documentaries. Her name is Bobbie Faye Ferguson. She's been doing that for about  
11 eight years now. Prior to that it was, it was a, a process that we developed ourselves, where we  
12 would, we would run this by someone in Headquarters and it varied because it would be, there was  
13 no set person who would be doing this. So we run it, one time we'd run it by a certain gentleman or a  
14 woman and the next time it be another one, but we'd usually run it through Headquarters. Sometimes  
15 the movie companies themselves would go to Headquarters. They'd go to the administrator or they'd  
16 go to somebody that they knew who would go to somebody who said, hey, they want to shoot here  
17 and then they would contact us and the Johnson Space Center, because those were basically the two  
18 centers where they've, they've shot most of the movies. I think they've shot at Edwards for some of  
19 the earlier lifting body and things that we did, I think, The Right Stuff, some of that was shot out at  
20 Edwards. But basically it's here and at the Johnson Space Center.

21

22 Moore: Did they, they did shoot some of The Right Stuff material here, didn't they?

23

1 Viarta: Right. Mostly on the beach and then they, cause that's where that program was, wasn't  
2 this part of Kennedy. . .

3

4 Moore: Cape side.

5

6 Viarta: . . . Space Center was not, yeah. The Cape.

7

8 Moore: Did they do it over on, over at the cape side. . . ?

9

10 Viarta: They shot it over at the Cape.

11

12 Moore: So this evolution of this process, do you sense from your point of view, where you're  
13 there, you're kind of involved, very involved in, in coordinating this from your end. Do you think it  
14 portrays the message that Kennedy wants, that it provides an important tool for communicating?

15

16 Viarta: Yeah. I think so, pretty much. One of the things that NASA wants out of the movies is  
17 that it's, it's realistic, it's not too violent. We have several people who wanted to shoot series and  
18 things here that were turned down because of the violence factor. It just portrayed things that really  
19 couldn't or wouldn't happen here, so, they were actually turned down. And we've had a few episodes  
20 that were, were, we asked them to change the, the script. There was a series here that Bobby Hosea  
21 and some of the other people were in that was called The Cape that Corbin Bernsen was the lead  
22 and a number of other people. There were some episodes that were, we asked them to modify and  
23 they were, they, they did that and they understood. And, and most of the, most of the production

1 companies want to be authentic. I mean they realize that some of the fiction things you have to take  
2 some licenses with, but most of the documentaries type things and, like the Apollo 13 or something  
3 that was based on history, they want to be authentic. They're, they're very much, they check that, is  
4 this what happened, they have a lot of NASA experts or consultants that would tell them whether it  
5 was, this is what really happened or not.

6

7 Moore: In touring people around after these, these movie, television series comes, all these  
8 things come out, do you sense that it plays a role in what people want to see?

9

10 Viarta: Sure. Basically, I think not only do we, we get to the public and make them more  
11 aware, but the movie stars, the people that work the movie companies, they're, they're just awed a lot  
12 of them, it's like, you know, they just are thrilled to be here. I mean, they just like, not everybody gets  
13 a chance to come to the space center, not everybody's been on a launch pad, you know, not  
14 everybody's been up close to the Shuttle, or underneath the Shuttle. I mean you could probably, you  
15 know, there's two or three hundred million people now in the U.S. You probably have, I don't know,  
16 less than a, less than ten thousand that, that have actually done that, you know, the general public,  
17 other than the people that work here.

18

19 Moore: So it does play a, it, you like doing that part of it.

20

21 Viarta: Oh yeah. Yeah, I think anytime you can, you can educate people and they can see  
22 what's really here, they're taxpayers, most of them, the ones that are citizens are taxpayers, and even

1 some non-citizens who work here under, you know, green card, so they're, they're taxpayers. So, it  
2 kind of gives you an idea of where, where you're tax money goes.

3

4 Moore: Let's shift to that kind of question. Your role here, working in press relations, public  
5 affairs, the spectrum, how do you view your position, what do you see when you get up in the  
6 morning? Today I'm going to do, what, share it with the public, share what's going on here,  
7 communicate?

8

9 Viarta: My, when I get up in the morning it's not really in that philosophy. I have a job to do.  
10 Right now my job is television operations and that would, that, that entails certain things and we have  
11 Shuttle launches which are one of our main missions. We have expendable vehicle launches which  
12 would be the Titan Rockets, the unmanned rockets, Titan, the Atlas, and the Delta. So we have  
13 different missions like that. In between that we have tours of people who are anywhere from high  
14 rollers, which we call, like CEOs of production companies, CEOs of TV stations, writers, famous  
15 writers, different people like that, so, so each day is different. We kind of, you kind of do it in a, in a  
16 like a plan, like a monthly plan, what do I have that month and things shift because a lot of the, a lot of  
17 the vehicles have problems where they're, when they're putting them together they take time and  
18 there's weather problems and so, things are shifting all the time. So we have to be very dynamic,  
19 very fluid here. For instance, we have a launch coming up in July and, I understand that that's  
20 probably going to slide a little bit to the right, which is not unusual, so the date that we have now is  
21 probably not going to be the date next week, or the week after that. So you kind of have to go with  
22 that flow, and because of that the people in public affairs, in this office anyway, and I'm sure there's  
23 others in the, in the vehicle world, we have trouble planning our vacations because we want to be

1 here, sometimes we need to be here because we're like a single point of failure, if you will, and so we  
2 plan around that and so sometimes it's very tough. We had a fellow in here, Mitch Varnes, who  
3 actually did a Shuttle launch, he was the commentator and then he got married. The launch was in  
4 the morning and then he got married that same day and most of us that were here, we, we were, you  
5 know, invited to the wedding or in the wedding, so, so that was, that was pretty cool.

6

7 Moore: Hoping not for a delay on that day. (laughs)

8

9 Viarta: Yeah, so dedication. That was, that was a true story.

10

11 Moore: Well, what do you try and communicate. Working with television and obviously your  
12 positions here has changed over time. What are you trying to tell in terms of, of what goes on here.

13

14 Viarta: The truth, basically. My job, basically, is not to tell the story, mine is just to make sure  
15 that the story goes out. Other people tell the story. I have a commentator who does commentary.  
16 We work with them. We have a preproduction meeting. What is he going to say? That's up to him.  
17 But we kind of monitor that and sometimes they'll, they'll make foopahs, if you will, mistakes. We kind  
18 of let them know on line so they can correct it. Doesn't happen often, but it happens. Sometimes  
19 they'll say, that, that the, they'll say Endeavor when it's really Atlantis, you know, things like that.  
20 They'll, they'll have a, they'll identify a wrong astronaut whose boarding the, the Orbiter for launch, so  
21 we kind of help them and we want to make sure that the, that the TV, the video, the audio's good  
22 when it goes out to the public. We want the people to know when it's going to happen. Unfortunately  
23 with, with the terrorists activities now, we, we kind of embargoed those, those activities. They used to

1 be live. A lot of them now have to be taped and played later so that the terrorists won't know when an  
2 event is going to occur or is occurring, so in case they, they plan on doing some kind of destructive  
3 action. So, that's unfortunate, so a lot of that, of our program now is, is taped, delayed tape.

4

5 Moore: Working with the press, you're giving them, essentially you're giving the information to  
6 the press so that they can give it out to the people.

7

8 Viarta: Exactly. And that's tough because a lot of, the press can't get the information out. We  
9 have a Shuttle coming back, Endeavor, from California, that unfortunately had to land out there  
10 because of the weather. We used to tell them when it was coming so they could watch on the  
11 causeways and see it fly over on top of our 747. News guys could come out and cover it. Now, we  
12 can't do that because of the troubled times. We can't announce that so basically, like I had a phone  
13 call this morning, a lady wanted to know, was the Shuttle coming back today, and I couldn't tell her. I  
14 just said, you know, ma'am, I'm sorry, because of this we can't tell you. I can tell you this, though, it  
15 hasn't left California yet, so that kind of let her know it's not coming in today without telling her what  
16 day it's coming, so. So, you kind of have to, you know, try and be nice to the people and give them  
17 some information, but not give away the farm, you know, tell them so the terrorists can't pick up on  
18 that.

19

20 Moore: I want to talk about this evolving relationship, but we're talking about it now. Does the  
21 press recognize that there are some things that you just can't tell them anymore? Are they  
22 accommodating to that fact?

23

1 Viarta: Yeah. But one of the problems is that there is, there's a lot of information out there. I  
2 mentioned this before. We've got Internet now, we've got information just all over the place and  
3 unfortunately we can not control all the information and there's certain people who give out  
4 information, not knowing that they are not supposed to. They're not NASA people. We have a lot of  
5 people like contractors, that have to know certain things because of flows of vehicles and  
6 unfortunately some of those people leak the information on purpose, leak it, you know, unknowingly,  
7 and therefore, they'll say, well, I saw this computer thing that, that you know, this is happening and  
8 you're telling me that it's, you can't tell me. So, you know, it's already out there, so why can't you tell  
9 me? And I say well we can't confirm it, you know, that may be the true date or it may not, so. It  
10 makes it a little tough, but most of the, most of the news people understand, most of them that have  
11 been in the business for a while.

12

13 Moore: Going back to an early time when we didn't have the Internet, television was strictly  
14 controlled by the networks who were going to give the information. . .

15

16 Viarta: Exactly.

17

18 Moore: . . . maybe a local paper. Was it easier at that time? Did you have a different working  
19 relationship? Go back to the beginning when you first started with the press.

20

21 Viarta: Yeah. It, it was quite a bit different. There wasn't that much information. TVs, a lot of  
22 people didn't send TVs then, it was too expensive. A lot of people didn't have TVs, it wasn't, it wasn't,  
23 the ratings weren't that big a deal, so most of it was printed material, the newspapers, the radios. Its

1 evolved now where there's very few radios, we have a lot of television, a lot of newspapers will come.  
2 There's, there's quite a few newspapers, but there's a lot of Internet activity. There's a lot of  
3 Space.com, Spaceflight.com, other dot coms, and there's a lot of that and there's web streaming  
4 where now you can watch a launch on your computer. You don't have to watch your television, which  
5 is kind of good. I mean, it's, everybody's, I shouldn't say everybody, there's a lot more computers  
6 now than there was five years ago. There's, you know, everybody's got a TV or more than one or two  
7 TVs in their homes. So the media just covers this place. NASA even has its own television station,  
8 our own satellite, which is good. We used to have to buy time, put it up on a satellite, and we just, we  
9 realized it was more cost effective to have our own satellite.

10

11 Moore: You know some people in the business who could put one up, I guess.

12

13 Viarta: A few people, yeah. Probably cut some deals.

14

15 Moore: Working with the press, has it changed from when you first came, just physically day to  
16 day interaction with the media?

17

18 Viarta: Probably a little bit, but not a lot. I think it's changed mostly since September 11<sup>th</sup> of last  
19 year. The same people I'm working with, it's just a little harder for them and for us to get stories,  
20 information, quotes. We're trying to work, they understand, it's, it's just a little different and I think the  
21 public, because of that has suffered. Our message has suffered because we, we can't be out as  
22 often as we were before. We don't have as much TV time. We can't tell the story as it happens.

1 We've actually cut our programming, our live programming for Shuttle launch from five hours to  
2 roughly three hours.

3

4 Moore: Some people think that Challenger played a key role in the, changed the relationship of  
5 the press and the Center. There was a different view, you weren't telling us stuff, that they were  
6 some problems with the way information was disseminated. That was right about when you were  
7 coming on board. Did you sense any of that?

8

9 Viarta: Yeah. There was a, there was quite a change there. I think it was a learning change.  
10 We realized some things that, that we did probably differently, that we should have, should have been  
11 more open I think. The press learned that they probably needed to be a little more cooperative with  
12 us and now I think that was one phase and I think nothing changed probably for all those years until  
13 September 11<sup>th</sup> and I think the news guys generally are very cooperative. They understand. There's  
14 a few individual organizations or people who are still pushing for things, you know, they, they just  
15 push the envelope, then they want to know, they want to know, they want to know. They go to the  
16 Freedom of Information Act, trying to get information, they threaten and bully, but, NASA's been  
17 pretty good about maintaining a policy. You really can't acquiesce for one person and not give that  
18 same information to everybody else. And we've been pretty good about that I think. There's no  
19 exclusivity for somebody because you are CNN, or you are this or that.

20

21 Moore: Did Challenger change the way the Center handled the press?

22

23 Viarta: Exactly.

1

2 Moore: How did that evolve?

3

4 Viarta: Well, we didn't, we had a plan but the plan really didn't, I don't think we foresaw all of  
5 the problems that were going to occur, the things that, that would pop up after Challenger and I think  
6 we learned from that, so we, we did a new plan, a contingency plan. And I think it's much better, it's  
7 more comprehensive and we have things to do. We know what to do if we have another failure of a  
8 Shuttle, loss of life, or injuries. And we've been practicing, we have sims, which we actually pretend  
9 that a Shuttle has crashed, there's been loss of life, there's injuries and we have these sims maybe  
10 once every two years or sometimes we were doing it once a year. And I think it kind of helps  
11 everybody.

12

13 Moore: What was the original plan and then, what, was there a practice for the contingency  
14 should it happen the first time?

15

16 Viarta: I don't recall having a practice before that. I think we had a plan. The plan, everybody  
17 had a copy of the plan, but when it actually really happened it was, it was a shock. Everybody was  
18 really like in shock and it was just, it was just unbelievable, I mean, we stayed open, the press site, I  
19 wasn't here yet, but I was working, I was working with the families, so I was aware of what was going  
20 on. We had a plan there. The plan was to take the families to a certain area, which was the training  
21 facility. We brought in food. We brought in the astronauts. We brought in medical people and we  
22 had a plan and that part of it was ok, but then communications went down. We were inundated, the  
23 Center, with so many phone calls, they just gridlocked. Nobody could call in, nobody could call out,

1 we had a few lines that we had secure and they were able to call in and call out at the, at the facility  
2 we were at, but there, all in all, I mean, you know, we, we had a plan, but the plan just didn't think of  
3 everything.

4

5 Moore: Tell me about your side dealing with the, kind of the extended families. Give, give me a  
6 play by play on that. That's. . .

7

8 Viarta: Well.

9

10 Moore: . . . You always hear about the, the mistakes that were made from the communication,  
11 how information delayed, but it sounds like there was a portion of the plan that was successful. Give  
12 me your day.

13

14 Viarta: Yeah, the part, the part that I had, that, that day, there were several, there were several  
15 delays, and this had pushed into January of '86. And I had worked all the Shuttle launches as a  
16 volunteer since STS-1 which was in April of '81 and that was, that was our first Shuttle and this was  
17 the 25<sup>th</sup> Shuttle so I think it was the Challenger's tenth mission. And we had five busloads of people  
18 that were just right out here at the press site, so I worked with the people at the press site, I mean,  
19 you know, the press site was here, we had the VIPS, that was the VIP site at the time, just down at  
20 the turn basin, where we had a little sequestered area and we had three bleachers full of people.  
21 And, it was raining, and it stopped raining, and the sun came out, but it was very cold, and they  
22 picked up the count, so we all got out of the tents and the cars, whatever, we went out, stood by and  
23 we watched it take off and we watched it go off. And then, actually on the, the actual explosion, there

1 was no sound. We didn't here an explosion on the ground. They were about ten miles up. So,  
2 basically, the Shuttle had already done its pitch and roll maneuver, so we were only looking at the  
3 back of the stack, we didn't see the Orbiter, the Orbiter was away from us, it was taking off going  
4 away from us. So we were all looking for the Orbiter to come out of the puff of smoke, and so forth,  
5 and do a return to launch site, RTLS, which would be our runway. Well. . .

6

7 Moore: So you knew right away that something. . . ?

8

9 Viarta: Well, we knew something was wrong, but it looked, it looked like an early separation of  
10 the boosters. We didn't realize that the tank had blown up, but there was, there was not an  
11 explosion, you did not see large pieces of stuff going, you just saw some white and orange smoke  
12 mostly, you didn't see any fire from the ground. And so we weren't sure, we just thought it was an  
13 early separation and the boosters were still going. They were intact and the Shuttle had blown up  
14 and the tank had blown up, but we were looking for it to come out and it didn't. And basically in some  
15 of the video you could see the crew compartment still going up, about another two miles before it  
16 started to plunge to earth. So at that time we just gathered all the people. Now the only people we  
17 had that we immediate father was Christa McAuliffe's mother and father. They were with us. But  
18 everybody else, the mothers and fathers and immediate family were on the roof of the launch control  
19 center, those that were still here, but I had the aunts and the uncles and the, the real good friends  
20 and neighbors, and there was five bus loads. There was probably two hundred people I believe.

21

22 Moore: This was right out here?

23

1 Viarta: Yeah, right out, right down at the turn basin. So we marshaled them all ahead, I had an  
2 escort in each bus and I was the lead. Marshalled them all into the buses.

3

4 Moore: Now nobody, did anybody know at this time. . . ?

5

6 Viarta: No, they were asking us what happened, we said, well at the time the only thing that  
7 was audio was that Johnson Space Center commentator said, we have a major malfunction. Didn't  
8 say the Shuttle blew up, didn't say the Orbiter blew up, didn't say exploded, didn't say anything, just,  
9 we have a major malfunction. A malfunction could be the boosters separated, you know, whatever.  
10 So, we didn't know really. I mean, we weren't in a position to tell them, but we really didn't know, just  
11 that something happened, so, we said, we'll try and find out, we don't really know what happened  
12 right now, we need you all to get on the buses and we, we actually sped to this marshalling area and  
13 had security ring the building so that the people would not be bothered by news or anything else and.  
14 . .

15

16 Moore: Now where was the, you told me. . . ?

17

18 Viarta: The training auditorium.

19

20 Moore: Training auditorium.

21

22 Viarta: Which was about five miles away.

23

1 Moore: Next to the . . . ?

2

3 Viarta: Headquarters building.

4

5 Moore: Headquarters.

6

7 Viarta: Yeah, so we raced over there, got the people inside, had security ring the building, had

8 some food and things brought over, tried to find out information. Some people were very anxious,

9 they were, they were having medical problems, maybe some heart attacks, I don't know. The

10 auditorium is, is a auditorium, so there was, there was room for 327 people, I think. And there was,

11 was bathrooms in there, there was some vending machines and a couple of telephones and there

12 was two entrances, a main entrance and a back entrance. And so we had the building surrounded by

13 security, nobody could get in and out. But we were in there for several hours. We had some medical

14 people come over, we had some astronauts come over. Basically, after several hours, there was still

15 debris raining down, I guess, on the ocean. Some of the tiles would, would float, took a long time and

16 they were caught in the winds and they were going up and coming down and there were still pieces of

17 the tiles, was probably at that time, I think they had about thirty thousand tiles, thirty-five thousand

18 tiles on the Orbiter. So, while that was taking place we still didn't have any word and when, when we

19 did start taking the people back to their hotels and cars and whatever, I don't think we, we actually

20 ever told them that, that they were lost. You know, that they were gone.

21

22 Moore: Was, was there any television coverage in the auditorium, or was it. . . ?

23

1 Viarta: We had some TVs in there, but I don't think we covered anything. Earlier we showed  
2 pictures of the area, just a wide shot of the area, but then I think we just blacked out and that was one  
3 thing that we, we had decided we wouldn't do in the future, we would have something up. We  
4 wouldn't just go to black, you know, keep some, some kind of. . .

5

6 Moore: So your side, so, calm relatively speaking, with the people. . .

7

8 Viarta: Yeah, I thought we did a very good job. There were some things, tweaks and things  
9 that they did after that though too, I mean, I'm not quite of all the changes, but we, we made some  
10 changes. And the other areas like the press site was just, they stayed open twenty-fours for days or  
11 weeks, I mean the people were just totally washed out, because of people wanting news and, you  
12 know. They had confiscated camera equipment. And people had cameras out there, the press and  
13 things like that so NASA could try and find out what went wrong. And fortunately, one of the NASA  
14 cameras, on the back of the pad, showed the, the failure at the ring, just a little puff of black smoke,  
15 during ignition of the boosters, and right at the joint, and they figured that's where the blow out was.

16

17 Moore: Certainly a tragic day took place.

18

19 Viarta: Yeah and actually for a year, I know I was very depressed, for a year, and then after a  
20 year, you know, like they say, time heals, it got better. Not, not completely better, but started getting  
21 better, and each time we launched felt a little better, a little more fearful though until the boosters  
22 separated 'cause, until the boosters separate they don't have much of a chance of survival, even if  
23 the Orbiter is still intact, but at that point, you know, the boosters are still going and you'll lose

1 dynamics, and the thing will rip apart and so forth, so you're kind of, you know, on pins and needles  
2 until the boosters, which occurs about two minutes and three or four seconds into flight, so we're all  
3 kind of like, ok, and when you here go for throttle up that's when the Challenger actually blew up, 73  
4 seconds.

5

6 Moore: So when, when we had the return to flight in 1988, that was, tell me about that launch.  
7 What were, what was your capacity? You had, you had changed your position by this point and you  
8 were actually. . .

9

10 Viarta: I was at the press site.

11

12 Moore: You were at the press site.

13

14 Viarta: I was taking news media to, to see the crew, was taking news media to see the Orbiter,  
15 Atlantis, I believe it was the return to flight, STS-26. And there was a lot of people here, it was like  
16 STS-1 all over again. There was just thousands of people, I don't even know the numbers, but it was,  
17 it was, quite a few. And it was, it was neat, because they actually had a, a press briefing when it  
18 rolled out to the pad, which they hadn't done before. It was a dark, we put some lights up so that the  
19 first six hundred feet or so the Shuttle was lit and we had, we had a ceremony actually. We had  
20 some NASA people there and we, we announced, you know, with great joy that we were going to  
21 return to flight and so, that was, that was pretty neat. And then when it went off, it was successfully  
22 and we've had since 26 we're up to 110, we're up to 110 flights, we've had since then, well total 110.

23

1 Moore: But still full of trepidation each time it goes?

2

3 Viarta: Exactly. I think anybody who was here, or remembers Challenger, or remembers  
4 Challenger and weren't here, but they know that, you know, until those boosters go off they don't  
5 have much of a chance of survival, even though they, they added a new system where they slide  
6 down a pole, but if you try and slide down a pole at 8,000 miles an hour, you know, you get ripped  
7 apart.

8

9 Moore: You're supposed to slide down a pole inside the. . .

10

11 Viarta: Yeah, basically, what happens, there's a, so you don't get hit by the vehicle, you can't  
12 just jump out of the port hole, which they blow the hatch on the side, you'd hit the wings, so they  
13 actually extend a pole, basically it's designed for after the boosters separate, the Shuttle then starts to  
14 maneuver. They blow the hatch, a pole slides out that extends down below the Orbiter, so that when  
15 they slide down the pole they won't get hit by the wings or the engines and then they deploy the  
16 parachutes after they slide down the pole and get away from the Orbiter.

17

18 Moore: So this is like for actually the crew to bail out in that sense?

19

20 Viarta: Yes, it's, it's. . .

21

22 Moore: At 8,000 miles an hour.

23

1 Viarta: Well, they could slow down, yeah, but. . .

2

3 Moore: Ok. (laughs) I was unaware of that.

4

5 Viarta: Yeah, they have that system.

6

7 Moore: Oh, boy. (laughs) Tell me about some of the other experiences, some things that don't  
8 specifically relate to, to KSC in particular, but had an overall effect on NASA. As you said the  
9 international people who come over here and, and I would contend that probably many of domestic  
10 people see this as NASA. This is where it happens. This is where they take off from. This is where,  
11 barring weather, they land, now that they kind of changed that process. How have other events, like  
12 the problems with the Hubble, the problems with the Mars activity, did that have any influence on the  
13 perception of the people that you were touring around, the kind of their attitude?

14

15 Viarta: Yeah, actually, anything that happens, good or bad, has a effect on the people for that  
16 time, the people that see that, sometimes people, that's, that's the only way they know about NASA.  
17 They've, they've been kind of oblivious until there's an accident, or some type of major event. When  
18 we had the problem with the Hubble, the first time, the, the lens was not correct, but how could this  
19 happen, what a waste of money, this and that and the other thing. Well now that the Hubble's up  
20 there and sending back all these neat fantastic pictures, birth of the universe, there's the birth of a  
21 star and everything, everybody's like, wow, NASA did a great job, but they're kind of like waiting for  
22 the hammer to fall. That's what the news guys are looking for too. That's the story, when, when  
23 something goes wrong, so they're always looking for it. We overspent on the International Space

1 Station, we were delayed on International Space Station, we had another failure with this, we had  
2 another, unfortunately even the local press have it wrong sometimes. They'll say, NASA, NASA loses  
3 another satellite. Well, sometimes, that's a, that's a military launch with a military payload. We have  
4 nothing to do with that. It's not NASA, but they say NASA because it's from the Cape. NASA loses  
5 another satellite. NASA has a failure and they never get it straight. Sometimes people, then people  
6 read that so they say, oh, NASA blew up another rocket. Well it wasn't ours.

7

8 Moore: I need to switch the tape.

9

10 Viarta: Sure.

11

12 (tape change)

13

14 Moore: Today's June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2002, Patrick Moore, University of West Florida, Kennedy Space  
15 Center. This is the second tape of the Manny Viarta interview. Carrying on where we were talking  
16 about kind of this changing relationship, this vision of what it is that, where we're going and the kind of  
17 information dissemination process. Tell me, actually we were just sort of talking about NASA TV and  
18 this is an interesting area to go into, tell me a little bit about this. What was NASA TV and it's now  
19 NTV, but nobody can seem to. . . ?

20

21 Viarta: Yeah, this evolution, we've actually changed the name from NASA Select, which was  
22 the name of our satellite, to NASA Television and we've actually changed satellites over the years.  
23 We, we had one satellite which became obsolete; I guess it ran out of fuel and so we switched to

1 another satellite. So we're on a, we're on a different satellite now, but it's the same functions. We,  
2 we use it for all of the NASA activities including a video file, because we have so many activities in  
3 this center, different centers wanting to use the satellite, we, we now have a NASA Television  
4 executive producer, who coordinates that. He's in Washington, D.C. We also have a NASA  
5 Television working group who works out problems that may occur with switching satellites or priority,  
6 who gets the satellite. Flight wants a lot of the satellite time for a mission so they can check things  
7 out. Other people need the satellite for engineering. Public affairs wants the satellite for the public  
8 affairs portion of a launch, so, we have these, these two new groups that are responsible for that. TV  
9 wise we've gone from M-2 tapes and pneumatic tapes, these big very large bulky tapes to, and film,  
10 we used to do a lot of film, to the little VHS, super VHS, and Beta tapes and we have some other  
11 formats, but basically NASA has chosen to stay with the Beta and the VHS, super VHS tapes. They  
12 may change again, but right now all of our recorders, all of our cameras are in that format, NTSC.  
13 Now we're going to high definition and NASA has a couple of high definition televisions which use  
14 Beta, but it's a special format, so you can shoot in high definition and you can play it so that it's not in  
15 high def, but basically if you want high def, you have to have high definition recorders, high definition  
16 monitors, with enough, enough pixels and so forth. So, there's been an evolution there too, in that, in  
17 what we, we hand out, what the, what the news media need. A lot of times they have to convert. All  
18 of our, most of our European customers use PAL, which is another format, so they have to convert  
19 from NTSC to PAL and that's an expense for them, but it's not cost effective for us to, to do that in  
20 PAL for just a few users, so they, they take care of the cost themselves.

21

22 Moore: When did this actually start, NASA Select?

23

1 Viarta: You know I'm not really sure of the actual date. Patrick, we can find out for you, but I'm  
2 not really sure of the date. It's been here since I came over, so we had NASA select in the eighties,  
3 but I'm not sure when it actually started.

4

5 Moore: Have you, tell me about the way programming has changed. Have they, this is  
6 obviously kind of, in terms of communicating the NASA story, communicating what's going on, this is  
7 an important kind of step. How has the programming changed from the original days when you were  
8 first aware of it to the present?

9

10 Viarta: We have a lot more on NASA television now than before. There's a video file which is  
11 every day, it's replayed, it's usually at noon, and at three, and at six, and they'll play it over the  
12 weekends also. Basically, it gives the centers, the different NASA centers an opportunity to do a  
13 news story in a two or three minute video, a video bite, with, with all the information so that any news  
14 organization that uses TV as a format or also Internet now can pull that down, have enough  
15 information about what they're seeing and use that video as is or they can take it and take parts of it  
16 and audit it, edit it, and do audio, voice-overs, and so they can do a story. I've done that.

17

18 Moore: And you do that every day.

19

20 Viarta: Yes.

21

22 Moore: It's not a weekly thing, it's a daily. . . ?

23

1 Viarta: It's a daily, it's a daily update. We try and get stories from the different centers.  
2 Headquarters is the, the center of responsibility so we feed everything to them and they come up with  
3 a, with a program and they'll, they'll show it. And if they show something at twelve and they have  
4 something that's in addition after that, like this launch, they might edit that into the six o'clock video  
5 format and so the video file will have that NOAH launch that, that we hope to do today. So that will be  
6 on later on tonight. So news guys can get it fresh you know when it's still a story.

7

8 Moore: So how much control do you have in terms of the other things that are going on, if  
9 something major is happening here, the emphasis goes here, but, as a rule, everything is coordinated  
10 out of D.C.?

11

12 Viarta: Yes. You have to get satellite time. You have to do a schedule. The, the sooner you  
13 know about an event to get on a schedule is the best, but they will, they will prioritize things. Now  
14 obviously if, if there's some breaking story here, or one of the other centers, they will either bump the  
15 programming or interrupt the programming and then go back to the original programming, but, it's, it's  
16 pretty good. We're more like TV stations now. NASA didn't have a lot of experience. We had a  
17 couple of people that come, that came from a TV station when we first started, Helen and Joe  
18 Benton, and then, there's been others since then, but I think we have an infrastructure in television  
19 now that, that we're operating pretty good. I think we do a, we do a very good job.

20

21 Moore: Do you find that people, when they come here, they are aware of NASA TV, that they  
22 watch it?

23

1 Viarta: Yeah, pretty much. I think they, they're aware of NASA television, they just aren't aware  
2 of how it works. Sometimes they're amazed at, at what we have. A lot of the time we don't have  
3 state of the art. It's very expensive to have state of the art. The equipment we have is not always  
4 brand new and yet it works, so they'll have state of the art, we'll have stuff that's one or two  
5 generations old, but as long as it provides the format and the information we need we'll use it, you  
6 know, we just, we just don't have a lot of money.

7

8 Moore: In terms of the information, things change as we talked about in the, in the earlier part of  
9 the interview, very cold war oriented and the, and the trip to the moon, the quest to get to the moon.  
10 Shuttle years much more focused on the science side, certainly when you were out recruiting, you  
11 were out recruiting people for the different reasons, for, for quest for Shuttle development, I imagine,  
12 for payloads and these types of things, the engineering, etcetera. How has the mission, how has the  
13 information that you as a, as a press interface changed from the earlier time when you were first here  
14 to the present.

15

16 Viarta: Well, we actually are not responsible for the mission, the mission is, is done at  
17 Headquarters and NASA actually has a 25 year plan, so we always have a mission ahead that they're  
18 working on. When we were doing Apollo, they were already working on the Shuttle. Because you  
19 didn't just do the Shuttle \_\_\_\_\_ were working on that. They've actually been  
20 working on a plan to go to Mars and that's been even before I got here was part of their plan. They  
21 had already done some studies. They had already used a, Carl Sagan and some other people to get  
22 together and say, what would it take to go to Mars, you know, using their, their, imagination. So we  
23 have a plan. We, we do hope to go to Mars. I think the thing that just came up recently is that the

1 Chinese are going to launch an astronaut sometime. They, they say they're going to launch an  
2 astronaut. Hopefully, if they do, you know, good luck to them. But then they want to go to the moon  
3 and mine the moon. Now, I think that will be a challenge to the United States, because I don't think  
4 we're going to want them to go up there and have sole possession of the moon. That's my thinking.  
5 So we probably will have some plans to go back to the moon, maybe have a station there, you know,  
6 where they could actually have a moon base which there's probably been several movies about  
7 things like that. And we want to go to Mars and I think that's going to happen. Unfortunately, I don't  
8 think it'll happen in my lifetime unless somebody, a president or somebody, says, you know, like  
9 we're, like Kennedy said, we're going to go do this in this decade and Bush said that we're going to,  
10 Regan actually said, we're going to do this and build a space station. So unless the funding and the,  
11 and the president or someone decides that we're going to do something in a, in a short period of time,  
12 I don't know what will transpire when I'm here. But basically, whatever the NASA mission is, it  
13 changes. Our job is just to make sure that that story gets out. So, it's a Shuttle mission or an Apollo  
14 mission or the International Space Station or Skylab, our job is public relations or external relations is  
15 to just get that story out. The mission actually is decided by NASA management.

16

17 Moore: So what's, what's on, so what are you communicating now? What's the 25 year  
18 mission? Where do we stand in terms of our goals?

19

20 Viarta: We are not really, periodically there'll be some things out of Headquarters which will talk  
21 about those future things. They'll ask questions of the new NASA administrator, what is, what is  
22 NASA going to do in the future, what's after the space station, you know, etcetera, etcetera. And, and  
23 he's alluded that we have a mission, a plan to go to Mars. He's alluded that we might go to the moon,

1 not because of the Chinese, but just that we might go to moon. There's a lot of, there's a lot of  
2 minerals, there's a lot of things that we can use that are on the moon. I mean there's just a lot of  
3 elements that we can use so it might be good to have a base there, you know, if something happens  
4 to the earth, I mean, keep mankind alive. So I'm, I'm kind of excited about that, I just, I just don't think  
5 it will happen in my lifetime. Hopefully it will, but I just don't think that it will. And if it does, great, I'm  
6 all for it.

7

8 Moore: Coming back to this, they're alluding to things, but do you sense that right now, certainly  
9 it's, it's a challenge for you as, as a press individual because is the goal to put the, the Shuttle up to  
10 put together the ISS. What's its plan? Really the issue comes back to, we had a clear goal in the  
11 past, by God, we're going to the moon. We're going to take these tests to get to the moon. We're  
12 going to build the Space Shuttle; we're going to do this so that we can go there. There always  
13 seemed to be those very clear steps and then as you said, Regan said, we're going to build the space  
14 station, Space Station Freedom. It's going to go up. . .

15

16 Viarta: Right.

17

18 Moore: . . . and now it's the ISS. Stepping forward now, when people come, where are we  
19 going?

20

21 Viarta: Ummm.

22

23 Moore: And maybe . . .

1

2 Viarta: I don't have the answers, but I, I think, I think the moon and Mars are probably two  
3 things. I think with the International Space Station what it's done is there's more countries now  
4 involved in space. I think more countries have money that they're willing to put towards that effort. I  
5 don't know if we'll have a cooperative effort with all of these International Space Station people to go  
6 to Mars. I don't know if NASA, United States wants any cooperation, you know, I think that's the only  
7 way to go because of the, of the cost it would be and you need everybody's technology. But I think,  
8 geez, since '75, the Russians from the Apollo-Soyuz to now where we have these expedition  
9 missions with, with the Russians and they're one of our probably partners even though they don't  
10 have any money right now, I mean, you know, they're, they're strapped for cash because of the, of  
11 the fall of the, of the U.S.S.R., but I think there's a commitment there. And the fact that they're putting  
12 guest astronauts, if you will, up, for twenty-five million dollars or whatever, I guess that's, that's  
13 innovative of them. It's, it's almost, it's almost like a capitalistic U.S. thing that you would do, but the  
14 U.S. has, has failed to, to utilize that. I think we, we probably could do stuff, but, I mean, imagine you  
15 see the Shuttle flying by with a Pepsi logo on the side, or, or something like that, but, but there's  
16 money there. And if that's what it takes, you know, hey, what difference does it make, I mean, as far  
17 as I'm concerned, if it's a white Shuttle or a Shuttle with a, with a product on the side of it, you know,  
18 a logo, if it's going to help the program, hey, I'm all for it.

19

20 Moore: Well, hey. Do you think, you understand the reason behind the space station and  
21 certainly it has a lot of value. Do you get the idea that the public understands it? It was easy to  
22 understand the Shuttle in some ways.

23

1 Viarta: Ummm.

2

3 Moore: And I don't mean to ask loaded questions, I'm just wondering how you're working with  
4 the people.

5

6 Viarta: Well, basically, it depends. The educated people, and I have to use that, educated  
7 people understand, I think, more than, than uneducated people, and there's a lot of third world  
8 countries and all that don't even have televisions so, I mean, you know, I know they know about the  
9 Shuttle, but they probably think it's a waste of money. You know, that money spent to launch a  
10 Shuttle could be, could build roads and could build things for them, homes, and so forth. So, so for  
11 those third world countries and uneducated people, I, I think there's probably not a great, a lot of  
12 support, but for the people that are educated I think that is probably fifty-fifty. The people realize and  
13 then they don't think it's a good idea, it's a waste of money still and then others realize the potential  
14 and they need to do that and so forth. So in the U.S. I think there's, they take polls all the time and  
15 there's periods where you have support for the space station, you don't, it's a waste of money, we  
16 spend too much, enough already. But I think basically we spend very little money of the tax dollar on  
17 NASA and at one time, and I don't know what it is now, but at one time it was one cent on the tax  
18 dollar was NASA and thirty, thirty cents on the dollar was for military purposes, salaries and so forth.  
19 So there's a big disparity there, you know, they get thirty, thirty cents on the dollar, we get one and,  
20 you know, that's, that's all we get, one cent on the dollar. It's not much.

21

22 Moore: Do you get comments from people about questioning how much goes into this, do  
23 people, are they aware how much, from your position?

1

2 Viarta: Some are, a lot of, but a lot of times people just want to know, how much does it cost.  
3 They don't really want to know how much, you know, we, NASA gets eight billion dollars, or NASA  
4 gets twelve billion dollars, or fourteen, but they don't really say, well, ok, but the military gets two  
5 hundred billion dollars, or something like that, you know, there's just not a comparison. They just talk  
6 about the initial program or, you know, what NASA gets. They don't really compare it to the total,  
7 total deficit or the total budget for the, for the United States, which is unfortunate.

8

9 Moore: Now you mentioned that you're, how much longer until you plan to retire?

10

11 Viarta: Well, basically, I could retire today. I, I have the combination of years of service and,  
12 and age, but I'm personally shooting for 2004. I'll have 34 years of government service and I'll be old  
13 enough to retire and actually the, the federal government is a lot better than Social Security, because  
14 you have to wait until you're 62. You can retire as early as 55 in the federal government, if you have  
15 thirty years of service, which is very good. And that was one of the selling points that I used to use  
16 when I recruited. And a lot of those people that I recruited are thanking me because now they're  
17 retired, they're able to retire and other people are looking at ten more years of work before they can  
18 retire and it's Social Security and that's not, it's not as lucrative as it is in the government. Not that  
19 we're getting, you know, millions of dollars or anything but it's just, it's a nice retirement.

20

21 Moore: You obviously enjoyed your job though and so do you desire to leave?

22

1 Viarta: I have some mixed feelings. I really do. A lot of people leave here, retire, and continue  
2 to work for NASA as a volunteer in different capacities, mostly in the public affairs area. I don't know  
3 if I'll do that. I'd like to try something different and I've been kicking around some things that I might  
4 go into and real estate was one and, and maybe, I have some friends that are in the car business  
5 selling cars. I think that I probably could do that and real estate, so I'm just looking into that. If I'm  
6 going to stay and volunteer for NASA, I just might as well stay with NASA and get paid for it as  
7 opposed to doing it as a volunteer.

8

9 Moore: Well I guess that makes sense. Your time here obviously, the good, the bad, the ugly,  
10 everything in between that you've enjoyed, a lot of center directors, you, you've known all of them.

11

12 Viarta: I've known all.

13

14 Moore: You've, you've worked under every one of them.

15

16 Viarta: I came in '74 when Dr. Debus was still here and now here I think it's our seventh center  
17 director, Roy Bridges.

18

19 Moore: Have they, in your impression, obviously only, how has their leadership kind of changed  
20 the structure of the institution of the center itself?

21

22 Viarta: Its had some impact. I don't think each individual has an, has an impact on the center,  
23 per see, because I think the, the impact of the center's directed by big NASA, if you will,

1 headquarters. Our center directors are just managers of the facility. They don't, they don't really  
2 have a say. I don't say that facetiously, but it's just that I think there's already a plan, like now, within  
3 the last tenure of our center director, Roy Bridges, he's had to be the hatchet man, if you will. We've  
4 downsized NASA. This is the first time since I've been here that we've downsized. We've always  
5 had around 2200 NASA employees. We got down as low as about 1600, so that was a first and he  
6 had to be the one to do that, to get rid of those people and still do a job. It's been very difficult  
7 because a lot of people here have felt that they're doing the jobs of two or three people sometimes  
8 and, so it's been a difficult job for him. But he, he didn't want to do that. He, he fought for more  
9 employees and in some cases he's actually won. We actually went from 1600 back up to 17, I think  
10 we've got somewhere between seventeen and eighteen hundred we can have. But, basically, I think  
11 you, your center is pretty much dictated to by NASA, the NASA people in Washington.

12

13 Moore: Has that changed? There seems to be a lot of talk about Debus' vision and the Debus  
14 years and kind of the way that has changed. Do you sense that or do you think it's always been the  
15 same.

16

17 Viarta: Yeah, the center directors change a little bit. Dr. Debus was a visionary. He worked on  
18 some, some early rocketry and things like that. He, he was a very intelligent man, but he had his  
19 own, if you will, bedside manner. Different center directors bring to the center a different personality.  
20 Some were, were better, some were, were not so good. They didn't have a good, they weren't  
21 perceived well by, by the people that they work with or for and, and the people on the outside. But as  
22 administrators, they've all been very capable I think. We've had a couple who were unfortunately,  
23 here at the time of a tragedy, like the Challenger. And our center director at the time, Dick Smith,

1 actually was the fall guy, if you will, because he was here and it was his watch when the, when the  
2 Challenger blew up. So, that was unfortunate for him, but we've had, we've had several since him  
3 who've done an outstanding job and some hard times, like the downsizing, but it's, it's a challenge for  
4 them, it's a challenge for the people that are, that are trying to do the job.

5

6 Moore: \_\_\_\_\_ This press facility, this is relatively new.

7

8 Viarta: Yes.

9

10 Moore: And has this been a real benefit to working with the press.

11

12 Viarta: Oh, I think so. The press thinks so. Some of the press have been here as long as I've  
13 been here.

14

15 Moore: Tell me about that relationship and that kind of evolution in terms of the physical plant  
16 and the way it changed the relationship.

17

18 Viarta: Well, we used to have, the press site used to be in a hotel. It used, we used, the press  
19 site came up when we needed it. We had some facilities that we were at it and when we had a press  
20 event we would go to a hotel and rent a hotel. In the recent tenure of the press site we had a, a  
21 geodesic dome, which occurred right around the bicentennial, '76 or so. We had a geodesic dome  
22 put up here. And it was a canvas stretched across a metal structure and it was in, it was in a moon  
23 dome type shape and it was terrible. There was no windows. You could, like the rotunda in the

1 capital, you could be on one side and talk and your voice would travel across, so somebody on the  
2 other side could actually hear you even if you're whispering. So it wasn't very good if you're trying to  
3 have a confidential discussion. When it rained it sounded like ten thousand rats were running across  
4 the roof. You couldn't hear. It was very bad. That structure was here until about five years ago. And  
5 one of the reasons is, we talked about money and funding, it was not a priority to fund this. The  
6 priority was to build the facilities, to maintain the facilities and this was a low priority. For some  
7 reason we had some money and, and we were lucky enough to get the money funded to do this  
8 building. So this building was purchased, actually constructed, it'll be six years ago, I think, this, this  
9 November. And this is great because this is a, this is a quality place for people to come and cover  
10 the space program to do their stories. For the people who work here we have a really nice facility  
11 now. It's, it's a nice place to come and work. There's windows, even though it leaks sometimes  
12 when it rains hard, but that's part of the construction problem, but it's just, it's just a really nice facility.

13

14 Moore: Why, why was the decision made to, to bring it from the hotel, out on the beach, where  
15 people were, could, you know. . . ?

16

17 Viarta: Just the numbers. We, we started getting, the numbers were just too much to, to  
18 control from a hotel and the, the costs were just, bussing people in from the hotels and so forth and it  
19 was, they decided to let them come to a site and that we needed a place where they could be on the  
20 site without being all over the center and this was a good place to do that. So that, it was, it was a  
21 combination of things.

22

23 Moore: Better than the dome. Was, was it better. . .

1

2 Viarta: The dome was an improvement.

3

4 Moore: . . . to have the dome? The dome was an improvement over the hotel.

5

6 Viarta: Exactly, exactly.

7

8 Moore: Now was the dome air conditioned?

9

10 Viarta: It was air conditioned.

11

12 Moore: Was it on this, where. . . ?

13

14 Viarta: Same site.

15

16 Moore: Right here where we're sitting.

17

18 Viarta: Actually when they tore down the dome we actually had to move into three double wide  
19 trailers for about a year and it was just below here. You probably seen it when you came up here and  
20 there was, that was not a very good place. There were no windows. It was three double wide  
21 trailers, side by side, with holes cut in to walk through and it had problems. It was, there was mold in  
22 there I guess and there was some medical problems, you know, because people didn't realize at that

1 time we're down about six years ago, that mold could cause medical problems to people. So I don't  
2 think anybody's been in those trailers since we moved out.

3

4 Moore: Now, the, the network facilities which are right along here off to our, your right. Where  
5 would, they were always there, well not always there, but when did they go in? They were. . .

6

7 Viarta: No, they were, they were constructed sometime after '76. Individual, people had trailers  
8 here initially and then they decided, someone wanted to build facilities. Well we came up with an  
9 agreement where they could a facility, they'd pay for it, and then they actually leased the property and  
10 it was on a, on a federal lease and so forth. So, they're leasing the buildings, it's their buildings  
11 they've built but they're leasing the space. And the trailers that are here they have a lease with that,  
12 to have the trailer on the property and it has to be renewed every couple of years. I don't think there's  
13 a lot of money involved, but it's just a token amount, but it's just so that they can have the facilities.  
14 We didn't build their facilities for them. So there's, there's three permanent structures, ABC, CBS,  
15 and NBC and then there's the trailers.

16

17 Moore: Now there are quite a few trailers around, although there's been. . .

18

19 Viarta: Right.

20

21 Moore: . . . talk about getting the trailers. . .

22

1 Viarta: Center, center director would like to eventually get rid of the trailers, however some of  
2 the trailers were just upgraded and, we're just, getting, we've gotten rid of a few trailers already. A  
3 few of the companies, they've ceased operations up here, Voice of America, Mutual News Radio, one  
4 of the UPI trailers. They used to have two trailers, they're down to one trailer now, I believe because  
5 of, UPI sort of went under and then they've come back a little bit, so there's still a news organization,  
6 a wire service.

7

8 Moore: Did building this facility, obviously it improved the environment, but did it improve the  
9 ability to communicate what was going on, to share information?

10

11 Viarta: Oh sure, even if we had the dome, the dome was constructed, you know, so many  
12 years ago and there wasn't a lot of infrastructure for the equipment we have now, the computers, the,  
13 the recorders, the type of equipment we have, all of the electronics. So when they built this facility,  
14 they built it so that they could add on. We've laid in cable for a lot of the things, underground cable,  
15 so we could just add on to those, those different communications type needs that we have and since  
16 then, we now have a web studio, which is new, and that was able to be put in without digging up the  
17 ground and so forth because we had the foresight to put that infrastructure in already. So that was  
18 pretty cool and, and we're web streaming things now, which is just another medium to use to get out  
19 to the, to the public.

20

21 Moore: A new technology.

22

23 Viarta: Yep.

1

2 Moore: In terms of international press, would the ISS and a truly international contingent on  
3 what's taking place, is there a larger number of international press that have come over?

4

5 Viarta: Definitely, definitely. There's more, since the International Space Station, we've had  
6 more international press come because of their involvement. The Japanese came. It actually started  
7 before the ISS, we had the Space Lab and different countries would fly a, a whole Space Lab. Japan  
8 did, Germany did several times, Japan had a couple, and every time one of these astronauts flew  
9 there would be a large contingent of Italians, of Japanese, of Germans, of Dutch, whoever flew and  
10 even now we still have the same deal. The first Russians that flew, there was a large contingency of  
11 the Russian press. Not so much now, but they don't need to. A lot of people will cover for the  
12 Russians, the wire services, they can get the information without actually having to send. But when  
13 Canadians we still have the same. When this Saudi Arabian prince flew we had a lot of, you know,  
14 people. We definitely will have more when there's, when there's international people on the, on the  
15 Shuttle.

16

17 Moore: And in, and in turn, some of that responsibility to tour these people around, the press  
18 people, do you still help when their families come, etcetera, do you participate in that?

19

20 Viarta: We've downsized, but we've consolidated, but we, we still have the same operations.  
21 We have people that, that take the families around. It's, it's my old organization, it's called the  
22 protocol office and guest operations. We have an international affairs office, I believe evolved, I don't  
23 remember when that evolved, but we have that because of the International Space Station, because

1 of Space Lab. They saw there was a need to have someone to liaison with those folks and it works  
2 out quite a bit. There's a, used to be a two, two person office, I think, they're down to one, with the  
3 downsizing, but, the one person does a great job. Debbie \_\_\_\_\_(Ron) does that and she  
4 coordinates the visits and it helps quite a bit, we know who's coming, how many, we can, we can get  
5 information to them, they can come and visit before the, that actual launch of their astronaut and their  
6 mission, and they can see what we have here. We can ask them what they require, we can tell them  
7 what we can do, what we can't do. So, it's challenging, but it's something we've been doing now for  
8 years and it's, it's not a big deal because we've done it, we know how to do it. But it's challenging  
9 because sometimes there'll be sixty press from that country coming. They'll want tours, they'll want  
10 this and that and some we can do and some we can't. It just depends on what's going on. Right  
11 now, we're restricted. A lot of things we can do for other countries, we can't do now because of the  
12 September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks.

13  
14 Moore: So international folk are. . .

15  
16 Viarta: They're, they're treated just like they, the domestic folks. We can't do anything special,  
17 if we, if we could take them, then we need, need to take, we should be able to take the U.S. news.  
18 We just kind of treat them all the same.

19  
20 Moore: Well I appreciate your time. I know there's other questions I'm going to want to ask and  
21 hopefully when I come back we can, we can ask some additional questions, if that's ok.

22  
23 Viarta: Ok.

1

2 Moore: Are there any other pieces that I've forgotten, kind of experiences in your life that are  
3 kind of interesting, unique, we do this for a fifty year schedule, or hundred year, so hundred years  
4 from now. Interesting things that have happened to you since you've been here that are worth  
5 reporting.

6

7 Viarta: Well, basically, it's a history lesson here. There's still things that were here before I was  
8 here. There's still people that were here before I was here. I was fortunate enough to be here when  
9 some of those people were still working here and got to go to some of the facilities, the first launch  
10 site, back in 1950, over on the Cape Side. That site is still there. We have, we were able to find it.  
11 There's a little piece of concrete in the ground or something, that that was that site. Complex 5, 6 is  
12 still there, which was the first American to, to orbit the earth was actually the first space flight was  
13 Shepard and then the first American was Glenn to orbit and that was, those two sites are still there. I  
14 was able to see those, be a part of that. I've met both of those astronauts, talked to them, had them  
15 interface with news people to do interviews, spent a lot of time with both of them, had pictures with  
16 them, you know, just a lot of memories and just listen to their stories. And, that, in itself, I mean, I've,  
17 I've just been blessed if you will, or just been so lucky to be a part of the space program, just kind of  
18 fell into it and I'm still here and, and it's exciting and people have told me, you know, what a lucky  
19 person you are, you know, what a great job you have. And, I think it's a lot of fun. I'll probably miss,  
20 like you said, but, you know, nothing goes on forever, and, my, my time here is, is coming to an end  
21 and I'm sure, hopefully, that NASA will continue and that other people, like in my office, will continue  
22 until their time is up, so. . .

23

1 Moore: Ok. Well I appreciate it. You've certainly been a tribute to this program and to this  
2 center. Thanks.

3

4 Viarta: Thanks Patrick.