ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

BETTY SKELTON FRANKMAN
INTERVIEWED BY CAROL L. BUTLER
COCOA BEACH, FLORIDA – 19 JULY 1999

BUTLER: Today is July 19, 1999. This oral history is with Betty Skelton Frankman, aviatrix, [1948, 1949, and 1950 International Feminine Aerobatic Champion] and pioneer for women in aviation. This oral history is being conducted by Carol Butler as part of NASA's oral history efforts.

Thank you so much for joining us today.

FRANKMAN: Thank you. I couldn't be more thrilled.

BUTLER: And me, too. To begin with, maybe you could tell me about how your interest in aviation began.

FRANKMAN: Well, in a way it's kind of like [STS-93 Shuttle Commander] Eileen [M.] Collins, who's flying today. We used to ride out to the airport on Sunday afternoons and watch the airplanes fly, and that's how she got started. I think she was watching gliders. I wrote away to all the aviation manufacturers, saying, "My father wants to buy an airplane. Please send me all the information." And this was all when I was eight, nine, ten years old. I became interested pretty much that way. In fact, my entire family did, and my mother and father and I all three started at the same time. But a lot of people around the airport would always take this little girl up to fly.

I probably shouldn't tell you, but I soloed when I was twelve, and it wasn't quite legal then, so I couldn't tell anybody. But I figure now, about fifty years later, nobody will bother

me about it. In fact, I didn't tell my mother for about a week. My dad said, "You can't tell anybody at all." So I didn't. She was a little surprised.

BUTLER: That must have been quite a flight.

FRANKMAN: Yes, it was. The thing that amazed me most about it was that when a person gets out of an airplane, especially a little two-seater airplane, the lift is so much faster and the airplane just went up as though there was nobody in it at all. It was amazing. But it was a great experience.

BUTLER: I bet it was. And the first of many great experiences to come for you.

FRANKMAN: I've been quite lucky, really have, although I don't believe in luck. I'd rather say I was fortunate.

BUTLER: Quite. As you were growing up with airplanes and aviation and continuing on, if you could give a brief synopsis of your early—

FRANKMAN: Well, the Navy really inspired me. I was born in Pensacola and spent my very young years sitting on the back steps of our little house watching the N3N Stearmans fly overhead, where the cadets were learning how to do aerobatics. That didn't quite sink in as far as aerobatics went, but my great love for flying came at that time. Then after we started flying, I went to work when I was very young. We were not a very wealthy family. The only way I could fly was to work toward it.

Then I began working for Eastern Airlines. I fibbed to them about my age and got a job about three weeks before I graduated from high school. Then I would work from

midnight to eight so I could fly during the daytime. Became a flight instructor, got a commercial and other ratings and kind of went from there.

BUTLER: When did you first begin doing aerobatics?

FRANKMAN: Well, by this time we were in Tampa, Florida. My dad had a flight operation there. They were having a local air show and somebody at the meeting said, "Why don't we have that little girl out at the airport do some aerobatics." And my dad was there and he said, "She doesn't know how." And another man who was there, Clem Whittenbeck, who was a great aerobatic pilot in the thirties—I'm talking about back in the forties now—he said, "Oh, I'll teach her how." So in a couple of weeks that was left until show time, he taught me how to do one loop and one slow roll.

The day of the show, I flew so high to be very careful, that I didn't believe anybody could see me at all, but when I landed, a man who owned an airport not very far away came up and said, "We're having a show pretty soon. How much would you charge to come fly in our show?" And that's when I became a professional aerobatic pilot. [Laughter] It was quite by accident.

BUTLER: On the spur of the moment.

FRANKMAN: Right.

BUTLER: As you were doing all of this and working with your family and with other people out at the airport, did any of your male counterparts ever seem surprised or have any—

FRANKMAN: Well, pretty much so. I did not date in high school because I was so busy with flying, and that was the most important thing to me. I also worked after school and on weekends. There was just hardly time to date. I learned many years later, on a reunion of our high school class, that most of the guys were a little afraid of me because I started flying and flew solo long before I learned to drive a car, and they weren't even driving cars then. So I guess my interests were just different, just a little different.

BUTLER: Very unique interest at the time.

FRANKMAN: Yes.

BUTLER: As you continued to do the aerobatics, did you ever stop and consider, "Wow! Look at this! Look what I'm doing." Did you ever have any thoughts?

FRANKMAN: Yes, I had wonderful thoughts. I spent many thousands of hours sitting in this little airplane, flying from one city to another in the United States and in England and Ireland. Sure, you have a lot of time to think. But, yes, I felt extremely fortunate, very fortunate to be able to fly, to do the things I was doing, and mainly the people that I met. I think the aviation community, which has now turned into the space community, they're probably the finest people in the world. And the fans are wonderful, and those who fly and understand flying, it's really a great honor to be associated with them. I loved every minute of it.

BUTLER: That's wonderful.

FRANKMAN: Yes, it was. It really was.

BUTLER: Great to be able to say that, to have such an exciting and fun time throughout your whole life.

FRANKMAN: Yes, that's true.

BUTLER: Did you ever stop and think about the danger involved?

FRANKMAN: I think anytime you undertake anything with a piece of mechanized equipment, as I call it, like a car or an airplane or a boat, or any of these things, you immediately know that there's a danger involved, but if you were concerned about that, you wouldn't be participating in those kinds of things. You consider danger only from the standpoint that it's up to you to know what you're doing, to do your best, to be very careful about it and very thorough about it, and learn everything you can about it. No, I never really worried about it, even though I had quite a few close calls. And in those instances you're so busy, you don't think about it anyway. So I can honestly say I was never really afraid. I've never been what I would call afraid. Now, there were a few times perhaps when you were lost in an airplane, you'd be temporarily confused, but not necessarily afraid.

BUTLER: That's good. Always managed to keep your cool under whatever circumstances might arise.

FRANKMAN: Well, you sure try. You really do.

BUTLER: I'm sure that helps in being able, if it is a situation where something's gone wrong, if you're able to stay calm, it makes it a lot easier to—

FRANKMAN: Well, if you really have a dangerous situation, you are so very, very busy determining—not determining, but doing, because you've already determined that long before you have a problem, what you would do in case of. And you're so very busy, you don't think about it. Now, I will admit, after a couple of pretty close calls, several hours later you give it a little thought, but not at the time. You really don't have time.

BUTLER: As you were continuing to fly and even travel around the world, had you ever thought about space travel as a possibility?

FRANKMAN: Yes, I have to admit that I had, because in 1948 I became extremely interested in UFOs [unidentified flying objects]. There were quite a few people in the aviation community that felt the same way I did about it. A fellow named [Donald] Keyhoe wrote a couple of books, one called *Flying Saucers are Real*, and *Flying Saucers from Outer Space*, I believe was his second book, and I read every page. My father thought I was crazy. [Laughter] But, yes, I became interested in space quite a long time ago.

BUTLER: At the time, did you think that space travel was in the immediate future?

FRANKMAN: No, I knew that it could not be, due to the state of things in the aviation world at that time. You must remember I started out in air show work in a 1929 model Great Lakes airplane, a 2T1A. And then I was fortunate enough to meet a man named Curtis Pitts, who designed airplanes, or was endeavoring to design an airplane at that time. The first time I ever saw his airplane, I fell in love with it, the only one that he had, and I tried to get it to fly and it wasn't available. I just followed it till I finally was at a point where they were able to let me have it.

It was the second Pitts Special airplane ever built. Now there are thousands and thousands around the world. But at that time the first one that he designed and built was almost immediately crashed by a crop duster in Georgia, and the second one, serial number 2, is the one that I was able to obtain. It is now in the National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian [Institution]. And I'm thrilled to say that when it was fifty years old, they started complete reconstruction on it, and a wonderful gal there, a curator named Dorothy Cochrane, started reconstruction on it. It's just about finished now, and it looks like a brand-new airplane and it's just beautiful. Very thrilled over it.

BUTLER: Is it being restored far enough that it will be flyable?

FRANKMAN: Oh, yes. Well, no, they don't usually fly their equipment after they restore it. It goes on display in the National Air and Space Museum. In fact, I think they have a policy that you don't fly their equipment after they rebuild it and display it. It's beautifully done.

BUTLER: That will be wonderful when it is all finished and you're able to see it and have other people be able to come and visit and see it.

FRANKMAN: Yes, it will.

BUTLER: And share in that part of history.

FRANKMAN: Yes. That possibly will happen this fall or next spring, maybe.

BUTLER: We'll look forward to seeing that.

FRANKMAN: Good. Thank you.

BUTLER: When did you first learn about efforts that both the United States and Russia were making towards space? Was it when [John F.] Kennedy announced that—I should say manned efforts—when Kennedy announced he wanted to send someone to the moon?

FRANKMAN: Oh, no, no, no. Long before that. One morning I picked up the newspaper and there was a picture of seven people, they had announced the day before that they were selected as astronauts. This was in April of 1959. I thought, "Wow! Wouldn't that be wonderful to be one of these people." But I knew at that time that women were not considered in that category and had not been considered and probably would not be for a long, long time. And, of course, I realized this from my past experiences in flying in air shows.

My first air show, really professional air show, was in Jacksonville, and it was the Navy Blue Angels' first air show. So I flew many years in shows with the Blue Angels and knew many of the teams, and was pretty much the only gal that was working on that level around the world and in this country as a professional aerobatic pilot.

I would like to say, on aerobatic flying, too, most people call it stunt flying. When I started doing it, I felt that it should be called aerobatic flying, which it had been by some. But I considered it an art, and I spent a great deal of time trying to convince people that it was not simply diving to thrill a crowd and to make a lot of noise and put out a lot of smoke; it was an effort that took many, many, many thousands of hours to perfect, and it in its own self was an art, and you had to look at it that way.

BUTLER: Absolutely. I'm sure you must have taken time before you perform a stunt in the air show, you would have to practice it over and over.

FRANKMAN: Oh, yes. You would go up high, to be safe, and you would do maybe the same maneuver 100 times in one practice setting, and you'd practice two or three times a day, not too long at a time, because you get very tired. There were negative Gs involved, G loadings involved. It was a little tiring at times.

BUTLER: You certainly put a lot of work into it to make it—

FRANKMAN: Yes, you have to do it properly.

BUTLER: It must have been neat to be able to fly in air shows with the Navy team, the Blue Angels.

FRANKMAN: Oh, yes, they were all a great bunch of guys and marvelous to work with. The nicest part about it, even though I was a gal, there were some skeptics at first, when I first started aerobatic flying, but after a woman comes along in those years, in the forties and early fifties, in this particular area as soon as you proved yourself, so to speak, and showed how proficient you could be with it, then there was just no difference. And it was really marvelous. It was an occupation that I really loved.

I think the thing I enjoyed most, and yet was probably one of the most dangerous, was flying upside down about ten feet above the ground, cutting a ribbon with the prop of the airplane. If nothing else, if nothing else gives you a thrill, that will, I'll tell you. [Laughter] You're pretty busy and it's quite a lot of fun. I understand I was the first woman in the world to ever do it. I worked very hard to perfect it, and I enjoyed it very much.

BUTLER: That's great. That's certainly not anything easy to do. I'm sure it thrilled the audience watching as much as thrilling you flying it.

FRANKMAN: Well, I must admit, the first time I tried it—and I haven't told many people this—but the first time I tried it, I misjudged slightly and flew underneath the ribbon, which put me even closer to the ground. I never made that mistake again. [Laughter] But I've made quite a few. All pilots do. Thank goodness they're careful enough not to get in trouble with it.

BUTLER: And then to be able to always learn from it, if you do that.

FRANKMAN: That's right.

BUTLER: Great. When you did learn about the Mercury astronauts and you saw them and you thought this was such a neat thing, but you realized women wouldn't work into it very—

FRANKMAN: I thought, golly, that would be the most fantastic thing in the world. Naturally, I was so thrilled for them, and they were all so highly qualified as test pilots. The requirement was to have 1,500 hours of jet flying time. Unfortunately, at that time in history women had no way to fly jets, so that was one reason alone that a woman could not get in.

But I was quite surprised, oh, a couple of three months later, I don't know the exact date, after the original seven were selected and long before any human being had gone into space, I received a call saying that NASA had agreed to let a woman for the first time take some of the astronaut tests they had given the original seven astronauts, and due to my background and experience in flying and the thousands of hours that I had, that they

wondered if I'd like to do it. And I thought, "Are you crazy? Of course I would!" [Laughter]

Then I spent approximately four or five months becoming familiar with the seven who had been selected, and traveling around the United States to the various test facilities, coming down here to the Cape, seeing a launch of a [Boeing CIM-10] Bomarc [missile] at night, which was a thrill to me at that time. And the tests were most interesting, very, very interesting.

But I knew at the time they were not considering a woman, really. In a way, I had to agree with them, although I'm always gung-ho about things like this, but they were working on such a small budget and the equipment was really not totally developed. Everybody was working their fanny off trying to get this program going. I felt that then was not really the total time for them to uproot everything they were doing and the progress they had made to try to put a woman into the program, and I figured it would probably take twenty or twenty-five years due to the feeling about women, anyway.

But what little time there was associated with the NASA test and the astronauts, I did everything I could. I felt it was an opportunity to try to convince them that a woman could do this type of thing and could do it well. I think my entire association for even that brief period of time was probably the most soul-searching thing I've ever been involved with. To suddenly walk into the NASA compound, so to speak, and have them explain what it was they were trying to do, how they were going about it, what the problems were, you know, prior to that, prior to the first manned flight, a lot of these missiles were blowing up, and it was a very frightening thing, a touch-and-go thing. They had a tremendous job to do, and I had great respect for all of their efforts. I really did.

And, of course, it was a thrill to meet the original seven and get to know them. My first visit was to their headquarters in Langley, Virginia, Langley Field in Virginia. I don't think they'd ever had women around their own little ready room before, because as I walked

in, they were all busy pulling down little things around the charts and so forth around the room. I later learned they were covering up a few pictures that I probably shouldn't see. [Laughter] But they were all very, very kind to me, very nice, extremely helpful, not resentful that I was there, but then they didn't have any reason to be, because they knew I didn't have a chance. But I am very grateful for the experience.

I saw Alan [B.] Shepard's [Jr.] first flight. I saw John [H.] Glenn's [Jr.] first flight. I kept very close track, and have for years, for forty years now. In fact, it's been just about forty years that I started going through the tests, forty, fifty. This was 1950. Now, it's fifty years ago. Whatever. It's hard to figure when you've got a camera going, you know. [Laughter] But this was in 1959, and I knew at that time there was no chance for a woman to become part of the program, but I will forever be grateful for their kindnesses and their help and the opportunity I had to go through the test.

BUTLER: Certainly a very exciting opportunity.

FRANKMAN: It was kind of interesting, too, especially at the Brooks Aerospace Medicine School out in Texas, in San Antonio, because they would— [Interruption]

I think one of the most interesting parts of the test was in San Antonio, Texas, at the Brooks Aerospace Medicine School, primarily because when I arrived, they had a test that stands you up on a platform and your feet are up in the air, and they couldn't figure out what for me to wear. So they decided to put me in a hospital gown, because they'd never tested women before. Then somebody said, "Oh, I don't think that would work when she gets on this platform thing that goes upside down." So they put me in a pair of men's pajamas that were far too large, and I had forgotten to take shoes with me, so I wandered around the whole place the entire time in high-heeled shoes.

But the thing I liked most, they had one test—these are very elementary tests now, compared to the tests that they're giving these days, but they would spin you around on a chair, blindfolded, and then tap you on a knee and make you pull your head up very fast, and say, "What did that feel like?" And I said it felt like a triple snap roll to the right. Everything stopped, and suddenly the doctors went out in the other room and talked a few minutes and said, "Let's do that again." So we did it again, and they said, "What did that feel like?" I said, "It was a triple snap roll to the right." And I finally realized they had never tested anyone who had done a triple snap roll to the right, and they didn't realize that I probably was the only one who knew what it felt like, or if they had tested someone who had done it, they got a different reaction, because that's what happened. It was a lot of fun in the test.

Another very interesting thing, we were at the Johnsville what was the world's largest centrifuge at that time, at the Naval Acceleration Laboratory in Johnsville, Pennsylvania. They briefed me and this and that and the other, and as the two technicians were putting me into the centrifuge which they spin around for you, for G loadings, and I was very quite accustomed to negative G loadings as well as outside or negative G loadings, as they were putting me in the capsule, one of them said—and this was an advertising campaign that was going on back in those days—one of them said, "Golly, wouldn't that make a great ad? 'I dreamed I rode the centrifuge in my Maidenform bra!'" [Laughter] And they were a great group to work with. I enjoyed it, and I enjoyed the centrifuge ride. It's not every day you get to do something like that.

BUTLER: Certainly not. Do you remember some of the other things you participated in, the tests or the training?

FRANKMAN: Well, there was so much. I did a little underwater work with—I think it was with [M.] Scott Carpenter and Alan Shepard and Wally [Walter M.] Schirra [Jr.], checked me

out on the cockpit, not the airplane. I couldn't fly it, of course. I think it was an F-104. And a couple of the others showed me one of the capsules [that] had flown and had come back, and all of the burned area on it. I flew their so-called Link trainer. It was very, very crude at that time. There were quite a number of things.

One that kind of was embarrassing to me, in the space suit I spent several hours in there and I lost quite a bit of weight for me, because at this time I only weighed about 100 to 105 pounds. Then after I got out of the space suit and had been soaking wet, and my hair was a mess, and then *Look* magazine ran the picture they took then, later. And everybody dreams of being on the cover of a big magazine, and there I was, looking just terrible, with wet hair. It was particularly embarrassing because just a couple of months before, they always selected ten—they did at that time—ten best coiffeured women of the year, and I was one of them, with a picture in all the newspapers with just a perfect hair-do, and then just after, this picture came out. It was very embarrassing, but it was also an honor.

BUTLER: You said you got to go in the Link trainer and do some training.

FRANKMAN: They called it an orbital air-bearing simulator, and if you saw pictures of it right now, you wouldn't believe it. [Laughter] It's a very simple machine. I spent some time in it, not very long, but some time in it. Of course, I had been used to Link trainers, so I understood what it was all about.

As I mentioned before, the most interesting thing to me—not the most, of course, because there was so much to digest—but they were so patient to explain to me how they were going to do their first missions and what they had to do in reversing their positions and coming back in with the fire and the problems of burning up and all of the technical things involved.

At this particular time I was vice president and account executive with one of the world's largest advertising agencies, and we had the General Motors and Chevrolet accounts. So when I returned to my office back in the General Motors Building in Detroit, the president of General Motors asked that I give a lecture to all of their technicians and designers and all of their officers. This was quite an honor for me, for a gal, again, because girls didn't do this kind of thing. Although I had been a technical narrator for General Motors at Motorama and most of their auto shows, the first time they had ever used a girl as a technical narrator.

So it was quite a thrill, after I'd finished everything, to go back and be able to expose so many nice people and knowledgeable people to the types of things and problems that NASA was up against on our first shots. They were courageous guys and they did fantastic jobs. Gus [Virgil I. Grissom] was a friend, and, of course, we lost him. In fact, as I go through the Kennedy Space Center today, I'm a little surprised that they don't have more materials around about the first seven, because that's where it first started. And, of course, there are some, but not a great deal. I've watched people go through there, and the only thing they're interested in now, which is normal—you know, these are kids and young people, and the only thing they really know about the space program is today, now, the Shuttle. And that's great, because that's their future. But I do feel that a little more should be done for all seven of the first group. Although a lot has been done, I don't see too much evidence of it today at the visitors' headquarters.

BUTLER: The path they forged is certainly very important to the present we're living in now.

FRANKMAN: Quite true.

BUTLER: When you were working with them and learning, as you said, the technical details and the difficulties, how did that compare both technologically and the different things that you were doing to what you had done before with airplanes and—

FRANKMAN: Well, it was a lot easier to understand, I think, because I did a lot of work on my own airplane and I learned very early you look after your own equipment. The same thing, you know, really occurred at that time. Now they have so many technicians to do so much for a launch, that the pilot is not as deeply involved as we were then in knowing every aspect of everything. It was, I would say, a lot easier for me to comprehend than it might have been someone who did not fly and who did not understand aeronautics and the forces that keep airplanes and so forth in the air.

BUTLER: You mentioned that you had gotten a call. Who called you? Was this NASA that was sponsoring you to come down and participate in this?

FRANKMAN: I don't really know how it started. Someone with *Look* magazine called me and said that NASA was going to test a woman or be the first woman to give tests to, and would I be interested in doing it. I think the call came from the aviation editor of *Look*, primarily because he had seen me fly a number of times and knew of my experience and my background. Of course, I had a large number of flight hours and quite a lot of experience. I had tried to set a woman's record in a P-51 at one time, a world's record, and the engine had blown up. I had had a lot of interesting things happen in an airplane, and I flew in the Cleveland Air Races. I guess they just figured I—well, then they were looking for test pilots and people who had done dangerous things, and it seemed like I fit the bill, I suppose.

BUTLER: You said you were there for a period of about four or five months?

FRANKMAN: It took about four or five months to complete everything. As I mentioned, we did the centrifuge thing. I spent some time at Langley. I spent some time here at the Cape [Canaveral, Florida] and some time in the blockhouse. Oh, I just learned so many wonderful technical things about the program that, unfortunately, the average public would never have been exposed to. It really was a marvelous opportunity and really a wonderful thing to happen to anybody, although I realized at the time that a woman would not be flying for a long, long time. Of course, I was specifically interested in getting *them* interested in a woman pilot, not going along as a specialist or anything.

Now I'm talking about 1959, before even Sputnik flew. I happened to be in South America setting a record with a car across South America from Buenos Aires to Vina Del Mar, Chile, round trip across the South American continent, in forty hours, and across the Andes twice in forty hours. And was high in the Andes and looked up, and there was Sputnik going over. It was a tremendous thrill. So I really became interested long before all of this happened to me. As I say, it was a very soul-searching experience being involved even a minute bit with the space people.

BUTLER: You mentioned getting to know the seven astronauts. Did you also get to know some of the managers and technicians very well?

FRANKMAN: I had some long talks with Dr. [William K.] Douglas, who was at that time the official, I guess, astronaut doctor, the first. There were probably many. He's the one that I chatted with most at Langley. We had some interesting conversations. He was probably a little less negative than most of them about a woman, but he felt that when space travel came, and it's here, that women might possibly be better at it because women could stand the tedious times when you are there with nothing to do. I guess this is attributed to someone

being a housewife, you know, same things over and over and over again, and nothing really to be concerned about. But he felt that on long space trips—this was in 1959—he felt that women might be better adapted than men to being less restless about the monotony of it all.

And the other thing that I was a little surprised that he felt, he felt that a woman's reproductive organs were better protected than men's, and physically it might be a little bit safer for women than men. I don't know whether that was ever mentioned anywhere or not. But those were about the two major observations I got from him.

In talking with several of the officials, which I won't mention, one jokingly said what he thought about women in space, and he said, "If I had my way, I'd send them all out there." [Laughter] So that kind of gave me an idea of what was going on. But he was joking about it. And I won't mention his name. [Laughter]

BUTLER: We won't ask you to.

FRANKMAN: Right.

BUTLER: It's interesting that there was then such a difference in levels. Here's one doctor that you said had one viewpoint, and yet others had a different one.

FRANKMAN: Yes. Well, for instance, Wally Schirra—I believe it was Wally—was friendly. He said that his father, I believe—you know, we're talking about, what, forty, fifty years ago, and I cannot remember everything, especially at this age. [Laughter] But I believe Wally said that his father had been an aerobatic pilot, and we kind of felt a little kinship there just because of that.

I almost had an opportunity to land my little Pitts Special, which only weighed 540 pounds, and the top wing came to about here on me, a very tiny airplane that would fit in a

small room, I almost had an opportunity when I went to England—I was selected to represent the United States one year in the *London Daily Express* Air Pageant at [Gatwick] Airport in London. And knowing all of the Air Force guys and the Navy guys from air shows, I had an opportunity to try to land it on a carrier. Of course, that was unheard of, for a woman to go on a carrier. But I could have landed on a carrier and stopped it without the hook or anything. A very maneuverable airplane. And send it to Europe that way, to London that way. But they also said if they got in the middle of the Atlantic and had orders to go to the Indian Ocean, that's where they'd go, and I couldn't take the chance. So I took it over with me on the *Queen Mary*, flew in England, and then flew it across the Irish Sea and was a guest of the RAF [Royal Air Force] in Ireland, and flew there. But I was particularly interested in the guys that had flown carriers and done carrier landings, because I never quite made it on a carrier. I would have loved it. It would have been fun.

BUTLER: That certainly would have been interesting.

FRANKMAN: Yes.

BUTLER: Very interesting.

FRANKMAN: Especially if I had been able to stop. [Laughter]

BUTLER: That would have made it very fun.

FRANKMAN: Yes.

BUTLER: What did you think at the time about the future of space flight? You said you thought it might take a while for women to get into it. But at the time did you think about that just in a few short years they'd be trying to go to the moon?

FRANKMAN: The moon, I think, came a little quicker than I had expected. I think the reason it came as quickly as it did, thank god, was because these seven guys, the originators, I call them, caught the attention of the entire world and made our country so very, very proud. We had a President who understood this and decided it would be a good idea to go for the moon. And although he didn't have the vaguest idea, I don't think, how he was going to get it done, he committed to getting it done, and that's what got us there a lot quicker.

However, as far as far space travel and the type of thing where we're discussing now and the types of things that are happening now, and the wonderful thing that's happening to Eileen Collins today, it's her day. It's really her day. I feel a little strange talking about my small experiences when she's having such a great one less than twenty-four hours from now. I'm very, very proud of her.

But I think that our President, Kennedy, had a great deal to do with our space effort going forward. Then the budget dropped off for a while, and then it came back on. I think we're doing the best we can for what we've got to work with and the budget that's involved.

BUTLER: And I'm sure that Eileen Collins, being where she is now, as you mentioned, the original seven astronauts were key for getting the space program where it is, but it was women like you that were key to helping Eileen Collins get to where she is.

FRANKMAN: Well, I think that probably I was the first one that kind of gave NASA a kick, anyway, although it didn't do much good, and that was in 1959. This is 1999. Our first woman—and I was here for that, when Sally [K.] Ride flew. I came over for that and was

interviewed by Jane Pauley on the program. But from '59 to '83 is a long time, and although she wasn't a pilot, it was a great accomplishment. But, to me, this trip that Eileen is taking is, in a way, my dream of all those years ago, forty years ago, and what I really wanted to do, and would have given my life to do at that time. And not just me; there were a lot of other girls who felt the same way. In fact, after the *Look* cover story came out on me, there was quite a bit of controversy, and even went to Congress, and the girls all tried to get into the space program. Some made some headway, but it just was not to be, and I realized that.

So it was '59 to '99 before we could get a woman pilot, commander, and I'm so very proud of her. And in a way, it's like my dream come true.

BUTLER: It's so fortunate that you can be able to be here to share in it and watch it.

FRANKMAN: Yes. I can hardly wait. I'm sure I'll probably cry, too. [Laughter]

BUTLER: I'm sure you won't be the only one.

FRANKMAN: Gals like to cry sometimes.

BUTLER: Absolutely. Nothing wrong with that. You mentioned that some of the others, another group of women had gone through a different sort of testing than you had. Had you known about that at the time or when they were doing it?

FRANKMAN: I knew that they were undertaking it, but, frankly, I was not able to follow their activities. It was after I had done my thing, so to speak. During that period of time I was involved with setting some records for Chevrolet. I did the survey trip and the actual trip and managed it, of a truck run down the Baja Peninsula long before it became a tourist attraction

like it is today, and at that time we were the first expedition down Baja. And just past Encinitas, there were no roads; it was just dirt roads and rocks and streams and whatnot.

When you're so tremendously involved with that, and I was involved with setting a transcontinental record across the United States, and many other record things, that it was hard to follow their activities. I was interested, but again I didn't feel that it would ever go anywhere. I feel so badly for those girls that it didn't. There were some fine pilots, some marvelous girls in the program. We were all in the same boat, so to speak, without a paddle.

BUTLER: I'm sure you continued to follow events of the space program itself. Did you watch the next shots, Gemini?

FRANKMAN: I've been over a number of times and watched. I mentioned Cypress Gardens earlier, I believe, which is in the center part of the state, halfway between Tampa and Orlando. Cypress Gardens is on a little lake called Eloise, a good-size lake, and we live lakefront on the west side of the lake, facing east. We sit in our living room and watch every space flight when it's not real cloudy. So I have seen more flights probably than just about anybody around through the number of years because we get to see them. I'm really very honored to be here, and so close, for this one.

BUTLER: It's a pretty special day.

FRANKMAN: Yes, it is.

BUTLER: After you had done your work with the Mercury seven astronauts—

FRANKMAN: Can we halt a minute?

BUTLER: Absolutely. [Tape recorder turned off]

After you had worked with the Mercury 7 astronauts and with NASA, you said you went back, had been with Chevrolet, if I'm correct, and went back and presented to them what you had done, and were able to share with them. What did you then go on and do in your career? What were some of the other—

FRANKMAN: I stayed with the ad agency, very exciting job. I traveled about 90 percent of the time, and it really was a marvelous, marvelous job, again at a period of time when no women hardly were involved at all with advertising, especially with a large worldwide agency. I felt so much a part of Chevrolet and General Motors. In fact, you probably read about the astronauts and Corvettes, the earlier astronauts. My job at Chevrolet at the time was coordinating all of the Corvette activities. We drove Corvettes on the beach, we raced, did a number of things. Several of the astronauts had already owned Corvettes. I think Alan Shepard had two or three or something like that. So immediately we wanted them to get into Corvettes, and I believe at one point all of them but maybe one, or maybe all of them, were driving Corvettes. But that's just one of the things. Jim Rathman [phonetic], who is from the Cape area here, he was very close to all of them, and being a Chevrolet dealer, he worked out the details on it.

But I was just involved with so many different things. I helped start—I was on a staff of five that started *Corvette News*, and I was agency editor of *Corvette News* for many years. Attended all of the major races in the country for Chevrolet and Corvette, drove the pace cars at Daytona for the races there, drove on the beach before the racetrack was there. Just was very, very busy doing exciting things. I was there until '71 and decided to come back to Florida. Nothing in the world like Florida. You can go away and stay awhile, but you have to come back.

BUTLER: How did you become involved in the auto racing? Here you had been a pilot and doing aerobatics. What transitioned?

FRANKMAN: It was rather strange. I had a charter flight to fly three famous race drivers for Bill France, Sr., who then was just getting NASCAR started, and he had three drivers in his plane. Two planes. I was in a Bonanza. We were taking them to a race in Pennsylvania, and on the way back it was just the two airplanes and the two pilots, and we started talking back and forth over the intercom. He said, "How would you like to come down to Daytona for Speed Week?"

I said, "Well, what is Speed Week?" He explained to me what NASCAR was doing with speeds in Daytona, and I said, "Well, sure, I'd love to come, but I'd have to have a sponsor."

And he said, "Well, I'll be in touch."

Oddly enough, about six months later he called and said, "I have you a sponsor. Would you come down, drive a car on the beach?"

And I said, "Sure. Why not?" [Laughter]

And I came down. I call it "stab and steer." That's about what it took on the beach, trying to stay out of the tidepools. Long, long before the track was built.

I came down and I drove for Dodge and happened to set a record for Dodge, class record. And then they hired me as a test driver and I went to Detroit and worked at their proving grounds and traveled for them.

Then I became a little restless, and I got very interested in the Corvette, and I switched over to the General Motors family and worked on the Corvette for many, many, many years.

BUTLER: And through all this you continued to fly then, too?

FRANKMAN: Oh, yes, I've always kept my license current and have continued to fly all of these years. I don't log time as I should, which is a law, but my time went well over 10,000 hours, and I kind of backed off on keeping track of it too much.

BUTLER: Quite exciting. You've had several different adventures from cars to planes and you mentioned earlier motorcycles. You and your husband—

FRANKMAN: Yes, I love motorcycles. They're highly dangerous and everybody should know that. We each had bikes, and we wouldn't ride together, because we know it's dangerous. We never rode side by side either, because we knew that if one got it, we would both get it. So we'd ride fifty feet apart, usually, so that if one had an accident or anything happened, the other would be there to take care of. We had some great times, wonderful cross-country trips on motorcycles.

BUTLER: With your interest in this variety of areas, did you ever look into boating at all?

FRANKMAN: Yes, I did. I became the first woman boat jumper in the United States, at Cypress Gardens—or in the world, I guess, and at that time there weren't fiberglass boats, they were very heavy wooden boats. I was hurt on one of the jumps, but that didn't stop me from enjoying it and liking it.

Then I got interested in the Gold Cup, these large Gold Cup—like Miss Budweiser is today. I was very interested in them, and I tried to borrow boats to set records in, and most of their races were around a course. All of the races, actually. I was going for a straight-away record, and nobody would let me have a boat because they said, "We would feel

ridiculous when we do our circular courses." Naturally, the speeds are lower. "But if you went out and did a two-way straight-run course, your speeds would be much higher and it would make us look bad. So, no, you can't have our boats." [Laughter]

But there was one man who was very, very kind and well-known on the circuit at that time, Jack Schaffer. He had a boat called *Such Crust*, because he owned a bakery. He let me drive it, and it's a whole other smoke, I'll tell you. [Laughter] It's quite a ride. I was black and blue all over when I got out of the boat. Very, very rough. But they've improved them a great, great deal now. Now you don't get black and blue; you go over on your back and drown, usually, if you have an accident.

BUTLER: I'm sure even though you were black and blue, I'm sure you had a great time.

FRANKMAN: I loved it, yes. It was a great challenge. Challenge is sort of—you know, you're asking questions, it makes me think a little bit about when I was very young, when I was a teenager. When I first started dealing a little bit with the press, which I'd rather not do— [Laughter] The first thing somebody would say, "What makes you tick?" And I would think, "What a question," you know. My heart makes me tick, and it's my heart that makes me do these things, what I feel inside. As [Sir Edmund] Hillary said, he climbed Mount Everest because it was there. I don't think I have any better answer than that, except that everyone is built a little differently, and my heart and my will and my desires are mixed up with challenge.

I love any kind of challenge. I love skydiving and have enjoyed that. Anything that's challenging, usually with mechanized equipment, I find most interesting. The same thing that happened with me in boats happened with me in cars. I wanted to go for a world's record. I'd like to have gone for a men's record, but there was nobody that would let me have a car.

Art Arfons, bless his heart, wonderful man, who had the Green Monster at that time, Art said, "Well, you can drive my little Green Monster Cyclops," which was really an open cockpit drag racer, and they weren't made for the type of thing I was trying to do with it. But we took it out to Bonneville and Art let me drive it. My top speed on the last run, I think, was over 315 miles an hour. I was the first woman to go over 100, over 200, over 300, and so forth. Art was just scared to death, and I was just busy. I was really busy. The car got airborne with me toward the end of the run, and a great, great compliment to Art, because the car was easy to handle and I got it back on the ground, fortunately going the same direction it was going when it took off, and I appreciated his engineering ability in building a very stable car. It was quite an experience.

BUTLER: Oh, I bet.

FRANKMAN: But, again, I tried to drive the Blue Flame when it went for the world's record, well over 600, and I flew the Pitts Special, which, incidentally, I named the Little Stinker. Had a skunk on the side. I flew it over to Milwaukee and tried to talk with the owners and the people. There was just no way they were going to allow a woman to drive that car, and it was a gorgeous automobile. Looked like a bullet. It did set the record, world's record.

BUTLER: So many opportunities you've had. So many interesting times. Is there a point, looking back over your whole career, that you would say was the most challenging time for you?

FRANKMAN: No, there isn't, because you can't mix boats and airplanes and cars all together. I might say affairs of the heart. I was not thirty-nine before I got married. I was thirty-nine and a half. I think that's the most exciting thing that ever happened to me. [Laughter] I was

very, very nervous, and was fortunate enough to marry a fantastic man. He was with the Ford agency at one time, and I was with Chevrolet agency, and we were bitter rivals and didn't particularly like each other very much, either, but we smoothed that out. It's the finest thing that ever happened to me, really, by far the most rewarding and the finest.

BUTLER: That's wonderful.

FRANKMAN: A marvelous, marvelous man. We will be married thirty-four years come New Year's Eve, and we decided we wanted to start our year out together, and that's why New Year's Eve.

BUTLER: That's great. And this New Year's Eve will be the—

FRANKMAN: Thirty-fourth. I hope we make it. He's extremely ill right now. But we're counting the days until New Year's Eve and the millennium. That's our next goal, and that's a challenge now.

BUTLER: Absolutely. All of our thoughts and prayers will be with you that you are able to celebrate that together.

FRANKMAN: Thank you. Appreciate it.

BUTLER: I think here we'll go ahead and pause for a moment. [Tape recorder turned off.]

What is this photograph here?

FRANKMAN: This was a photograph that was a taken—this is the sixth, I think, of the seven original astronauts, and from left to right is Deke [Donald K.] Slayton, Wally Schirra, Scott Carpenter, John Glenn, Gus Grissom, and Alan Shepard. I don't know who's missing; I'd have to think. Maybe Gordo—[L.] Gordon Cooper [Jr.] is missing. This was the first day I visited their ready room at Langley in Virginia, and we were matching to see who was going to buy the coffee.

This is my pride and joy. This is Little Stinker, my Pitts Special that is now in the National Air and Space Museum, number N22E. I always called it "2-2 Easy." A little tiny airplane, only weighs 544 pounds, and a great joy to fly. As you were flying along cross country, you'd look out there at that little short wing and think, "What in the world is keeping me in the air?" Marvelous little airplane.

This gives you an idea of how very small Little Stinker was. With Little Stinker is Little Tinker, a chihuahua, which was my mascot and flew around the airplane with me. We had a great time together.

BUTLER: Would Little Tinker hang head out the window, ears flapping in the wind?

FRANKMAN: Oh, no, no. He'd sit in my lap most of the time or on the back of my shoulder, and had its own little parachute and it had its own favorite airplane. It loved Tallahassee in Florida, because every time I would land there, there was a fire plug close by. [Laughter]

BUTLER: [Laughter] That's great.

FRANKMAN: This was the boat-jumping that I had mentioned. You go up a ramp. Actually, it's a water-ski ramp. Then you jump. We were jumping over this 1955 Dodge, it looks like, at Cypress Gardens in Florida. On that particular jump I had a very hard landing. I knew at

this point it was going to be extremely hard, and I did have a little medical problem after that for a while. I limped for about a year, in fact.

BUTLER: Oh, my. You certainly look like you're enjoying it at the time.

FRANKMAN: It was fun.

BUTLER: And this is a picture of you.

FRANKMAN: This was entering the centrifuge for the wild ride at the U.S. [Naval] Acceleration Laboratory in Johnsville, Pennsylvania. That's when one of the technicians made the remark about the advertising campaign. [Laughter]

BUTLER: That must have been quite a ride. Was it similar to any of the experiences you'd had?

FRANKMAN: It was very similar to the G loadings I had felt in the airplane.

This is an actual shot of me just before they closed the door or just after they closed the door to the centrifuge. It's an interesting piece of equipment. It's on a 55-foot arm and it goes round and round and round very, very fast and creates G loadings on the body. In other words, if your body weighs 100, they can make it weigh 200, 300, 400. Each G loading carries your body weight up. I was used to G loadings because I'd had quite a number of them in Little Stinker.

This is a shot that was taken actually in front of a capsule that's exactly like the one that Alan Shepard flew in. I had been in the space suit for quite a long time at that point, and I must say they're not very comfortable. But it was such a thrill just to be able to get into one

of them, and think, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could just use it, if I could just get into space with it?" But unfortunately that was not to be.

BUTLER: Was this one of the training suits that they used?

FRANKMAN: This was taken out at McDonnell-Douglas [Corporation]. This was one of the suits that they had on hand there. McDonnell-Douglas did the capsules.

BUTLER: I have to ask. Alan Shepard, when he was on his first mission, didn't have a method for relieving himself very well. You said you were in the suit for a long time. Did that become a problem for you?

FRANKMAN: Well, it's a very personal subject. [Laughter]

BUTLER: Well, you don't have to answer if you don't want to.

FRANKMAN: I'll tell you the truth. I used to fly in Little Stinker from daylight till dark if I had to get to—you know, you weren't flying very fast, 110 miles an hour and with a head wind probably of 50 miles an hour. But anyway, I would fly from daylight till dark, and I became quite accustomed to controlling not having to make pit stops, shall we say. [Laughter] So that was not a problem for me here in this shot.

BUTLER: Oh, good. [Interruption]

FRANKMAN: That reminds me of one time I was driving from Winter Haven over here for a shot, and I really was in a hurry to get here. I drive fast, anyway. And a cop stopped me and

he said, "Let me see your license." So I hand him my license. He says, "Oh, you're Betty Skelton! I remember when I was just that high and I rode my bicycle out to the airport to see you fly."

I said, "Go ahead and give me a ticket and let me go see the space launch. You don't have to insult me, too." [Laughter] And he was very nice; he let me go.

I had an opportunity to go into one of the first blockhouses, so to speak, here when I was at the Cape in 1959. They were getting ready for a missile launching at that time. This was all part of NASA test, and I did later see the launching.

This is one of my favorite shots, because it was in an airplane, naturally, and I was also with a really nice guy, Wally Schirra, and he was explaining to me the cockpit of the F-104. He always had such a nice smile and such a friendly attitude. It was always a pleasure to talk with him.

This shot was taken at the Aerospace Medicine School at Brooks Field in San Antonio. As I've said, I didn't have my shoes with me, so I wore high-heeled shoes and a large pair of men's pajamas the whole time I was there. This is the sound room, and they would put you in there to check your various reactions to sounds. Actually, it was so quiet in there, you could hear your own heartbeat. It was kind of interesting.

BUTLER: Quite an interesting experience and a very classy outfit.

FRANKMAN: Oh, sure. [Laughter]

BUTLER: What are we doing in this shot?

FRANKMAN: This is just simple treadmill tests that they gave you at the Brooks Aerospace Medicine School. It, of course, made it go faster and faster and steeper and steeper, to see how long you could undergo the physical activity.

BUTLER: I have to say, in all of these you're just grinning and looking like you're having a blast.

FRANKMAN: I was. I just had a great time. Really great time.

This was kind of interesting. They were trying to show me and test me under water because of the buoyancy advantage you have. Your body weighs a lot less, so to speak, under water, like 90 percent less. This is Scott Carpenter and Alan Shepard helping me adjust the mask. The interesting thing about it is, I don't swim. I never have. I'm not particularly afraid of water, but I don't swim. But I didn't dare tell them. [Laughter] We all went under water, and they were very nice to hang around and help me when I wanted a little help. I don't think they ever knew I couldn't swim. But it wasn't the most exciting thing that I did, I'm afraid.

BUTLER: That's interesting. I was going to ask you, with everything else you've done, from cars to planes, to boats, to skydiving, I was about to ask if you've done much scuba diving.

FRANKMAN: I've done a little, but I didn't particularly like it. I skied in the ski shows at Cyprus Gardens a lot, but when I'd fall, I'd just come up and hang on to the ski until somebody came to get me. So I never really learned how to swim.

BUTLER: Do all these boating adventures and boat jumping and water skiing—didn't need to swim?

FRANKMAN: Really, I really didn't. I'm not afraid of water; I just didn't like it in my ears and eyes. [Laughter]

This is the control room of the centrifuge that I mentioned to you. While you're going around and around in this thing on the [50]-foot arm, they actually see you on a TV screen in the control room, and those are the technicians, of course, watching to see if I black out or, you know, what happens. They were very nice to me.

BUTLER: And you got to watch this video yourself afterwards, of you going through the ride?

FRANKMAN: Yes. Right.

This was in a water test with Scotty and Alan Shepard. They were very helpful to me during the water test, which I was very pleased didn't last too long. [Laughter]

This was long before America ever flew anyone into space, before Shepard's flight, at the Cape. Wally Schirra and Deke Slayton, the late Deke Slayton, they were showing me what a capsule looks like when it comes back, or when it lands and is recovered. In order to find out what sort of damage they could expect on an actual flight, recovering these test flights helped them a great deal technically.

BUTLER: I have to ask. You worked so closely with the seven during this time frame that you were down there and did get to see a couple of launches. When John Glenn went back up just last year, did you get a chance to see his launch?

FRANKMAN: Yes, I saw it. I had written John a letter, and I think it probably went in the "fan" box as everything usually does. I also wrote Eileen, and I'm sure it went in the "fan"

circular file also. But, yes, I was here for John's flight. I also was interviewed for a magazine article about the time, and I said, "If John needs an old lady for a backup, I'll be there in a heartbeat for him." [Laughter] But, unfortunately, I didn't get the chance. He did a great job on his flight, really did.

This picture of Wally Schirra and Alan Shepard showing me the orbital air-bearing simulator, which is similar, not in appearance, but the purpose is similar to a Link trainer for a regular pilot. This is what they eventually used to practice in for their actual flights.

BUTLER: Again, you all look like you're having a blast.

FRANKMAN: Yes. It was a very exciting time.

This is on Daytona Beach, the sands of Daytona, long before the track was built and just before making a run with NASCAR in a '56 Corvette. I also drove the '56 pace car there for the races, which was a Vette. I think the speed was somewhere around 143, 144, somewhere, miles an hour, the average speed. It was a new record for women, straightaway record.

When you run the beach, you had to be very careful. Of course, they don't anymore, but the tide would bring in what we called tidepools, and you'd be going like gangbusters down the beach and suddenly you'd see a tidepool coming up and you'd have to watch your course very carefully so that you didn't go into the little water holes.

BUTLER: And this is?

FRANKMAN: This is in Miami at the All-American Air Maneuvers. Mr. Piper, Bill Piper, who built the famous Piper Cub, this was in the late forties, and he asked me if I would be interested in flying their experimental Super Cub to see if I could set a new altitude record. I

said, "Sure, that would be fun." And so they loaded it up one morning with the barograph, all the same day, of course, and I climbed in and went up to maybe 29,000 feet or something like that. I can't remember all these figures. It was about 53 degrees below outside. Oh, I haven't mentioned, I usually fly bare-footed, and my feet darn near froze to death. [Laughter] But it was a nice little airplane. After that, they came out with the regular Super Cub.

BUTLER: Tell me, why do you usually fly bare-footed?

FRANKMAN: I guess because I'm a Florida cracker. [Laughter]

After all the tests were finished, in February, February 2nd, to be exact, *Look* magazine ran a cover story showing all of the tests—not all, but some of the tests that I had taken. This kind of caused a stir among women pilots in the country who felt that I was going to get there and they weren't, which was not the case at all, and I did not mean it to be that way.

BUTLER: A lot of these pictures that you've shared with us were taken by *Look* magazine.

FRANKMAN: Right.

BUTLER: It's under their copyright.

FRANKMAN: 9:35 a.m. That one nobody could figure out that was a fantastic flight.

BUTLER: Absolutely.

FRANKMAN: And I remember the time because a disk, or a record came out.

In the late forties, I endeavored to set a world land speed record for women. I was trying to break Jacqueline Cochran's record, and actually had the record broken. You fly four passes not too high above the ground. But there were two rules: you couldn't go over a certain altitude and you had to land where you took off. Just as I was going by the pylon on the last pass and I had the record set at 426 miles an hour, I think it was, the engine blew up and there was a little fire. I pulled up to over 3,000 feet to bail out. The tower told me to bail out. I reached for the handle and I was over the world, and I thought, "Nuh-uh. I don't think so." The handle to eject. So I did not eject, and landed without an engine at McDill Air Force Base.

At that time the Air Force was instructing all of their P-51 guys, if you have an engine failure, get out. But I was fortunate enough to get it back down, thank goodness, because it wasn't my airplane. [Laughter] It belonged to a wonderful gentleman named Woody Edmondson, who was a 1948 International Aerobatic champion, and he was kind enough to let me use his airplane.

BUTLER: I'm sure he was glad to see—

FRANKMAN: Oh, he was scared to death. [Laughter] Everyone who lets a girl use their mechanized equipment just lives in great fear until you return it all in one piece.

BUTLER: But so many of them were willing to be able to let you do that.

FRANKMAN: Yes. It was very, very nice of him.

... coveralls over the outside, very loose, and before I got out of the airplane, I would unzip and throw the coverall off, and I would get out in a dress and have my shoes handy, my heels, to put on, because I felt women should create a nice and good impression of women

who do what most consider masculine things. And I've always felt that way. I think it's very important that no matter what you're doing, you remain a lady.

BUTLER: Absolutely.

FRANKMAN: This was my 1929 Great Lakes, when I first started flying it in about 1947, and it was a dear little airplane with a Kinner engine. I had an interesting experience many, many years later, in fact, just a few years ago, we answered an ad in a magazine to buy a little sailboat, a little small 17-foot sailboat, and I asked the man his name and he said it was Kinner. I said, "Oh, I hope it's not the same Kinner that made that Kinner engine that caused me so much trouble in the forties." [Laughter] And he said, "That was my father." And I felt so badly about that. But it was a very interesting engine, to say the least. I had about three of them and used parts from two to keep one running all the time.

This is a very exciting place. It's called Bonneville Salt Flats, and it goes for many, many miles. It's hard as rock. It's where most of the speed demons go to set their records. This is the Green Monster Cyclops. Really wasn't made for this type of running, but I really wanted to go for a women's record, so Art Arfons let me use the car. When you sit in the car, your fanny is only about six inches off the salt, off the ground, so to speak, and it's open cockpit, so as you're flying along, salt is flying in your face. You do have goggles on, but, believe me, you keep your mouth shut, I'll say that. [Laughter]

This is the car that got airborne on me right at the end of the run. It was really quite a thrill indeed. I had the flu at the time, and I felt I might have done better if I hadn't felt so badly. But that's the Green Monster Cyclops owned by Art Arfons.

BUTLER: You certainly look like you're feeling fine.

FRANKMAN: Yes.

That's space stuff. When you take off and you open the throttle, the back end of the thing there closes up, and the more it closes up, the more power you're getting. This was shot right at the takeoff on the salt flats.

This is a shot of the first time I ever tried to cut a ribbon flying upside down. Naturally, being the first time, we went out and got the longest fishing poles we could find. Two very famous people held the pole for me. One of them was Steve Wittman, who has won more air races than any other person in history. He is now gone. And Billy Brennan, who flew his airplane in a number of races and won the Cleveland Air Races several times with it. I did learn how to finally hit the ribbon, coming through the cutting it with the prop, but I kind of saved this shot because it was the first time.

Oh, one thing of interest. During an air show you'd have somebody from the crowd come out and hold one of the poles for you, and you'd have somebody standing by. You'd ask for a volunteer, and they'd come out and hold the pole. Then when you came in for your pass, you would head right for them, I mean just head right for them, upside down, and when you'd get a little bit closer, they'd drop that pole and just run like their life depended on it. Then you'd circle back around and you'd have somebody standing by who knew how to do it. Then you would do the actual ribbon-cutting with the prop of the airplane. But it was always a lot of fun and the crowd enjoyed it.

This was a shot that was considered for the cover of *Look*, but for some reason they really decided to show the one where my hair looked so badly. [Laughter] This, I think, was my favorite shot, in the helmet. The helmet fit pretty good, too. They had a lot of different kinds of helmets from early days of flying, of cloth helmets to skydiving helmets, to boat helmets. This was really kind of my favorite, but I didn't get to keep it.

As you can see from this picture—well, anyway, you see why they didn't give me a hospital gown, anyway. They decided I would be better off in pajamas, men's pajamas. So I

spent several weeks in men's pajamas that were too oversized for me. I think that just only goes to point that they really weren't thinking about women very seriously and did not have the equipment there to even test women at the time.

This is one of my favorites, not of me. I wanted to inject, I am really not my most favorite subject, and I hate to keep saying "I, I." This is one of my favorite shots because of the helmet. Mauri Rose, a very famous race driver who won Indianapolis four times many, many years ago. The first time I drove on Daytona, I didn't know I was even going to need a helmet, so I didn't own one of this type. I had cloth helmets. Mauri said, "Here. I've worn this for many years and banged it all up. Why don't you use it." So he loaned me his helmet, and when I was all finished, he said, "I want you to have it. You just keep it."

BUTLER: That's nice.

FRANKMAN: Mauri was a fantastic race driver.

This is a very special Corvette that was built for me and completely designed by the chief engineer, Bill Mitchell, of General Motors at the time. He and Harley Earl said, "We want your first Corvette to be very special," and it was sent to them from the factory and they took it about three months, then they said, "Now you can come out and look at it." It was a gold car, all metallic gold, really beautiful, and had pearlescent leather inside, with gold belts and buckles. Everything was just gorgeous. It even had a little small foot platform out of gold, where you put your feet. Naturally, I never wore shoes in it. And that's Mauri's helmet again.

This was shot in Darlington, South Carolina, at the racetrack there. I for a number of years paced many races throughout the country, and this happened to be in Darlington with my beloved gold Corvette. During my life I had about eight or nine Corvettes while I was with General Motors, or with their agency, and I'm a Corvette lover. [Laughter]

WRIGHT: You said in your spare time you made your own clothes. Is this an outfit that you made?

FRANKMAN: I don't think I made that. I think my mother made that or picked it up. Mother made all my clothes when I was young. She took in sewing and made a lot of my clothes.

This was taken in Texas—Denison, Texas? Desnison, Texas? Denison, Texas, where I had just received an award and was inducted into the International Aerobatics Hall of Fame, and at that time became the first woman to be in both NASCAR International [Motor Sports] Hall of Fame and the International [Acrobatics] Hall of Fame. So this is my husband, Donald, who, incidentally, was a writer/producer/director in Hollywood for a number of years, on "Route 66," "Bonanza," "My Three Sons," most of the shows that were being done at that time.

BUTLER: He's had an interesting career.

FRANKMAN: Yes. He has done some fantastic things. We wrote, directed, and produced a film together called "Challenge," and it was about an Art Arfons attempt to break the world speed record. It won the Silver Award of Excellence at the New York International Film Festival in 1965. So we're both quite proud of that. And we both have always liked the word "challenge" anyway.

BUTLER: Absolutely. It's obvious that you both have lived by it all your lives. We certainly appreciate you taking some time out of your exciting life to come and talk with us and share some of that challenge with us today.

FRANKMAN: Well, I just can't tell you what fun it's been. You don't often get to sit around and talk about memories, or I don't. I'm very quiet about the past and I don't live in the past. I always look to the future. But it's been kind of fun just to go over memories and bring back some great ones. It's been most enjoyable being with you, and I appreciate your interest. It's a little odd, after forty years, for anybody to show any interest on what happened that long ago, and I do appreciate it very much, from all of you.

BUTLER: We thank you.

[End of interview]