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**Interviewee: Leland, Alison**

**Interview Date: March 5, 2014**

**University of Houston**  
**Oral History of Houston Project**  
*Houston History Class*

Interviewee: Dr. Alison Leland

Interview Date: March 5, 2014

Place: Phillip Guthrie Hoffman Hall at the University of Houston

Interviewer: Jacob Wagner

Transcriber: Michelle Kokes

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**Abstract:**

Dr. Alison Leland, a political science professor at the University of Houston talks about her husband, former Houston Congressman Mickey Leland. Dr. Leland married Mickey Leland in 1983, while she was obtaining her law degree at Georgetown University, and he was just starting his third term as a congressman.

Mickey Leland represented the 18<sup>th</sup> District of Texas in the House of Representatives, which encompassed the Fifth Ward, Third Ward of Houston, as well as areas near Rice University and Houston Heights. Prior to his time in the House of Representatives, Mickey served as a representative in the Texas House. During his political career, Mickey was characterized by a humanitarian attitude, and helping those in need of a voice. From his own humble beginnings, Congressman Leland established a precedent of assisting those most in need to give them the opportunities he did not have.

Mickey Leland was killed in a plane crash in Ethiopia while on a humanitarian mission. Alison Leland candidly discusses that period of time as a wife and mother. The couple had a very young child and she had just found out she was expecting twins. Despite his loss twenty-five years ago, Alison Leland marvels at how he remains alive in the memories of those who knew him and how she continues to learn things about her husband every day.

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**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON**  
**ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

**Alison Leland**

**Interviewed by: Jacob Wagner**

**Date: March 5, 2014**

**Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes**

**Location: Phillip Guthrie Hoffman Hall at the University of Houston**

JW: Jacob Wagner at the University of Houston in Phillip Guthrie Hoffman Hall. It is March 5<sup>th</sup> at 4:05 p.m. in the afternoon and I am here with Dr. Alison Leland and we are about to do our interview about her husband Congressman Mickey Leland. How are you, Dr. Leland?

AL: Great, I've been looking forward to this.

JW: Me too. So, you and Mickey were married in 1983 is that right?

AL: Yes.

JW: When did you first meet Mickey?

AL: The first month of my first year of law school at Georgetown University in Washington.

JW: And he was a Congressman at the time?

AL: And he was a Congressman at the time and my friends encouraged me to have lunch with him because maybe he could help me find an internship.

JW: Okay, and what was your first impression of him?

AL: Charming, funny, outgoing, just kind of a really cool, interesting guy.

JW: Right okay. So your friends prompted you so that's how you first met him. Was it you reached out to him first or did he come to Georgetown and you saw him or how did that first meeting happen?

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AL: I met him at a reception on Capitol Hill and it was my first month of law school and I had worked and saved and finally I was there. I had every intention of just having my head down and being focused and not being distracted by anything. But you're right, my friends said you have to always look ahead to summer internships and clerkships and this is somebody who could potentially help you.

JW: And you went up there and the rest is...

AL: We had lunch and I'm still waiting for that with the internship.

JW: So did you know anything because you had met him in the middle of his political career pretty much.

AL: Right.

JW: Did you know much about him before then or what he had done before?

AL: No I didn't know anything about him and I had considered myself to be somebody who was pretty relatively tuned in politically. I had gone to college in Atlanta, I had worked for two years in the Mayor's office in Manor Jackson's office and my undergraduate school, Spelman, had lots of well-known people and people from the Civil Rights Movement that would come and speak and lecture and teach so Atlanta was and is a really big political hub and I'd also had some internships in Washington in college. Yet when I'd met him I'm not from Texas I hadn't been here before and I didn't really know anything about him. But what was really surprising to me was the first time I did come to Houston how so many people knew him and that included little kids in the neighborhoods where you wouldn't normally expect would recognize or know who a member of Congress was. But it would range from the lady in the yogurt shop, the kids in the neighborhood, they all knew him. He was, he was kind of mesmerizing but he was also someone who really focused on each individual person that he encountered and he had lots and lots and

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lots of relationships and that was surprising to me, because that was different from what I had experienced.

JW: Than every other politician.

AL: With politicians, yeah, in Washington or Atlanta before.

JW: Right. So the question... you went from being the, your first semester law school at Georgetown and then you started seeing a congressman. Was that a huge change for you from your undergrad to the law school now to you are dating a congressman?

AL: I look back and think, "What was I thinking?" Really I look back and think, "What was I thinking?" Because I had put so much effort and energy into preparing for law school and I was so excited to be going to Georgetown and yes, I would have my tax law school study group on Monday, dinner at Senator somebody's house on Tuesday. My study group on Wednesday, the White House on Thursday and it was yeah kind of a crazy... I'm glad I took that step but kind of a crazy... definitely kind of a crazy step to take.

JW: When did you first meet him? You were married in '83 but you first met him in...?

AL: '82.

JW: Okay. So what was Washington like in the 1980s with both your experience as a law student and as a congressman's girlfriend and wife?

AL: Washington was really different, I was just corresponding with an old Washington friend today about that and I think one of the differences in Washington then was members of Congress would get elected and they would pack up their families often and they would move to Washington. So Democrats and Republicans lived in the same neighborhood, their kids went to the same schools, their spouses became friends, they got a ride to work together and so it became really hard to demonize people because they were your friends. There was a sense of community.

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It was almost like going away to college they would say, with all of these people from all over the country who are all the world's smartest people in their town. Mickey's personality though was such that he had wide and broad friendships from some of the most conservative members who never wanted to like him, never thought they would and found him to be really irresistible, found themselves drawn to him. There are conservative Texans who were his colleagues who really, really mourned his loss in part because they really considered him to be a friend. Today if you got elected and you packed your family and moved that would be political suicide because people would say you are a sellout - you're an insider. Today a member of Congress will go out for the first vote on Tuesday, immediately leave after and never get a sense of the city, never get a sense of the community of Congress, never really even have an opportunity to get to know others. My sense is that Congress would not be a particularly fun place to work these days.

JW: Right so you had said that when you moved to Houston for the first time you started to understand, to realize and understand how many people would recognize Mickey and how many people knew Mickey. Did you from there learn about what he had done before he got elected to the United States Congress or even before the Texas Congress and what he had done in various poor neighborhoods and things like that?

AL: Well, over time I still learn new things about him. I'll still have someone share with me a story or a time they spent or something they worked on or something he did and so I think I've continuously been learning things about him. But... we got married and I continued through my law school years. Once I graduated I moved to Houston. So it was a learning process, it was a learning process all the way through. Learning the culture of Washington now from the perspective of being a congressional wife but also learning Houston and learning his district and learning the people, and yet one of the gifts that he gave me was the depth and breadth of

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relationships that he had that spanned ages, cultures, races and religions. Many of those people are very important to me today.

JW: On that same note I've done a few Google searches of him and I've seen pictures of him with the DeMenils of the Menil Museum

AL: Yes.

JW: ...and I was wondering what kind of, how was it is kind of surreal with having a relationship with a Houston family that's well known. They have a museum after you. They have made such great contributions to the arts and the city? What does it feel like to have these relationships with these really well known Houstonians and really well known people in the State of Texas?

AL: Well they met Mickey early in his career, really saw something in him and were early supporters and investors of him as a person. He had grown up in Houston and had never lived outside of Texas until he went to Washington. So prior to that while still in the legislature through the DeMenils he got his first passport and he got the opportunity to travel and he got the opportunity to be exposed to the world beyond Houston and beyond Texas. They loved him and he really loved them. It's also an example of how he represented a district at the time that spanned the heart of Houston, Fifth Ward where he grew up, Third Ward, The Heights, some of the Rice area... but it showed how he could embrace and be very effective in poor minority neighborhoods but then also move effortlessly and seamlessly in very important and influential circles both in Houston and the places where those relationships took him. They were very special to him and he to them.

JW: What were the campaigns like for the congressional seat...what was that experience like because I've seen a few pictures of him "Leland...Congress" behind you and him were at the University of Houston

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podium talking. What was that like? What is that campaign experience like for a congressman and a congressman wife?

AL: Well when I first met him he was already in so he had already experienced the toughest race which was his initial race but later towards the end of his career he had what he considered to be his most difficult challenge and that was when a sitting school board member Elizabeth Spates ran against him. He worried, he sweated, he went back to his most traditional campaigning and he was riding busses where he would get on the bus on the first stop, once it filled up he would make a speech. He was going back to his roots and she criticized him saying, “You’ve abandoned your district you don’t care about Houston, you’re traveling the world. You care about poor people in other countries and you ought to be focused on what is going on at home.” So he had to really, really work. But to answer your question I don’t remember feeling worried that he was going to lose although it was interesting to see a real, full-fledged campaign because the previous campaigns had been much, much easier. Having said all that I think he ended up getting 82% of the vote against her. All his friends said, “Oh please! Come on! That’s what you consider to be your biggest challenge, your toughest race?” He was very fortunate that he had a district of people who loved him, who knew him, who thought they had a really important personal relationship with him and in fact they did.

JW: In Houston specifically, what were some of the initiatives that he had taken while in Congress?

AL: Members of Congress have to figure out some area that they can focus on and some way not just to make a name for themselves but also to really make a difference. When he was in the Texas legislature he was really focused on healthcare and was instrumental in getting generic drugs passed. Going back a step earlier, in his early career he envisioned that he would impact

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people through healthcare and initially thought he wanted to be a doctor and be a community activist through healthcare. But through his college days, Civil Rights Movement, he got redirected into politics and pharmacy by training, he holds a pharmacy degree from Texas Southern. Healthcare was always an issue that was really important to him. When he got to Congress, though, he had two main interests. One was in the area of telecommunications and he served on the Energy and Commerce Committee and their subcommittee on telecommunications. He really focused on minority ownership and really immersed himself in everything from who owns the airwaves, the TV stations and radio stations, all the way down to popular television dramas at the time that didn't have any black actors. He was able to advocate and push and some of them suddenly did. Telecommunications was a big area of interest and that was when the cable industry was burgeoning, the very beginning of the cell phone industry. That was a big issue for him but he was also haunted and moved by issues related to hunger. He was really into food security and was the founding chairman of the house select committee on hunger, got support from then President Ronald Regan, divided his time between looking at issues of hunger in the United States and looking at issues of hunger internationally, thought that this was an area that no one was really paying attention to. He believed that was an area that he could really make a difference, so that really became his passion.

JW: Now what do you think the motivation for that was to get into, specifically the hunger and the helping these people who are hungry not only in the United States but across the whole world?

AL: Part of it was growing up in the Fifth Ward with a single parent mom although his mom went to school and got a Master's degree while she was raising two boys. Part of it was his own upbringing and then part of it was the exposure that he had in his travels. I think that when he



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had the opportunity to travel internationally he began to see that there was simple things that we take for granted, children who die of diarrhea, for example.

JW: Right.

AL: Things that are treatable that require would only require the marshaling of some effort and some money where he could really make a big difference. Part of it was having the opportunity to see, then feeling as if maybe he could go and make a difference. He was criticized for looking at international hunger but he traveled throughout Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta and Houston and there were really striking examples of that here as well.

Another area that he was passionate about was Israel, it was one of the first places that he got to travel to. When Barbara Jordan had announced that she wasn't going to run for reelection he was in Israel I believe, and had to be tracked down to come home. One of the things that he started which was a passion and survives to this day is he started an internship program for high school students in Houston to go to Israel in the summer. This year is the 34<sup>th</sup> year that high school students - and we raise the money, the foundation raises the money and pays for the trip. So high school students who go to high school or live within his congressional district so the heart of Houston many of them are kids who have never been on an airplane, let alone to another country. This group of ten or a dozen students every summer they go to Israel and they live, work, study and travel. He thought, again, he thought it was a way to expose kids who were like him from Houston. It was a way to bridge understanding between major religious groups. One of the criteria to go is you can't be Jewish. These are kids who would not otherwise have an opportunity to go. He traveled to Israel, he loved Israel, and he had really strong support in the Jewish community in Houston. As recently as Saturday at a Bat mitzvah I saw a very

conservative Jew, he came up to me and told me how much he loved Mickey. He said, "I don't

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love Obama but I loved Mickey,” and “He was somebody who knew how to bridge groups.” So that relationship was really important and another example of how unconventional he was.

There were some people who said, “Israel? Why don’t you start a program that takes students to Africa?” and he would say, “That would be a great trip but that’s not this trip. I want to do something a little bit different but also something that is personally important to me.” Those ties and relationships go on. He also started an internship program - same year - here at the University of Houston where our students go up to Capitol Hill. There’s a group of all young women who are there as we speak and he also there to fought that Houston students, perhaps students who hadn’t gone away to college should have the opportunity to go away, should have the opportunity to work on Capitol Hill, to be part of the culture of students who may be more well off to have the opportunity and the contacts to do that. So for me seeing these high school students go to Israel and seeing the U of H students go to Washington in programs still bearing his name, all these years later is so personally gratifying. It really makes me proud because with each of those students they have to stop and think, “Okay, who was this guy? Why does this program bear his name?” In that regard he was really passionate about children and he was really passionate about young people. To see them carrying around his legacy is really, really important to me.

JW: Why do you think he was passionate about young people and children? Do you think he just saw the future in them or he saw... What do you think the reason behind that was?

AL: I think he was a young man who was bursting at the seams to try things, do things, travel and so forth and so on. To be honest, he had a football scholarship to go to USC and his mother wouldn’t let him go. She didn’t feel comfortable having him leave. I know that he always thought how would my life have been different? He managed to create opportunities for himself.

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But I think he thought he started behind the starting line and if he could have gone to college I probably wouldn't have met him. I think he thought, "I was smart enough, I was good enough. If I had had the opportunity many things could have been different." I would often respond, the implication that it would have been better and I would often respond that it might have been different and a different path, but not necessarily a better path than the path he was on. I think he looked at young people and thought, "Okay I was a boy growing up in a single parent home in 5<sup>th</sup> ward, what if someone had taken an interested in me? What if I could have gone on an airplane out of my neighborhood when I had never been outside of my city before?" I think he thought "I could really make a big difference," so as passionate he was about big global issues he really wanted to make a difference here in Houston. He saw that "If I time these Israel trips so that it's between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade they will come back and they will imagine they could go to any college because they have been on an airplane now, they've been to Israel and now leaving home is not going to be so daunting." That has been absolutely the case. I meet former interns all the time who say that program gave me the courage to do something I never would have done before. I think he would see the trajectory of young lives going in different directions and he would just feel enormous pride.

JW: That's incredible.

AL: You would have liked him.

JW: I already like him and I've just read articles about him.

AL: You've done great research.

JW: Thank you.

AL: You've really done your homework.

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JW: What issues do you think today Mickey would try to tackle? Of course it would continue with the young people, the children and of course the healthcare, the poor and the hungry. But in today, in the context of today's world what do you think he would you know want to change or want to be a champion of movement?

AL: I really think about how much the world has changed and I think about it in terms of my family, in terms of technology, you know when I pick up my iPhone how he would have had the coolest first one off the assembly line. I often think if he were to come back I'd have to explain, "Okay this is what this is, and this is what this does." When it comes to politics if he were to return to Capitol Hill there would be some familiar faces and there certainly are people that were his friends. Bill Clinton was one of his friends before he was President. Al Gore I think I went on my first or second date to his house with Mickey. He would see so much change. We spoke of the difference in relationships that people have in Washington. I think that he would have been someone who would have wanted to bridge those gaps but also in big global issues. He was really focused on environmental issues, that was one of his passions. I think there are still issues percolating in telecommunications. I think there are issues going on related to the voting rights act or voting rights and that being under threat that he would be involved in and passionate about as well. It's hard for me to imagine when we have a black president who is somebody who he would have not even have known. Barack Obama would have been a student. So it wasn't someone who was one of his colleagues, it was not someone who came through the Civil Rights Movement. It was a young man who came along and I often wonder what their relationship might have been like. In fact I've met the president just once and when I said my name he said, "Leland," he said, "He was inspirational."

JW: Wow.

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AL: Yeah and that meant a lot to me.

JW: That's incredible.

AL: Yeah.

JW: Wow. So to me a general word that I found that describes Mickey incredibly is humanitarian. I felt like he made, he focused a lot on people and made sure that people were okay. We talked a little about this but this but it just seems, this humanitarian, I'm just wondering where did this surge of humanitarianism come from? To me it seems something like that is so rare even in today's world, where you touched a little bit on his background but do you want to expand a little bit more on that on where that humanitarianism came from?

AL: That's a good question, Jacob. My sense of Mickey is that he always felt as if he was in a hurry. That he always felt as if he didn't have endless time to do everything he wanted to do. So he was a person with a long list and many things he wanted to do and doing many of them all at the same time. We were a good yin and yang in that regard. Part of it I think was that he was just a young man and a later a man in a hurry but in terms of being a humanitarian, again my sense is that he had this clear vision that he could make a difference and significant legislative achievements were clearly important to someone who is in a legislative body. I think he also thought, "How do I impact people" and "How do I impact people that maybe other people aren't paying attention to? How do I focus attention, resources, effort, and money on people who aren't going to get that?" I think again it goes back to perhaps thinking about himself and what would have happened "If I had gotten that?" And that's not to say that he didn't have coaches, teachers and people who encouraged him, but there was initially a limit and a bar that he had to exceed. So I think his sense was that his sense was, "I'm going to do as much as I can as fast as I can as much as I can," that seemed to be a driving force for him.

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JW: If Mickey could impart one message today, to today's world to today's generation to my generation what do you think the message he would want me and the people of my age to carry with us as we go out into the world?

AL: I think he'd want you to be mindful of your own opportunity for success. I think he'd want you to feel... to quote him that "you are a citizen of the world." That you have some moral obligation, some moral imperative to do more than just yourself. To be an impactful member of your own community, your own neighborhood. It doesn't have to be a huge noteworthy thing but to be mindful, to be aware and to see opportunities where you can make even the small difference in someone's life.

JW: I think that's all I pretty much wanted to ask you about in the interview. I thank you very much for being so candid and so helpful for all of this. Is there any last statement you want to say? Any personal story of yours and Mickey's anything like that?

AL: Can you pause for one second?

JW: I said to you earlier Jacob that I always had a sense that Mickey was in a hurry that he was trying to get things done as fast as he could. I don't think I fully shared that sense. I think I had the perspective of someone young, that there was endless time. So I am reminded of him, I am reminded of him every day. We have three sons now in their twenties. People, strangers and friends alike often ask me about him. I'm really gratified that he is someone who is still missed and remembered and I certainly think that he deserves that. It's hard for me, it's sometimes hard for me to understand that he is a person of history, of our local history, of our national history. In Ethiopia there is a university named after him and an orphanage, and again people there know him. I was saying to you that he was really passionate about issues of hunger and that's what led

him to go to Ethiopia and he wanted to go and to look at the Sudan and Somalia. He had

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traveled there earlier and he would return home haunted. He couldn't go to a grocery store, he couldn't see the abundance here and not really remember and be haunted by the children that he had seen. I talked about the difference that he thought he could make... looking at the children who happened to be born there versus being born here and that difference that made in their outcome and their life expectancy was something that made him compelled to try, to do more, compelled to make a difference. Mickey was funny, charming, unorganized, passionate, impulsive, lots and lots of friends... many of his friends have carried on his work. Many of his friends are, he had staffers who are now elected officials like Senator Rodney Ellis. He had great pride in those who worked with him and for him who have now gone on to, gone on to other things. There are many, many reminders and many who are still... many who are still carrying on his work and for me that has been really important.

JW: You had said earlier and I had just thought of this now... he did do a lot of work worldwide. Israel and in Africa and in countries that are desolate and poor. In one of his campaigns one of his, the woman running against him had said he lost contact with the people that he was representing in the United States and here specifically in Houston. How do you think, how did he respond to that? How did he try to, how did he feel about being attacked, necessarily, for going worldwide and trying to help people?

AL: I think he was shocked, then he was hurt and then he was angry because he couldn't believe that someone would question his motives or that someone would believe that he was out of touch with Houston. That he had lost touch with his district because he was passionately a Houstonian and passionately, passionately a Texan. His counter argument would be during a congressional recess "Instead of going on a vacation with my family, I'm going to Africa and I'm going to the most difficult part of Africa. So I'm taking my time going to a really hard place

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on a really hard trip.” The year that he was killed was not the first time that year that he had been to Ethiopia. So I think he thought that he put so much energy and passion into representing Houston well but that he had this urgent calling and that he was compelled to follow that as well and then he felt he would have been derelict if would have let it go. Once he saw what was happening then and understood the abundance of our country he felt compelled to make a difference. So he did, tried to shepherd the resources of congress, tried to focus the attention on food security on other parts of the world, looked back in his own roots in terms of healthcare and wanted to figure out how to make it more widely available. There are so many people doing that kind of work today from the Gates Foundation to other congressional committees that he was passionate about in the eighties.

JW: I think it’s incredible that you see him reaching out to these countries and it’s not a sense of typical American exceptionalism where “You are poor and desolate so we are going to come in and help you, make sure you are doing okay.” It’s more of a sense of “We have enough of food on our plate, let’s help you.”

AL: We are compelled to.

JW: “We’re compelled to help you because we see your bucket and it’s not all the way full but ours is.” I think it’s an incredible aspect of Mickey that I feel is sometimes void of in the world and sometimes in Congress. I was incredibly moved in reading articles and researching about Mickey and he just seems to me to be an incredibly likable guy and I wish he was still here so I could meet him, talk to him about his legacy and what he has done.

AL: But then he in turn would want to talk to you about what you were interested in. The next thing I would know you would be coming over for dinner and then he would ask you “So where do you want to go? What do you want to do?” He’d say “Hold on a second let me call



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someone.” Literally! The next thing you know, Jacob you’d be in that part of the family and a relationship would ensue.

JW: That’s incredible! You had said 1989 he passed away in Ethiopia and that wasn’t his first trip there... why was he going to Ethiopia? I had read he was looking to go to the poorest, most desperate nation and help them. What was the second choice?

AL: Each time he went he would try to bring people with him where he could shine a light on what was happening. He was always trying to cajole his friends in Washington to go with him. On that trip Al Gore was supposed to go with him but his son was hit by a car at a baseball game and was in the hospital, so he couldn’t go and similarly he had invited Nancy Pelosi but she missed the connection in Italy and didn’t catch up with him.

JW: Wow.

AL: Similarly wanted to take my then three year old and I said, “You’ve got to be kidding.” Senator Rodney Ellis who was a close friend and Mickey insisted that he had to take his chief of staff and not Rodney who had also been lobbying hard to go on that trip.

JW: You were at the time were pregnant with twins, right? With your twin sons.

AL: I found out I was pregnant on a Thursday and he was killed the following Monday.

JW: Wow. What was that moment like?

AL: I had widowed at 30 and the clear signs that everything in my life had changed. That I had a life and then it was gone. Now I had this really crazy bizarre new life and it’s a hard life lesson because I think we have a tendency to think we can map it out and we know what’s going to happen and we know where things are going to go. Also he was such an incredibly good father to our oldest son that I could only imagine how he would have felt having identical twin sons who look like him.

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JW: What was... what was your first reaction when you found out? I imagine they had called you or how did you first find out that he had passed away?

AL: Well before that I found out that his flight was late, his office called and said his flight was late to where he was traveling to in Africa. I said, "Okay... and so... what does that mean?" He was traveling on a private plane that they had chartered so the fact that he was late in another country didn't seem startling to me at all. But it quickly became evident that his plane had disappeared and he... a vigil developed, press on my front lawn, the president calling my house and speculation, people trying to figure out where he was. Colin Powell was the President's National Security Advisor and he was called me to tell me they would use their spy satellites to look for him. Fortunately for me it was only one week. I think that my greatest fear was not that he would be found. My greatest fear was that he would never be found and that he would become like Amelia Earhart, that we would be always wondering what had ever happened to him. So it seemed like an endless week but in retrospect it gave me time to prepare. A week by comparison seems like a blessing. I had time to, I had time to prepare but I never, I always thought there had to be a different answer that he would come walking out of, you know, walking out of the woods somewhere. That seemed logical to me but I was really grateful to know and yet it became the starting point of a very new and unexpected chapter. As I said at the very beginning of the interview what is perhaps surprising to me is how much he remains really part of my life. Obviously part of my children's life, but part of Houston's as well. Yesterday was an election day in Texas and today I had people say, "Wow, what do you think Mickey would have thought about the races in Austin or the races in Washington?" He died at only 44 and yet he's had, you know, he's had the opportunity, he's had the opportunity for longevity in an unexpected way.

**Interviewee: Leland, Alison****Interview Date: March 5,2014**

JW: He's still relevant today. I had said to you in one of our breaks that it's almost as if he has never necessarily gone because he's still incredibly relevant today. As you said people come up to you and tell you stories about you that you never...

AL: Yeah, something new. I've told one of my son's it's almost like putting together pieces of a puzzle and new pieces come up all the time and I always find it so interesting because somebody will say, "I knew him in high school," or "I knew him in college," or "I knew him in some different point in time," Than the years that I knew him which it turned out to be the end of his life. That's fun to hear, and for me Houston's always been this collective hug because there's so many people caring and supporting me. Even still to this day who want to know how my boys are doing and how I'm doing who are rooting for me to be happy and they are still remembering him in a very nice way. That next chapter has been that much better because I've been here and because I've had that love and support of Houston.

JW: How do your sons feel about Mickey? Your oldest obviously had time with Mickey. Whereas your two twins didn't. How do they feel about their dad? Do they know a lot?

AL: I think it's really hard for people to tell them what a great dad they had. They remember either a little or they don't remember at all. So there are lots of young men who grew up without a father. I think it's really hard if you grew up with a father that people considered to have been a great father and that you missed that. So the answer is that it's a big loss and you know in some respects it's a hole that's really difficult to fill and for Mickey that would break his heart because there would have been nothing more important to him than to be here to be their dad.

End of interview