Smith: How did your paths cross?

Bresnahan: Our paths probably first crossed when Representative Ford became vice president. At that time, I was assigned to Spiro Agnew as vice president and had been on his detail for five years. When Vice President Ford entered office, I had already been transferred off of the Agnew detail. I was in the Protective Support division of the Secret Service. I was in Washington and was assigned to a couple of speeches Vice President Ford made in D.C. That was the first time I really had come in contact with him. I certainly knew his name from the years that he’d been in the House and he was very influential in all those years, but I never had any contact with him until that time.

Smith: Let me ask you something and back up a bit. One of the interviews we did was with Jerry Jones, who was in the Nixon White House, and who at that point had reorganized the personnel office for H.R. Haldeman. Jones told us a fascinating story. Haldeman and Ehrlichman were still there, so it’d be spring of ’73. And he got a call one day from Haldeman, who wanted to know how many people reported directly to the vice president. Jones did some quick mental arithmetic and said, “Oh, about 50.” And Haldeman said, “Fine. We want undated letters of resignation from every one of them.” Which raises two questions. One, and I realize it’s both speculative, is whether this was a hangover from the general Nixon ’72 election order that basically wanted to reshape the administration, although it was several months later than that. Or, two, whether at that point, they would’ve already known that at the very least some kind of investigation was underway.

In other words, long before the Wall Street Journal broke the story about the investigation of the Vice President, is it logical to assume through the Justice Department, if no one else, that the White House would’ve been aware that he might be in trouble?
Bresnahan: I don’t have any direct knowledge of that. In the past Vice President Agnew refused, not always successfully, to cooperate with Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

Smith: Okay.

Bresnahan: And so there was a natural knocking of the heads there. I recall times that I heard about, I didn’t actually see it, but I heard about it, where memos would come from Haldeman that ‘the Vice President will do this,’ ‘will do that,’ and the Vice President sent it back and said, “I don’t work for you. I work for the President and if the President would like me to do this, I’ll be more than happy to do it.” And so, the order would have to come from the President and that used to drive Haldeman, especially, and Ehrlichman, crazy because they wanted control.

Smith: Was he a proud man?

Bresnahan: Mr. Agnew?

Smith: Yeah.

Bresnahan: Absolutely. And a great guy.

Smith: Was he?

Bresnahan: Oh, a terrific guy.

Smith: Fun to be around?

Bresnahan: He was fun to be around. His whole family was fun to be around. I mean, we’re getting back before President Ford, but he was a terrific guy to be around. Very friendly, very funny, completely misrepresented in terms of what people thought of him. I’m not saying, because I really don’t know whatever happened that took him down. I mean, I know the stories of it, but I don’t know how true it was or anything like that, but one-on-one, he was as nice as he could be.
Smith: During the ’68 campaign, there was this picture, caricature maybe, that was developed of him as racially insensitive. And it’s interesting to hear that the caricature is not very accurate.

Bresnahan: I think that was maybe not the start, but the continuation of politics that we see today, where they try to assassinate a person’s character. I think you’re talking about the incident with the ‘fat Jap’ and that was something that would be like if they called me by my nickname and my nickname had some sort of a racial tone to it. It was not intended that way at all and he was not that way at all. He was a fair guy. He made decisions and he stuck with them as far as I can remember. And he did what President Nixon asked him to do pretty much without question.

Smith: And he became a political phenomenon. I mean, almost larger than the White House had bargained for.

Bresnahan: He really was. He was almost like a Sarah Palin – came out of nowhere, was a county commissioner in Baltimore, Maryland. I grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland, so I voted for him for governor in, I believe, it was 1966.

Smith: And people forget he was the liberal in the race, running against George P. Mahoney.

Bresnahan: Well, yes, but he was a Republican. I certainly did not have any understanding of politics in 1966, I was still in college and not interested in politics, but I do remember voting for Agnew. He was a Republican and I was a Republican. I didn’t really know too much about him, but I remember on the ballot was an issue to raise the governor’s salary from $10,000 per year to $25,000 per year. All of the governors before him had worked for $10,000 per year, which was more money then than it is now, but it wasn’t very much. And I had hoped that I would certainly make $10,000 a year when I got out of college and so that wasn’t very much money. So, I think, for some of the things that he got in trouble for were things that governors had been doing previous to that. Not to say it was correct.
Smith: No, no. There was a deathwatch, let’s face it, at the end. How did he handle all of that?

Bresnahan: You know, it really went fast. We were in a fighting mode, ‘we’ being his group of Secret Service agents. We liked him a lot so we called ourselves ‘we’ although we were not political. We liked him; the politics didn’t matter much to us. We didn’t want to see him get hurt, but if you look back, I think you’ll see that just weeks or so before – it seems like weeks to me now – he went out and was going to speeches where he was being considered the next president, because he was vice president and at that time, it looked like President Nixon was going to go down and he was going to be the president. So, right up until that point, it looked like everything was going to go along smoothly until the trouble came. And I’ve always felt, and I have no evidence of this whatsoever, but I’ve always felt that Haldeman and Ehrlichman finally got their pound of flesh at the end.

Smith: It’s interesting you say that because, in a totally unrelated way, Nelson Rockefeller had an osteopath and buddy for thirty years, a guy named Ken Riland. Through Rockefeller, he came down and did the same thing for President Nixon and Warren Burger and a bunch of people. And he ran afoul of Haldeman and Ehrlichman and spent four years being investigated by the IRS - indicted, acquitted, but hounded. And it was very clear what the source of the problem was.

Bresnahan: There are more stories. I don’t know if this is the forum, but there are more stories of their efforts to dominate the White House and the Secret Service.

Smith: Really?

Bresnahan: I recall that the Secret Service had developed and purchased a brand new armored parade limousine, which at that time, in 1972, was the finest protective vehicle ever built. And the Secret Service brought it around one day and they asked President Nixon if he’d like to see it because it’s going to be a car he was going to ride in. And he said, “Yes, I’d like to see it.” I’m getting this story a little bit secondhand, but he came out to look at the car and
they showed him some of the things in the car which were safety features and so forth, and he was pretty impressed with the car. He went back in and then they put the car away and sometime either that day or later, Haldeman came out and said, “The President will never ride in that car. You didn’t go through me to get approval to see that car.” And, generally, that’s the story. There could be details in there that I didn’t know about because I’m getting it more of secondhand through the grapevine.

But in that inauguration in January of ’73 - I was involved with that inauguration - Vice President Agnew rode in the finest car ever built, not the President because of what Haldeman had done. So, basically, the President was in a very good car, there’s no problem with his car, but this was the newest and the best and he wasn’t riding in it.

Smith: Was that the parade where you had problems with the protestors along the route?

Bresnahan: They were throwing things. Yes. I have some pictures at home. I happened to be doing the advance and I was working what we referred to as the ‘right rear’ of the vice president’s car and I had some paint on my shoes. They had thrown stuff. Nothing actually bad, in fact, I didn’t know I had paint on me until the end of the parade and I looked down and there was a slash of red paint across my shoes. But that was the inauguration where the White House staff ordered the Nixon girls to ride in convertibles. The intelligence that we had was that the demonstrators were going to throw rocks and if one of those girls had been hit in the face or somewhere with a rock, it would’ve been pretty devastating.

Smith: You know, it’s interesting, but one of the really difficult things today, forty years later, is to make people understand what an almost insurrection any culture there was, particularly in Washington. Richard Nixon likened it in some ways to the Civil War. That didn’t justify what happened, but the context is usually the first thing that gets lost when people attempt to explain Watergate and its consequences.
Bresnahan: You asked me if Agnew was a strong personality, and in this particular inaugural parade, his children were supposed to ride in an open car also. He told his Secret Service supervisors, “Just have a closed car available for the family in case I order it.” And, at the last minute at the Capitol, he said, “Put the family in a closed car,” and that’s what we did. We rolled in a closed car, put him in a new limo, and went into the inaugural parade that way. I had heard, I don’t know this firsthand, that Haldeman was furious that anybody would’ve upstaged this situation. But, from a security point of view, we knew we were going to get rocked and we weren’t on the Nixon detail, so we could not help the presidential detail, but we could make sure that our people were safe and that’s what the supervisors did.

Smith: When Ford becomes vice president, you worked some events in D.C. that he did.

Bresnahan: Yes, I was perimeter security at, I think, one or two speeches at that time when I left the Agnew detail., I went to an area called Protective Support Division because they didn’t have any place to put us because the resignation happened so quickly. We were supposed to be with Vice President Agnew for six months after he left office and something happened in the administration and there was a call that went out that the Secret Service was to leave, and this was within weeks of him resigning. He was out in California and they discontinued his detail on the spot. I was back in Washington, at the residence and we discontinued on the spot. So, then they sent us over to this Protective Support Division, which they don’t even have anymore, and that division was kind of a manpower pool.

Vice President Ford came in and had some speeches. I don’t know when they were planned and so forth, but we went and helped with security at those speeches and that’s the first time I really saw him.

Smith: For all of the professionalism of the agency, you’re also human beings. Was there a time, a moment when you either personally, or collectively, reached the conclusion that the Nixon presidency was doomed? Was it when the Court ruled on the tapes? The ‘smoking gun’ tape is the most famous. I
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imagine in the abstract, it was unthinkable, because obviously nothing like this had ever happened before, but was there a time somewhere when you thought this is going to end badly?

Bresnahan: First of all, I wasn’t that sophisticated to know what was going on. In fact, when I’ve told my wife, she’s heard it hundreds of times that I wish that I was paying better attention to what was going on. I was more involved with ‘Where are we going to go?’, ‘What’s going to be the next trip?’, ‘What’s my next assignment?’, than I was in what was going on right around me. But I think that we thought there was a good chance that President Nixon would resign about the time that the Vice President was doing some of these speeches where he was being mentioned as the next President of the United States. And so that was weeks or months prior to his resignation.

Smith: Which, of course, put Ford in an impossibly awkward position. I mean, on the one hand, he had to be loyal to the President and, on the other hand, he couldn’t be so loyal as to undercut his own integrity.

Bresnahan: Exactly.

Smith: That’s a real tightrope.

Bresnahan: He had a picture in his office in Rancho Mirage sitting in a chair in an outer office outside of the Oval Office. And he was sitting there and he’s reading a magazine, which he did all the time, he never just sat. He was always doing something. He said to me, “Bill, you know what I was doing there?” And I said, “No, sir, I have no idea.” He said, “Right there, I got up from that seat, walked in and found out that I was going to be the President of the United States.” The White House photographer took that picture and it’s quite historic. I don’t know if he knew what was coming. It didn’t look like he knew. He was very calm, he was just flipping through a magazine, killing some time, waiting to be invited into the Oval Office.

Smith: That’s interesting because it raises this large question. And, again, obviously it’s speculative on your or anyone’s part, but there is this quality about Ford - that he’s good old Jerry, the Boy Scout, the Eagle Scout, a guy who genuinely
went out of his way to see the good in people. And the flip side of that was that he was genuinely shocked, I’ve heard him say, when Nixon lied to him or when anyone lied to him. Was he too nice to be president? Because, you know, the job requires a certain amount of ruthlessness. For example, not cleaning house more thoroughly early on, which is something Rumsfeld was urging upon him. And yet, he didn’t want to tar all the innocent people in the Nixon White House. Many of them were very capable. And he had to provide some continuity. He didn’t want to tar all of them with the brush of Watergate.

Bresnahan: Once again, at that point I wasn’t very sophisticated as to what was going on, but now I know what it takes to walk into the presidency. You need that transition period that we give our elected presidents, months of transition, to interview and hire chief of staff and different secretaries and all of those things. Ford never had that time. So, it would make sense that he would kind of keep the continuity that was there rather than go in and blow it up. Even though he had 25 years, 23 years, of experience in knowing people and who he might want to put in this or that job, it takes a little time to work your own administration in when you have to come in so quickly. And, as far as being tough, he’s tough. He was tough.

Smith: Can you illustrate that?

Bresnahan: He would stand up for what he wanted whether it be something we were doing or whether it be something on the outside and if somebody said something that he didn’t feel was true or correct. He wouldn’t be rude, he was never rude, but he would say, “I don’t believe that. I think” this or that, whatever the situation might have been. He used to have a saying, I don’t know if I can come up with it now, something about you can disagree without being disagreeable. And I thought he really kind of lived by that.

Smith: Yeah, when you look at his relationship with someone like Tip O’Neill. It wouldn’t happen today. In fact, it’s hard to make people today understand.
Bresnahan: We miss that, but that’s my opinion. No, he could be tough when he needed to be and he could be tough all the time. Whatever was necessary.

Smith: Did you see the temper?

Bresnahan: Where I actually saw his temper more than I ever saw it in any political situation, was in his athletic endeavors. He was the most highly competitive athlete that I had ever been around. It came out on the golf course and he could get furious at himself, at a poor play. He was a good golfer; he was capable of shooting in the 80s, but then sometimes he’d shoot over 100 and, boy, we kept our distance. In those days, he was former President, so we could keep our distance a little bit.

Smith: Were there signs to look out for? There are people who say that if you were up close, you literally could see the red ascending.

Bresnahan: I never saw it. That probably is true, but I never actually saw that. But, the signs that we knew, I was younger and I was somewhat athletic myself, so I was into games and sports and things. I knew when he would tee off and hook a ball terribly into the other fairway or something; I knew this is not the time to ask him a question. So, you picked your spots and because you knew from your own experiences, he doesn’t want to talk to me right now. He just wants to get out there and take care of whatever this problem was.

Smith: Do you think it bothered him, the whole Chevy Chase caricature??

Bresnahan: I can’t see how it wouldn’t have bothered him a little bit, although I think he and Chevy Chase became pretty good friends. You know, I tried to be an athlete and if you tease me about the way I do my sport, I might laugh at it, but I would rather that wasn’t the way. So I assume that was the case. It was a little unfair. This guy was an All-AmSmithan football player back in the 30s and he used to laugh because people used to make the joke about the fact that he played with a leather helmet and had gotten hit in the head too many times and he would make fun of himself on that one. So, I don’t think it bothered him a lot.
Smith: I sometimes wondered whether it maybe bothered Mrs. Ford more than it bothered him.

Bresnahan: You know, I don’t know. I don’t know that. She never said anything to us about that. When your partner gets criticized, usually that person is more offended by it than maybe the person being criticized.

Smith: On August 9th, 1974, the Nixon appearance in the East Room and then the Ford swearing in, where were you that day?

Bresnahan: Let’s see. When did Agnew resign?

Smith: Agnew resigned in October of ’73.

Bresnahan: Okay, I was probably at that time in our training division because I’d gone off the detail, and gone to the training division with a short stop at that Protective Support Division that I mentioned before.

Smith: So, during the Ford presidency, when did you come to work for him?

Bresnahan: I was lucky enough I had learned to ski a little bit, and when Ford became President, the very first year, we were going to come to Vail. The Secret Service was looking for people that could ski because obviously President Ford was going to go skiing and that’s when Larry Buendorf – the first time I think I met Larry, he was on the presidential detail at that time. The Service put out a teletype requesting anyone that knew how to ski to give their name up if they would like to possibly go to Vail at Christmastime. And this was a long time ago, but somehow I think I put my name in and I got selected. And so we were all sent out to Vail, Colorado a couple of weeks, I believe, before Christmas, to go through kind a test.

Smith: And I assume there was a whole lot less here then than there is now.

Bresnahan: No, we were just in Vail then. There was no Beaver Creek. In fact, President Ford skied the very first day Beaver Creek ever had a run. He skied on that run before it was open because I skied with him that day. I remember that. But we were sent out here and they put us through a training session and so
forth and, luckily, I made it through because I wasn’t that good, but neither
was anybody else. So, we had one good skier, a fellow named Dave Beihler.
The rest of us were kind of somewhere in between. So, we got to stay and
then we got to come back at Christmastime and be with President Ford and
for the next three Christmases, I believe he was in office three Christmases; I
got to ski with him every Christmas. That was my only time with him that I
recall as president.

Smith: And they stayed at the—

Bresnahan: The Bass House.

Smith: The Bass House. Okay. Private residence in Vail?

Bresnahan: Right in the center of Vail. He could walk to the chair lift from there and we
did.

Smith: Did that give you security concerns - the fact that it was right in the middle of
a fairly congested—

Bresnahan: We were able to seal off the neighborhood and keep the neighbors happy. I
hope we kept them happy. We tried. It was a special problem to take a
president on a chair lift and then down an open ski slope, and Larry Buendorf
was in charge of that. He basically put the plan together that we would do.
We had formations that we ran on skis that were very similar to what the
agents assigned to the president do when he’s walking around or moving
around anywhere else. And so we came out and we practiced these
formations and practiced what we would do in each circumstance. I think we
did a pretty good job. In those days, the security was not like it is today.

Smith: After the two assassination attempts in California, was there any significant
rethinking of or tightening of security?

Bresnahan: Oh, I think every time we have an issue, the Secret Service looks back at
every ounce of whatever information they can come up with and they see how
we can do it better. What did we miss? Not necessarily what did we do well,
but what did we miss here?  How did we miss this?  And so every time we have an incident, things change.

Smith:  It’s interesting because when we were talking to Larry, he said the problem with the Squeaky Fromme incident was that basically everyone did what they were supposed to do and it was almost an element of luck that he happened to see what he saw.  Because, he’s convinced that no one else physically was in a position to prevent her from getting off a shot.  You think of these guys who are still beating themselves up over the Kennedy assassination, but clearly you can be the most professional people in the world and do everything you’ve been trained to do and there are variables beyond your control.

Bresnahan:  Yes, and those variables were more back in those days than they are these days.  You wouldn’t see President Bush or President Obama now walk across the Capitol grounds in Sacramento.  If they did, there wouldn’t be any people that had not been checked standing near them.  So, all of those things are an evolution of protection that has come up as a result of the things we did there that we thought we could do better.  So, most of what you see now of the president - in fact, I noticed with President Obama on TV, you don’t see very many agents around him and they have worked their protection so that the agents can back off a little bit and give him some space to do whatever the TV cameras want to do.

Smith:  That’s interesting because, presumably, every presidential family brings their own experience and outlook and resentments, appreciations.  It must have been tough for the Ford kids.  I mean, he never thought about being president.  Mrs. Ford certainly never thought about living in the White House.  But then for teenage children - Susan famously - but the others weren’t that much older.

Bresnahan:  Well, I came back and Susan was either a senior in high school, or I can’t remember if it was the first year in college, somewhere around there.  She was probably 17 or 18 years old, came back to Vail to ski.  And once again, they called on the skiers to come back, and who would like to come back and ski with her?  Well, I raised my hand.  And so I came back and skied with Susan,
and she and a couple of her girlfriends came and stayed in Vail. I don’t know if it was spring break or some sort of break from school and we skied with her and assisted in her security here. Susan, I think, unless she was fooling me, liked us. We tried not to infringe upon her teenage years. I’m sure we did. I wouldn’t have wanted some guy walking around with me when I was 17 that my dad had control of. But, at any rate, she seemed to like us and we tried to leave her alone as best we could to make her own decisions.

I think Jack was the oldest son. Jack, at his age, didn’t really need a couple of guys hanging around with him, but he more or less put up with it and then I think we finally got a group of guys with him that were more in his age category, and I think it probably smoothed out then because Jack was of the age he didn’t need some sort of senior person keeping an eye on him. He was probably over 21 and he was a young bachelor. He didn’t need us hanging around. But eventually we got the right combination and I think Jack liked his guys. We had no problems with Steve and Mike. Of course, Steve went on to be a TV star and I think Mike became a minister. So, we were with all of them and it worked out pretty well and we didn’t have any major problems with them.

Smith: Let me ask you something, because I think to outsiders, let’s face it, it’s hard to imagine how this relationship gets defined and presumably redefined with every incoming President. It’s clear that you are always there, you’re inescapable. There’s both a professional respect and yet there’s also presumably a line of familiarity that you don’t want to cross. You’re not members of the family, but to outsiders you must look like you’re almost members of the family. How does that get defined? We’ve been told that the Fords were particularly appreciated - or example, on Christmas, they would really try hard to make sure they didn’t have events so that the agents could have a holiday of their own.

Bresnahan: Yes, many of the presidents have stayed in the White House on Christmas Day so that the agents weren’t traveling away from their families on Christmas. Now, very often, on the 26th, they’d go to the ranch, depending on
which president it might be, or they’d go to Camp David or wherever they might go. Camp David wasn’t too much of a problem because that’s close enough to home. But most of them would take that into consideration. And, of course, President Ford came out here at Christmastime, but most of the agents that came out here with him more or less volunteered to come at that time. I mean, the supervisors of the presidential detail would ask who would like to go - to try to get enough agents who volunteered to go on that particular trip so they wouldn’t have to take the guy who has three children and missing Christmas would be a hardship for him. We were able to do that. The supervisor organized a detail of a lot of single guys, after that particular trip they would go back and they would get time off and the married guys would take the next trip. They tried hard to fall within those guidelines if they could. If the mission came up and we had to do it, you have to do it.

Smith: It almost applies more to a former president where they’re out of office. I don’t know if there’s such a thing as a standard length of service on each detail or whether each one is different. I’m trying to understand as a layman how that unique relationship is developed. How close is it? How detached is it?

Bresnahan: It varies from person to person. It also varies from agent to agent. President Ford liked Larry Buendorf a lot. We had another agent who played professional baseball, was an athlete, and he came over to the Secret Service. We had another agent that was with him that was a professional football player. And he had some sort of a relationship with those guys because of their things in common. Bruce Bales was a professional player and he was always talking to Bruce about baseball. David Cahill, had played for the Los Angeles Rams and the Washington Redskins and President Ford always talked to him about football. Football was his big sport because, of course, he played and was very good at it. So, he would talk to them about the sports and when he saw them, he’d say, “See what the Redskins did? Did you see what that team did?” that sort of thing.
So, there was some sort of man to man relationships there that were of interest, but when President Ford went into his house, we didn’t go with him. We weren’t supposed to and didn’t need to. I don’t think it’s like anything I can think of - but it was a friendship when he walked out. He’d say, “Good morning, boys, how you doing?” We’d get in the car and we’d go to wherever he was going. And when we were skiing when he was president, he’d walk out and say, “Good morning, boys. Looks like a great day. We’re going to have some fun today.” And go off skiing.

Smith: Well, Larry told us, for example, he’d be in the front seat of the car with the President and he said, “There were times we’d drive hours and nothing would be said.” The other thing, he wasn’t going to start a conversation - Larry wasn’t.

Bresnahan: No, because you never know, even when he’s former president, what he’s doing in the backseat. He’s reading the paper, he’s reading a magazine, and he might even be scrolling down some notes or writing a letter. So you don’t want to make small talk unless he starts it. Now, if the former president or president in the back seat says something to you, you certainly respond to it. And sometimes they ask you a political question. Sometimes they ask you, “Did you see this article or that article?” And if you saw it, sometimes they’d ask you, “What’d you think?” And, in my case - like I said, I wasn’t overly sophisticated - so I kind of stayed out of that. But there were times when situations were going on around us that he would ask something on his mind and he wanted to have somebody to discuss it with. He’d say, “What’d you think about so-and-so doing this or that?” And if you had knowledge of it, you’d say, “Well, blah blah blah. What do you think, sir?” I’d try to push it back on him because he obviously knew what was going on and I didn’t.

Smith: You came out with him in January of ’77?

Bresnahan: I reported to Rancho Mirage in May of ’77. I was assigned in Washington, D.C. I think I was in the Washington field office at that time. I got a call when they were putting the detail together – either that or teletype, I can’t remember how it happened – they were looking for people that wanted to go...
to Palm Springs, and I had been in Palm Springs in 1967 with President Eisenhower.

Smith: Really?

Bresnahan: Can you believe that?

Smith: That’s great.

Bresnahan: So, I had a history here that I knew about Palm Springs and I said, “This has got to be a great assignment.”

Smith: What was Ike like? I mean, that was just about before his health really went into a tailspin.

Bresnahan: We actually took him back to Walter Reed from Palm Springs and he passed away in Walter Reed later in 1968, I believe.

Smith: Or ’69.

Bresnahan: Okay, I have it in my mind as April of ’69, because I started with him in April of ’67.

Smith: At that point, again, the whole idea of Secret Service for former presidents was relatively new.

Bresnahan: It was relatively new and I was a brand new agent, stars in the eyes, out in Palm Springs, out in California. I was single. I was making more money than I ever dreamed. So, it was a great time for me and we worked our eight hour shifts and we had our days off.

Smith: Now, where did the Eisenhowers stay?

Bresnahan: They stayed in El Dorado Country Club. He had a friend, if my memory serves me, it was McCullough Chain Saw - owned a house out there and he stayed at that house.

Smith: Played a lot of golf?
Bresnahan: He wasn’t playing as much then because he was starting to get older, but he did play. He played maybe once or twice a week, if I recall, and pretty much with my age in the Service, I was residence security. I didn’t go out with him very much. In fact, Mrs. Eisenhower would call this grocery store that she dealt with and order what she wanted and they would bring the groceries in. The groceries came in a box, catsup and mustard or whatever it was. We didn’t want the delivery people to go into the house because we didn’t know who they were. So, I got the groceries from the guy and thanked him. They had an account, so there wasn’t anything to sign. I took the groceries into the house and the General happened to be in the kitchen as I was bringing the groceries in and he said, “Oh, thank you very much” and I thought he knew I was an agent and he reaches in his pocket and he tipped me 75 cents. I kept it.

Smith: By the way, there were those who would say Gerald Ford wouldn’t have tipped that much.

Bresnahan: I don’t think that’s true. But anyway, I still have the 75 cents that President Eisenhower gave me, the three quarters.

Smith: Were you impressed by him?

Bresnahan: I really never got to know him, but he was very nice. And with my limited contact with him as a brand new agent, really not having much contact, he was very nice. I ended up going with Mrs. Eisenhower to Main Chance in Phoenix, which was a spa in the days before spas were really a big thing. I got to know her just a little bit because I was around her a little bit. And she was very nice, too. Very nice. But those were early days, later we went back to Walter Reed and I got off of doing a temporary assignment there on that detail. I’m going to guess, if April is the right date, then I got off in March and went back to the Washington field office where I belonged because I was still a young agent and I needed to go through my on-the-job training, which I hadn’t even gotten yet. So, I wasn’t around when he passed away in April. But the last year he was out in Palm Springs, I was with him.
Smith: Mrs. Ford, did you have much contact with her?

Bresnahan: Yes, I did. I was with them for two tours and you mentioned before that the Service likes to not have anybody stay in one spot too long anymore.

Smith: You can see why.

Bresnahan: Yes, you can get stale. I would say a four-year assignment is about max and I think that’s probably what they’re doing now. So, my first assignment in 1977 started in May and four years later, I transferred to the Los Angeles field office. And I was there for about two years and then I got promoted and came back to the Ford detail. So, I was with them for eight years. So, over those eight years, we got to know them fairly well. And, because of Vail, my family got to know Susan and Mrs. Ford and, in fact, my girls – I have two daughters – and my wife were invited to Susan’s wedding. So, that was pretty unusual. And then, during President Ford’s funeral in Palm Desert, my oldest daughter happened to be with us at that time – she and my wife were fortunate enough to be guides for the funeral area. And they got to help out there which meant a lot to them because they had known him pretty well.

Smith: There was something like 50,000 people who went through Saint Margaret’s. I still find that extraordinary.

Bresnahan: They had a bus base set up and that’s where my wife and my daughter worked at getting the people on the busses and then to the church and then back again and off the busses. Then, at the end, they were allowed to get on a bus themselves and go through the church. That was an experience that they still remember.

Smith: What was his day like? Did it change at all? We know he was a workaholic. We know he worked Saturdays. Some think he would’ve worked Sundays if he could’ve had any staff.

Bresnahan: When he was former President, he was in the office every day, seven days a week. Now, he came into the office sometimes and he would sit in there because it was comfortable and he would sit in there and read. He was an
avid reader of periodicals and newspapers. I think he read every major
newspaper every day. And that’s before we had everything on the internet.
He was reading, he was getting the newspapers and reading them.

Smith: We’re told he never became computer literate.

Bresnahan: Uhm, I don’t think so.

Smith: Mrs. Ford did, we’re told.

Bresnahan: He might have been able to look at his email, but I’m not sure of that. But he
read periodicals, Time magazine, Newsweek, every week when they came out,
he’d read them cover to cover. And sometimes he was happy with them and
sometimes he wasn’t, but the newspapers, he read every day. The New York
Times, Washington Post. In fact, one of the things we always wanted to do is
when we got on the airplane is to be sure we had the latest edition of the
newspapers to keep him busy for the flight. I remember one time we were
going into New York and he wanted to get a New York Times in the morning.
We got there at 6:30 in the morning because we’d fly all night on a red-eye.
And he only had large bills, he asked me, "Do you have any small bills?"
And I said, “Sure.” He said, “I want to buy a newspaper.” And so I gave him
two dollars or something, I don’t even recall, and so he bought the
newspapers and we went on about our business in New York.

We flew back to California that afternoon and the next day, he would be
running around the office trying to find me. I’m off because I just took that
trip. He’s looking for me for two days to pay me those two dollars back. He
did not forget those things and I think that was probably like he told me, he
said when he was growing up, sometimes his family didn’t have a nickel.
That’s all they had was a little bit of change. And I think when he grew up,
that impressed upon him that if he had a debt, he was going to settle it and he
would. He would chase you around until he could give you your money back.
Not that two dollars made any difference to me, but it made a difference to
him.

Smith: How would you describe his sense of humor?
Bresnahan: He had a good sense of humor and he loved a good joke. He wasn’t big on something too off-color. A little bit off is okay, but if the joke got a little bit rough—

Smith: But among those who knew him, it’s well-known, Mrs. Ford has a much more ribald sense of humor than the President.

Bresnahan: Yes, she could get a kick out of something that was a little bit more off-color than what he did. It was kind of funny because you could see at events with him as a former president - I didn’t see him as much when he was president except to ski - and he could get a little nervous around people because he was always a little bit nervous of what they might say.

Smith: In what sense? That’s interesting.

Bresnahan: Well, he just seemed to be, if people would come up to him, he was on guard. You could tell that he was on guard. And he wasn’t going to get tricked into saying something into a microphone or something that he would regret.

Smith: Because he was pretty accessible to the press.

Bresnahan: Yes, when we traveled around, usually, he would do interviews.

Part of tape unintelligible. Conversation resumes with Ford family intervention in 1978…

Smith: How difficult was that?

Bresnahan: You know, it was only difficult for us in that we knew kind of after it started that it was going on. I remember that Barbara Walters came out shortly after they got out of office, and did an interview with Mrs. For. And I was furious with Barbara Walters because she went after her, and it was a little like the press would pick on Reagan towards the end of his 80 years and it was obvious that his memory wasn’t as good as it used to be. And she was kind of having some issues and, of course, I like Mrs. Ford and I wasn’t crazy about the press. I thought Barbara Walters went after it a little too hard, so it made me angry. Of course, I didn’t say anything, but that’s when we knew
something was going on. Shortly after that is when the family got together and they did their intervention.

I was, in some ways, fortunate enough to go with her to some of the meetings. The Betty Ford Center that she has now - when you first arrive, you go and you’re saturated into the Center and you stay there and you do day in, day out rehab. So she did her rehab in San Diego at the naval base.

Smith: How difficult was that?

Bresnahan: Actually for us it wasn’t difficult because she was headed towards a better life.

Smith: She wasn’t resisting it.

Bresnahan: No, not at all. She fell in line and she knew there was an issue and she knew she needed to get some help and she did. The thing that was interesting about it is they didn’t make any special arrangements for her. When she went to San Diego, she was in a group of ten people and they would be sailors, wives of sailors, they would be working people. She was the most prominent person in the group, but in the group, everybody was the same. They would tell their stories and we could hear some of that. When they would get into some of the very personal things, when she would be in with a counselor, we didn’t go there. But the general sessions, we were around. And it really enlightened me as to what alcoholism was and how difficult a disease it is to deal with. I had no idea. I thought, you know, if you’re drinking, why don’t you just stop?

Smith: Forty years ago, it was a very different culture. People just drank a lot more.

Bresnahan: Well, yes, most of our parents, smoked and they had a drink when they came home and most of the time that was not a problem. And only later on, and I think she pioneered some of that - of the fact that she would go through that rehab—

Smith: If you stop to think about her impact since leaving the White House, there are very few presidents who have the kind of impact on how real people live their
lives between the breast cancer and the alcoholism and drug addiction, you know.

Bresnahan: She was out in the open. Yes. And he was very supportive.

Smith: And he stopped drinking at the same time?

Bresnahan: He stopped drinking. When she went through that, he said, “I’m not going to drink anymore. I don’t care about it that much anyway.” So he stopped and he’d literally, as far as I know, didn’t drink anymore. I mean, I don’t know if he ever had a glass of wine anywhere, but he stopped drinking. And in their younger lives, he used to talk about when they were first dating and they’d go on ski trips, in those days, what you did in the evening on a ski trip is you went to dinner and you drank and you had a great time. So that was part of their socialization, but as he got older, as we all do, it’s not that important. So he just stopped.

Smith: He was very self-disciplined, wasn’t he?

Bresnahan: Oh, man! He worked out every day of his life. He had a pool at the house and he had a pool in Vail that he had access to. It wasn’t his, but he had access to it. The one in Rancho Mirage was at his house. And he would go out every day, almost until the end, and get in that pool and swim laps. And then he’d get out of the pool and he’d do sit-ups. I don’t remember if he did push-ups or not, but he’d get in the pool and he would do a certain number of laps and he tried to keep track of the time, even as he got older. And I wasn’t around towards the end, but the agents that were said, he would get in that pool and they would have to help him out as he got into his 90s. But he wanted to get into that pool. He didn’t do it when he was traveling that much because it wasn’t really available, but the minute he got home, into the pool and work out. And he kept fit. He was very fit.

Smith: Did you see them as grandparents?

Bresnahan: Yes, but that was more internal in the house. And I wasn’t around him as much when the kids came to Vail to ski. I know he would take his
grandchildren and take them down to ski school and get them into ski school and get them started. In those days, he wasn’t skiing anymore. His knees had gotten so bad that he couldn’t ski anymore. But he took on the task of taking his grandkids to the ski school.

Smith: I’m told here in Vail especially people were very good at sort of leaving him alone. Which was not the case everywhere. Let’s face it. The ultimate celebrity is a former president.

Bresnahan: Yes, people were pretty good.

Smith: And lots of people want autographs and that’s got to be one of the banes of existence just because you’re public property.

Bresnahan: The only thing that he didn’t like – two things, actually. He didn’t like to give an autograph while he was playing golf. And maybe someone else has told you that, too.

Smith: No, but I would think golf is all about concentration.

Bresnahan: Yes. And he really didn’t like to give autographs to anybody he thought might be a collector. When a little kid comes up to him and asks for an autograph, he would do it as long as he felt like the kid just wanted an autograph of a former president. And he was good about that. But, boy, when he was concentrating on golf, you do not want to ask for an autograph.

Smith: And I’m told on weekends when he was watching football, it was another almost trance-like state.

Bresnahan: Well, I didn’t see that so much because he’d be in the house or he’d be in the office when he was doing that. So, we could hear the TV going, but he’d be in there either with a friend or with someone or by himself watching the game. We wouldn’t go in and sit down with him and watch the game. We weren’t on those terms with him. But, he would come out and say, “Ah, did you see that game?” or whatever it was. And if it was Michigan and they lost, he was upset. And if they won, he was ready to go. And he’d take a bet. If
you wanted to bet against Michigan, he’d take you on. Now, he’d take points from you, but he’d take you on.

Smith: You said you were there four years from May of ’77. Did you go with him when he went to the Sadat funeral which I think was September of ’81?

Bresnahan: No, I didn’t go with him to the Sadat funeral.

Smith: Okay, because that’s supposedly the genesis of the friendship with Jimmy Carter.

Bresnahan: No, I wasn’t there for that. It was ’77 until about ’81. Sometime in ’81 I went to Los Angeles. Was there for two years and then I came back again. So I came back in ’83, I think.

Smith: In ’77 then, in ’80, there was some talk, I don’t know how serious it was, about maybe he’d run again in ’80.

Bresnahan: Could have been.

Smith: And one senses that probably was something Mrs. Ford would not have looked favorably upon. In any event, they had a good life going.

Bresnahan: We went to the convention, I believe there was talk about a co-presidency where he’d be the vice president but he’d have some responsibilities and so forth. I remember that because it was in Detroit and I was working midnights. So, we were asleep during the day when things were going on. So when we got up, we all wanted to know what was going on because I was getting excited because I might be headed back to D.C. again which would’ve been fine. I was born and raised there, so to go back there with another vice president would’ve been okay with me. We were excited about it and it looked like it was going to happen. And then I went to bed and when I woke up that night, it was over. The decision was made and, typically, if President Ford negotiated, he negotiated, negotiated, negotiated, and when it didn’t work out to what he wanted – cut it off. And then we left Detroit. That was the end of that. So, I don’t know anything about any negotiations.
Smith: In later years, you were there ’83 to ’87?

Bresnahan: Yes, ’83 to ’86. I think I transferred back to D.C. in ’86.

Smith: Then, did you see him and President Carter together at all through that period?

Bresnahan: I don’t think I ever did. I did ski with President Carter, but I never got to know President Carter at all. But, I was in the Denver field office and went and skied with President Carter when he came to Crested Butte, Colorado. But I never talked to either one of them about the other. I just know that President Ford, when he first was defeated by President Carter, was not happy. Just like any athlete, he did not like to take a loss. And he couldn’t deal with that.

Smith: Was he depressed or angry?

Bresnahan: No. Angry. Angry or frustrated might be a better word. He wasn’t angry at President Carter, he was angry that he didn’t win. You know, he fought hard and he lost the fight and he wasn’t happy about that. And he mellowed pretty quickly. He didn’t seem to dwell on that. I never saw anything that I would consider being depressed. He just said, “Well, we’re going on to the next thing.”

Smith: I wonder if he ever got sick of being asked about the pardon.

Bresnahan: I think he did and he was asked a lot and the answer was always the same. And, just like the picture I mentioned earlier where he was sitting waiting to go in, people always thought that he knew and that was part of the deal. I don’t think words were ever exchanged or anything in writing. I think that probably Haldeman and Ehrlichman knew that Ford was going to do the right thing in terms of the country. I think that they picked the right guy.

Smith: Do you remember the last time you saw him?

Bresnahan: After I retired, I continued working for the Secret Service at doing background investigations, when I was out in California and a lot of times, I
would be doing what we referred to as ‘updates’ on agents that are current and were on that detail. I don’t recall seeing him then. So, I don’t know the very last time I saw him. I do remember that when his knees were not hurting and he was walking around in the Rancho Mirage area, he was spry. He didn’t have the gray hair and he had hair, so he didn’t look his age at all. And then the next day, you would see him and he’d come out and he had some pain in his knees and all of a sudden, he looked his age. But then he got his knees done. I wasn’t around for the knee replacements. I was around for one knee surgery. In fact, I was almost in the operating room when they were doing it because we wanted to put an agent in there. And what we came up with as a compromise is I was just outside. I could see him through this window in the door. And I stood there and watched the surgery. We really weren’t too concerned about that particular situation. But once he got his knees fixed, he was doing pretty well for awhile. I don’t recall seeing him when he was past 90.

Smith: And his health really was very good up until right about then.

Bresnahan: Right about that time and really almost within months before he passed away that the agents would tell me from the detail when I would come back and talk to them (when I was doing their backgrounds) that they were helping him out of the pool and things like that. But he was still getting in that pool every day and doing his laps. And I said, “Boy, that scares me to death.”

Smith: Well, especially at this altitude. Especially those last two summers.

Bresnahan: He didn’t come up here towards the end.

Smith: He actually came up here the last summer.

Bresnahan: The last summer?

Smith: Both the last summers and it was a subject of real controversy with his doctors, his friends. I remember a conversation with Mrs. Ford and she said, “You know, we’ve had the quantity of life. Now we want the quality of life.” But, I mean, it was tough.
Bresnahan: I talked to some of the agents that were on his detail and they said that he actually went doctor shopping on that deal, because the first two doctors he talked to said, “Sir, we don’t think you should go up there. It’s not really good for you.” So he went to another doctor and that doctor said, “You know, you want to go to Vail? Go.” He says, “You’re going to be somewhere when you die, so go to Vail.” So, he said, “Fine.” And that was it, he came to Vail. So, he had a tough time, I think, that last year. It was a tough time. What year was that?

Smith: 2006.

Bresnahan: Okay. I was around, but I was not with them. I’ve always been in Vail ever since 1977 when I came with him, but in talking to the agents, he had a tough time. I think they went back early that year.

Smith: I think they did. Yeah. There was a trip to the Mayo Clinic in between.

Smith: Todd Maturnich, who’s thoroughly professional and discreet, was a little uncomfortable in talking to us and wound up giving us one of the best stories. It was maybe three months before the President died. It was the last time he came out of the Eisenhower Medical Center. And the agents picked him up and they said, “Now, we’ll go home.” He said, “No, we’re going to the In-and-Out Burger.” And they went to the In-and-Out Burger, he gets out of the van, he walks into the In-and-Out Burger, and he stands in line to get his burger.

Bresnahan: I’ve got a story about McDonalds. This is when he was still playing golf when he was younger. He was playing in Palm Desert, I don’t know which course he came from but one of the courses in Palm Desert, and the three men he was with wanted to go to lunch. And President Ford was always in a hurry, he wanted to get back, he had things to do at the desk, and so forth, and he didn’t want to sit down and have a two hour lunch. So, he said, “Okay, fine. Let’s go to McDonald’s and get a hamburger’” is what he used to call them. So, I was in the car and he said, “Let’s pull into McDonalds” and there was one right there in Palm Desert. So we pull into McDonalds, we got out of
the car, and I am with him, I just followed him in because this is totally off the
record, we don’t know what’s going to happen. We follow him in and he gets
in line and he gets up to this little girl and this young girl wasn’t even born in
1977, so she has no idea who this gentleman is in front of her. And he goes,
“What do you have?” And she points like this at the menu which is behind
her. She’s looking at him and he’s looking at the menu. “That’s what we
got.” And he looks up there and he goes, “Can I get a hamburg’?” And she
goes, “Yes, sir.” And so he ordered a hamburger and a Coke or whatever he
got and she never knew that she had served the former President of the United
States. It was quite funny because he knew about McDonalds but he likely
had never been inside before because he didn’t really know the system. So it
was probably similar to the In-and-Out Burger story.

Smith: Now, when you’re out with him in the limo did you radio back to the
command post and say, “Change of plans. We’re going to McDonalds”?

Bresnahan: Yes.

Smith: And what did they say? “Okay”?

Bresnahan: Yes. It’s no problem if we didn’t know we were going there, nobody else
knows we’re going there. So we’re not too concerned when we do these off
the record type things.

Smith: So when you sent the report that you’re going to McDonalds, did they come
back and say “______”?

Bresnahan: No, they were used to that. They might have radioed back and said, “Bring us
back a Big Mac.”

Smith: They knew the system.

Bresnahan: Yes, they know the system. Those things were always kind of funny because
when he would get out in the public and into a routine that he wasn’t used to,
it was funny to watch him.
Smith: I assume even just getting on a plane you’re surrounded by people and presumably a lot of them recognized him.

Bresnahan: Well, as former president, I traveled with him a lot, just like Larry did. And I would always make sure for my own sanity and my own protection that we had the seats that he liked. He wouldn’t ask me to do it, but I knew that if I wanted to have a comfortable trip without him being upset, I’d better find the right seats. He’d travel first class on a commercial and he liked to sit at the bulkhead if there was leg room, because he couldn’t sit like this with his knees bent because it would hurt his knees. So, depending on what the aircraft was, where he would like to sit. I would try to call the airline prior and make sure we were in the seats we belonged in. And sometimes you didn’t tell the airlines who it was, but since you’re a first class customer, they treated us pretty good. I said, “Well, my friend that I’m traveling with” because sometimes he would travel under his own name. Sometimes he would travel under other names.

Smith: Really?

Bresnahan: I can’t remember if Penny would use her name for the reservations, but we would use sometimes different names and sometimes his because I remember that coming up, too. But I always made sure when I was traveling with him that we got to the seats we were supposed to and then when we got to the airport, the airlines would give us the courtesy of putting us on the plane first. Then he would get in on the window side and I would get in next to him in the seat blocking people from actually coming in and trying to shake his hand or whatever. And sometimes people would get on and would recognize and they’d reach over and he’d shake their hand, but I wouldn’t let them get in too close to him. And what he would do is he’d get right into his reading and so a lot of times people would see him and go, “Oh, there’s President Ford” but they would see that he was busy and give him the courtesy and keep moving.

Smith: One airline story that would’ve been after your time, but he was trapped. He had no choice. He saw Oliver Stone’s *JFK*, which is a travesty. I mean, from start to finish.
Bresnahan: Yes, it would be for him.

Smith: And especially for him. I wonder if he watched movies or tended to work.

Bresnahan: I don’t believe he watched the movies very often. He would read and he was funny because when we were, we did a lot of red-eyes, because he didn’t like to waste time. So, he could sleep on an airplane as well as he could sleep in his bed. And he would get on the plane and as soon as the plane started to move, he would go to sleep. He was like a lot of politicians, when he wanted to go to sleep, he’d go to sleep. And he was out cold. I’d be sitting next to him and he’d say, “Bill, I’m going to take a little nap. When the food comes, wake me up.” So, we’d take off and you know how long it takes until they bring the food and in those days, first class had some pretty good food. The food would be coming and I said, “Mr. President, the food’s here” and I’d give him a little nudge. “Oh, okay” and he’d wake up and he’d eat his dinner. He would often say, “Now, I think they’re going to have hot fudge sundaes,” which he liked, so he said, “Wake me up when the hot fudge sundaes come,” and he would go like that and he was out cold again. To be able to sleep like that, what a great thing! Ten minutes, maybe fifteen minutes, the hot fudge sundaes would come and I’d have to shake him to wake him up. And he’d wake up, he’d eat his hot fudge sundae, and back to sleep again. And then he would wake up when we landed in New York.

Smith: Meanwhile, you’re awake the whole time.

Bresnahan: Oh, yeah. That was funny. He would say to me, as we’d land in New York, “Oh, boy, I really slept good on that flight. How’d you sleep?” And I said, “Sir, I don’t sleep. How would it look if your Secret Service agent was asleep next to you?” “Oh, right,” he would say.

Smith: Sounds like you liked him.

Bresnahan: Oh, I did. I did very much. He was great to me and always very nice. We had a deal in Vail when we would travel like that, once again, we would leave very early in the morning to go. He was going to his boards and different things that he would go to.
Smith: Would he fly out of Eagle or would he go to Denver?

Bresnahan: We had to go to Denver. Eagle really wasn’t doing that much flying unless we got a private plane. Sometimes if we had a private plane and he was doing an event and they’d provide him with a private plane, we’d fly out of Eagle. But most times, we’d fly out of Denver and we would leave at 5:30 in the morning to get an early flight and there was a donut shop in Vail and the guy came to work at 3:00 in the morning because donuts, you make early in the morning. The baker’s there and it wasn’t even open and I got to know the guy. So, I would go and knock on the door because on my way to the Ford house I’d get him a cup of coffee and I’d get a bag of donuts for both of us because if he had coffee and donuts, then I could eat coffee and donuts. So, we’d get coffee and donuts and when he’d come downstairs in the car, I would get in the microwave (and he took his coffee black) and warm his coffee up just before we went out and would pass it back to him. “Oh, did you get any donuts?” I said, “Yes, sir” and pass the bag of donuts back. But that meant at 4 o’clock or 5 o’clock in the morning, I could have a cup of coffee to keep me going, so it was kind of a mutual deal.

And the funny thing was that Larry Buendorf was taking a trip with him. After we had done this a couple of times, Larry was going to take a trip with him, and it was one of those 5:30 in the morning things, and he called Larry at home the night before and said, “Larry, can you stop and get some coffee and donuts?” Larry called me the next day and said, “What have you started?” But, Larry went and got the coffee and donuts. He was a good guy. He took care of us and we took care of him.

Smith: That’s a good story.

Were you surprised at the amount of reaction at the time of his death?

Bresnahan: I wasn’t surprised by the reaction over what had happened to him and the respect that people had for him. I was surprised that so many people thought that we would be devastated, the Secret Service agents with him. People came up to me and were giving me condolences. I appreciated that and, you
know, I felt bad, but I knew that he was 90 and I knew that we can’t live forever. I felt bad that he had passed away, but I knew that it was going to happen and so I wasn’t devastated like a family member might be. I happened to attend a memorial service in Vail during his memorial service. During the service his Vail friend done a film of all the people making comments about his life and things where he had touched them. During the film people kept coming up to me and kind of patting me on the back and saying, “We’re sorry.” That was kind of nice and I was very glad that my wife and my daughter got to be a part of the memorial in Palm Desert. That turned out very nice for them, too.

Smith: Clearly they were both very active in this community. I mean, very visible, very much involved, and not just names on a board.

Bresnahan: Oh, you could see them walking down the street a lot of times. He would go into town and get his haircut. He had a barber named Karl. Karl happened to be Mrs. Ford’s hair dresser, too. Karl did haircuts and he did ladies’ hair. So, you would see Mrs. Ford going into Karl’s and you’d see the President going into Karl’s. The Fords would go to Pepe’s for dinner or The Left Bank. They had a series of restaurants around town that they would go to regularly and they were very active in the community.

The big deal was the Fourth of July parade. Every Fourth of July, the Fords were the grand marshals of the parade. And they would sit on Pepe’s deck. If you get a chance to go over to Vail and see that, they would sit up there and watch the parade. And I’ve seen the parade probably every year since 1977 and it hadn’t changed since then. The fire trucks and a real down home AmSmithan Fourth of July parade. The Fords would come every year to do that and every year, he would light the Christmas tree. They would come to Vail and they would hold the Christmas tree lighting. They would wait until he got to Vail to light the town Christmas tree. He often took the grandkids to that.

Smith: He had a good life.
Bresnahan: He did. He had a very good life. He worked pretty hard and he enjoyed his golf.

Smith: And he lived long enough – I mean, poor Lyndon Johnson who died the day before the Vietnam peace agreement was announced – and Gerald Ford lived long enough to know that most people had come around to his way of thinking on the pardon.

Bresnahan: Yes, I think he didn’t have any regrets. He regretted losing the election and you know, when an election’s that close, that had an impact.

Smith: Yes, they wanted an outsider.

Bresnahan: Yes.

Smith: They’re voting against Washington.

Bresnahan: Yes, but he didn’t let that get him down. He was upset about it for awhile and then he got over it.

Smith: Last question. How do you think he should be remembered?

Bresnahan: I think he should be remembered the way that he wanted to be remembered and that was as a person that came in at a time when we were in crisis and straightened the crisis out and carried us through. He would’ve liked to have had another four years to push whatever agenda that he had at the time, but he wanted to be remembered as getting us out of that mess. And for us that were around during that, that was a mess. We had the Vice President involved and we had the President involved and it was a tough crisis for us and he did pull us out of that.

Smith: Perfect.
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