

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Bill and Sally Hanlon
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: Let's start with your stories before you met the Fords. And how Vail came to be. Because it was clearly central in their lives for a very long time.

Bill Hanlon: The President started coming to Vail, I think it was 1968 that he first came, and he was an avid skier and he was an outdoorsman from his earlier days when he was a young person.

Smith: I've always wondered where he got the skiing bug, because we don't think of Michigan as a ski location.

Bill Hanlon: Well, I think it was Bowie Mountain that they used to travel up to and his fondness for the outdoors and being very athletic - that was his bag. And Mrs. Ford, I don't know. She skied, but he sure was there and made an effort to come to Colorado through a couple of friends, Ted and Nancy Kindel from Grand Rapids.

Smith: Who had already discovered Vail?

Sally Hanlon: They opened the first lodge, the Christiania.

Bill Hanlon: So, they came here in 1963. Vail opened in '62, but there were only three buildings.

Smith: What was here before then?

Sally Hanlon: His family was in the furniture business in Grand Rapids.

Smith: Okay.

Bill Hanlon: Ted Kindel.

Smith: But in terms of the geography and the region?

Bill Hanlon: Two sheep ranches and a couple of buildings in Vail, but that was it. That's when Vail Associates at that time purchased two ranches that I think were

about 500 acres each. They did some other things, but they were also in the process of applying for a forest service permit to access public land to operate a ski area. And, in those days, I think it was a lot easier, as you mentioned before. Could this happen again? Probably not. Land being one of the items.

Smith: In Colorado, how much of the ski industry was already developed? Was Aspen developed?

Bill Hanlon: Aspen was 1880 or 1890 and it was a mining town. And it almost became the capital of Colorado.

Smith: Really?

Bill Hanlon: Because there were many people in Aspen. Same thing with Leadville. And then Denver, because of the lower altitude, was probably chosen.

Smith: And am I right that the Fords originally had a condominium in Vail?

Bill Hanlon: They had a condominium in the Lodge of Vail, but I think it was 1968 that they came here. Again, with Ted and Nancy Kindel, who had decided to come here. They built the lodge. Then Larry Burdick, who had built in 1962 a building that is still there called the Red Lion, which is a restaurant. And Larry lived there. So that was their exposure to coming here.

Smith: Sounds like it was love at first sight. I mean, that they developed an affinity for the area almost on seeing it.

Bill Hanlon: Yeah, and I think one of the other items is their children were getting older and as you go to the university, whatever it is, this is vacation time and a place for the children to meet up with the parents for family vacation.

Smith: Later on they had the habit of spending Christmas out here. Was that something they did almost from the beginning? Because I would think the condominium would be pretty crowded for the whole family.

Bill Hanlon: Well, that was his time to have vacation, too, from the House of Representatives.

Sally Hanlon: When he became the president, that's when they rented the Bass House. Dick Bass was one of the original investors in Vail. And they always gave the Fords that house. That's where they had every Christmas and summer.

Bill Hanlon: And that became the summer White House.

Smith: Oh, okay. Now, how did your paths cross?

Bill Hanlon: I guess our first exposure was through Bob.

Sally Hanlon: Bob Barrett. Have you met Bob Barrett?

Smith: Yes. I've known Bob for years, had a great interview with Bob. Bob has more stories...

Bill Hanlon: Yeah, but I guess he came when the President was at that time Vice President, and we were up at a function for some thing up at the top of the mountain. And that's when Bob Barrett came over and introduced himself and we said, "Well, we're Bill and Sally Hanlon and we live in town," and all that. And that was at that function. And then it was the next summer...

Sally Hanlon: When Agnew resigned and then Nixon resigned.

Bill Hanlon: Yeah, and Nixon resigned. The President came to Vail.

Smith: That must have been somewhat unsettling, but also a big deal.

Bill Hanlon: It was a big deal to see the entourage of people coming in before for security for everything. And he had met us and it was a little nucleus that Bob wanted him to meet - some of the local guys - and we were considered some of the local guys. And when President and Mrs. Ford came, he wanted someone to present Mrs. Ford with some flowers in a very traditional way of welcoming the First Lady. And he called Sally and we had two children who were then four and five, to go up to the Bass House, which is a couple of hundred yards from where we lived in town. The town was a lot smaller then. And our children were there and we dressed them up in finery so they looked presentable for four and five year old children. Then the limousine and the security were there and we walked the children over and they had their flowers with them and a car came in at the presentation. The dog was there,

the President's dog Liberty, and it was good. We took some pictures and we still have them. That's how we met them. And, I don't know, there was just a little group of about twenty people.

Sally Hanlon: And that's the summer, too, that Bob called and asked them if we'd have them for dinner. He said, "Would you host a dinner for the Fords?" And we said, "Sure." We lived in a small condominium, so we said, "Well, sure." And that's how we really started becoming friends.

Smith: Was there anything about them that surprised you? People talk about how unspoiled they seemed to be, how natural and accessible. Was that an impression that you had?

Sally Hanlon: Absolutely. And people would ask them, "What do you talk about?" And I would say, "The same thing we talk to you about." It was nothing different.

Bill Hanlon: I think that was the surprising factor, because when you first meet him, you're meeting the 38th president. There were only 38 people before him holding that office and we were there. Nervous? Sure. But it was quite an honor. I mean, I grew up in Boston. Sally grew up in Boston. I worked for public utilities before coming to Vail. Sally was a school teacher in Newton, Massachusetts. We got married and then came out here and it was fine. We had two children and then all of a sudden we were asked to have our children present flowers to the First Lady of the United States.

Smith: Of course, the other side of the coin was they had never expected to be in those roles.

Bill Hanlon: They were mainly just regular people. And the fun thing is, what do you talk about? As Sally said, you talk about anything that was in the paper that day or the current events. But they were just very quiet people.

Smith: Talk about families – kids - as you got better acquainted?

Bill Hanlon: He was always concerned about, you know, the outdoors because he loved golf. And he loved politics. He was in it for forty some odd years.

- Smith: The whole Chevy Chase bit, the notion that this guy, who really was a naturally gifted athlete, was a stumbler, bumbler...the whole caricature of Ford. Was that something that he ever discussed?
- Sally Hanlon: He would laugh about it. You know, when he would hit the golf ball into a crowd, he'd just make fun of himself and laugh about it. But the press treated him so poorly in that regard. I mean, he was anything but a bumbling athlete.
- Smith: Well, it's interesting, because when he was on the ski slopes, waiting for the lift or actually on the slopes, there were always people who were waving, who wanted to get his attention. There were all sorts of distractions that any other skier would never confront.
- Sally Hanlon: Would never have. But I think most of the Vail people, a lot of people, left him alone. People would come into the store and ask where the Ford house was, but no one would ever tell them because we didn't want them to be driving by that house every day. So I think it was pretty low-key.
- Bill Hanlon: That was part of the low-key bit, but if you're the President of the United States and you fall skiing and there's someone around, it's going to make a newspaper.
- Sally Hanlon: And a lot of people thought that he shouldn't ski. That it's a dangerous sport and as president he shouldn't be out there. Not Vail people, but the nation.
- Bill Hanlon: But he just enjoyed it. And the operating company at Vail Associates at the time - I mean, to have a president skiing on your area. It wasn't a crowded ski run that he was on. They needed the security and they got it. It was wonderful. And you mentioned Larry Buendorf. Larry was one of the skiers with him all the time. Dale Underlick. Did you know Dale?
- Smith: No.
- Bill Hanlon: Larry was the Secret Service president(?), Dale was the head of the detail. And he's in Denver. He's a retired person. They were great friends, too.
- Smith: Did you see much of the kids? Were they up here much?

Sally Hanlon: Susan was here a lot more than the others. Susan and Steve. Susan was dating someone in Vail at the time in the summers.

Smith: Was she a skier?

Sally Hanlon: Mhmm. And then as she got older and got married, our Meg used to babysit for Susan, because they were close.

Bill Hanlon: But it was fun and exciting to be on a first name basis.

Smith: Were there places in Vail that were their favorites? Things to do, places to go, restaurants? Were there habits they had here that you could describe?

Sally Hanlon: They would go to almost any restaurant. They went to Gramshammer's a lot because they were very close to Pepe and Sheika. They would go to the Left Bank a lot. But people pretty much left them alone when they were in a restaurant.

Bill Hanlon: It was kind of fun, when they came here and after he was no longer President, they were here from the eighth of June until the end of September. And they were up here and they had a lot of visiting dignitaries.

Sally Hanlon: They had the World Forum.

Bill Hanlon: And the Jerry Ford Golf Invitational, also. So there was always somebody in and he was very active on boards.

Sally Hanlon: And he travelled a lot.

Bill Hanlon: And he travelled a lot, but when he came into town, Sally and Betty were very close, so there was "Let's have dinner next week."

Smith: We get a sense of what his daily routine was like. What about Mrs. Ford's?

Sally Hanlon: She had a lot of close friends and she had a group of friends from Denver that she remained very close with that helped her with starting the Betty Ford Center. And people like that would come to visit. She was very close to her interior decorator, the one that did her house in Beaver Creek. She would just call and say, "So and so is coming to town. Do you want to lunch with us?" And it was funny, until this day, I have two voicemails at home that I just

can't erase. And one of them was Jerry's birthday a couple of years ago. His birthday's in July and we joined them for dinner. I was out of town, but we joined them for dinner at the Left Bank and I said, "I should erase that, but I just can't do it."

Smith: Was that the last summer?

Sally Hanlon: I think it was.

Smith: That was the summer everyone told them, including the doctors, "You shouldn't be doing this." The altitude and all that. And she said to me, "We've had the quantity in life. We want the quality of life." You can understand that being here, but those last couple of summers must have been pretty rough.

Bill Hanlon: They were, because of the altitude. On all people the altitude is going to affect them.

Sally Hanlon: But that summer, someone started a group, a Friday lunch men's group. And you had President Ford as your guest that summer and he had trouble breathing and it was at Gramshammer's on the porch. And he was embarrassed.

Bill Hanlon: Yeah, because he wasn't moving and going from the car to the table that we had, there were probably ten guys. But he had to walk maybe 30 yards and in that time he had to stop, and the altitude got to him. He was a little dizzy and one of the Secret Service guys came over and we sat down in a chair.

Smith: Did you sense he was very proud? You'd never see him in a wheelchair.

Sally Hanlon: No. No cane.

Smith: No cane.

Bill Hanlon: But Mrs. Ford was a very, very active lady and when you see the Betty Ford Alpine Garden, it's beautiful. People go out there and enjoy her little park.

Sally Hanlon: And they went to all the Bravo concerts. They were out every night.

Smith: Really?

Sally Hanlon: Mhmm.

Smith: Well, we've been told that they were very visible, very involved.

Sally Hanlon: Mhmm.

Bill Hanlon: But Vail is a funny place and whether it was Jack Nicklaus walking down the street or Mrs. Ford or the President of the United States, people would not bother them. So they felt very, very comfortable and right now in the big city you can't do things like that. But here they could and they felt very, very comfortable. They didn't have to come in the side entrance to go to the Gerald Ford Amphitheater or anyplace. They could just walk down the street.

Smith: That's interesting because I think one of the banes of existence were the autograph seekers, particularly, the professionals who were out there.

Sally Hanlon: Right.

Smith: But I take it that he didn't have that as much to deal with in a setting like this.

Sally Hanlon: I don't think so.

Bill Hanlon: We've got a little pile of things. We've got some great notes and thank yous and this and that. But yeah, he was always responsive and it was great to be with him.

Sally Hanlon: And all those years, the Firestones lived next to them and Nikki Firestone and Betty were very close, so they did a lot together.

Smith: And clearly, the Betty Ford Center is the Betty Ford Center, but it's also the Leonard Firestone Center.

Bill Hanlon: They were great friends and when Mrs. Ford decided to do that, Leonard jumped in 100%.

Smith: There are people who say that she saved his life.

Bill Hanlon: That's right.

Sally Hanlon: He used to say that.

- Bill Hanlon: He told me that, and I'm an alcoholic, and he was.
- Smith: One of the things that's fascinating about President Ford – most of us, clichés become clichés for a reason, most of us tend to become a little more conservative as we get older. Maybe we have more to conserve. And fiscally, he was never anything but a tight-fisted traditional conservative. But on a lot of the social issues, whether it was abortion or gay rights or whatever, he seemed to be much more accepting, much less judgmental, for lack of a better word, than some 'social conservatives'. And was that related in any way to the alcoholism? To understanding that good people have weaknesses?
- Bill Hanlon: Well, you said that he was kind of conservative. In New England, we used to call that snug as bark to a tree. That's tight.
- Smith: He didn't tip generously on the golf course, I'm told.
- Sally Hanlon: He would check every bill at dinner.
- Bill Hanlon: Yeah, he did. He did like to pay his fair share.
- Smith: He was, like lots of people, a child of the Depression and really bore that mark.
- Sally Hanlon: Right. And can't stand to see any waste. But Bill always had a football bet with him.
- Bill Hanlon: Yeah, we used to bet more than any game was when Michigan played Notre Dame. And I always used to give him a little bit of jazz, you know, "You get these big rough kids from Michigan playing those nice Catholic kids from Notre Dame who were just going to school and trying to maintain a great grade point average so they could get into the seminary." "Now, don't start that business." He was a very easy person to talk to being the 38th president. One thing I did like, I did like to play golf. Now I'm not a great golfer, but it was very easy to play with him. And we would talk about things. But before I went out on the golf course with him, I would, always at the first tee, wherever we played, whether it was Vail, Arrowhead or Beaver Creek, it didn't matter, but there was usually he and I and two other people. And I always made a point that I myself would walk away and around the first tee,

you know, everybody that's there is out looking at President Ford and they're certainly not looking at the other three people of the foursome. I would always walk away and then get in a good position to say, "I'll be right back. Don't forget Mr. President, bring your wallet." And he'd say, "There you go." And when we left the tee box, he would say, "At least you're consistent." And I would say, "Yeah, but the people like it." You know, they always wanted to see him. And he was a good golfer. He hit that golf ball a long way.

Smith: Did he ever get a hole-in-one? Did he ever mention that?

Bill Hanlon: I don't know. I'm sure he got a lot of gimmes.

Smith: Well, now that brings up the somewhat famous story about Bill Clinton.

Bill Hanlon: When they were playing golf.

Smith: Speaking of gimmes.

Sally Hanlon: Uh huh.

Smith: Of flexible rules.

Bill Hanlon: Uh huh.

Smith: Was it Nicklaus or Palmer that they were playing with?

Sally Hanlon: He played with Nicklaus a lot and I think that's who it was that day.

Bill Hanlon: Yeah.

Smith: Then I think it was Nicklaus who had the great comeback when Clinton said, "Let's do this again tomorrow." And Nicklaus said, "Okay, but you have to play by the rules."

Bill Hanlon: We did have a lot of fun. I tried to call Mrs. Ford July 1st. The Fourth of July was a big thing - that's Americana days. But I would always call on President's Day and leave messages. She's out in Palm Springs and she gets the message that I called and we talk every once in awhile.

Smith: Do you really?

Bill Hanlon: Yeah.

Smith: That's interesting because I don't think she's ever gotten over losing him.

Sally Hanlon: I don't think so.

Bill Hanlon: They were a good team. They were good buddies.

Smith: It's interesting you put it that way. They hadn't been in the public eye for while, but people were maybe reminded, or some learned for the first time, of just how close that marriage was. Everyone knows about Ronnie and Nancy it was a revelation, I think, to see how close the Fords were.

Bill Hanlon: They were big _____ than I was. I mean I've got some great memories.

Smith: Did you ever see his temper?

Bill Hanlon: I heard a few GD's.

Smith: Was that on the golf course?

Bill Hanlon: Yeah, but that was just when he and I were there.

Smith: Never wrapped a club around a tree or anything?

Bill Hanlon: No. He did at himself if he did a bad shot. Some of the things we were talking about - whether it was everyday events or something - there were a few GDs or something, but he was always just a gentleman. And that's what everybody loved. And walking down the street with them or in a restaurant or something, people did respect him. But there was always somebody yelling in the background "Hey, Mr. President!" It was funny, one night I asked him if I could tell a story because I didn't know if I would offend anyone.

We were out at a function in the Vail Village Inn and there were probably 60-70 people and we're all in one room. Then came 10 o'clock and the function was over and it was a fundraiser for drama(?) or one of the events here. And there were two Secret Service people, one in the car and one inside the room. Sometimes they had two, sometimes three when they went out to events. But this night at the Vail Village Inn, it was in the dining room. And next to the

dining room in the bar, there were about 15 people from the University of Michigan. And it was about 10 o'clock at night and they were hooting and hollering and they found out President Ford was there in the next room. And finally 10 o'clock came and everybody's getting up. When he was talking to his wife, it was "Betty", when he was getting ready to go, he said, "Mrs. Ford, I think it's time to go." And so the Secret Service looked around and I was near him and he said, "Bill, when we go by that door with all those University of Michigan people, can you walk in front of the President (on the outside of him) between him and those people who I think have had too much to drink because they all want to shake his hand?" So, I had three minutes of glory with the Secret Service as President Ford's wingman.

Smith: They didn't get the chance to shake his hand?

Bill Hanlon: No, President Ford was between the two of us and we had a little barrier there and he waved and said "Thank you" because they were singing the Michigan fight song. And it was fun. And those are the things that I'll always remember. The night we went to a concert at the Gerald Ford Amphitheater and Willy Nelson was there. Sally and I and our children had gone to dinner with them and we drove out in the car to the Amphitheater and Willy Nelson was there. To get acknowledged and pointing to the presidential seats, I mean, we got some great people. We went to the dedication of the library and the rededication of the library.

Smith: That was a cold day.

Sally Hanlon: That was a cold day!

Smith: It was amazing to see Lady Bird. I mean, Caroline was inside, but there was Lady Bird outside with Barbara Bush kind of mothering her.

Bill Hanlon: The memories of the gentleness of both of them and they both were gentle people.

Smith: One thing people didn't fully realize, because they didn't proverbially wear it on their sleeves, and that was the importance of faith in their [the Fords] lives.

Sally Hanlon: Absolutely.

Smith: People think of Jimmy Carter and they think of born-again Christianity and they think of the Reagans and I'm pretty sure the Agnews, but the Fords really didn't.

Sally Hanlon: They really did. It was automatic. It wasn't for the press.

Bill Hanlon: I think you could see that in their adoring of the children and the children adoring them. They had a nice, tight relationship.

Sally Hanlon: They really were close.

Smith: And they enjoyed grandparenting?

Sally Hanlon: Oh, very much so. Very much so. But, as Betty used to say, like we all say, "It's wonderful to see them all come at Christmas, but it's wonderful to kiss them all goodbye." But the grandkids were all pretty close.

Smith: Obviously he had a sense of humor, but he couldn't tell a joke. He would laugh at someone else's joke?

Bill Hanlon: He would appreciate it. Another thing, with Mrs. Ford, you could tell about the allergy.

Sally Hanlon: When we first met them, the second or so time they came for dinner, we invited a number of friends and we spent a lot of time in New England, so we decided we would have a lobster dinner, not knowing she's dreadfully allergic to shellfish. So, when the Secret Service told me that the day of the dinner, we just had steak cooked at the same time for her. You'll probably be interviewing Rod Slifer, but he and his wife were at this dinner and he cracked open a piece of lobster to break the shell and he squirted Betty Ford all over the face with lobster juice and he grabbed his napkin and he kept trying to wipe her face. We all thought that was pretty funny that the one person who's allergic is the one he hits.

Smith: Let me ask you something that among those who know them well is well-known - she had a much more ribald sense of humor.

Sally Hanlon: Oh, very, very funny. Very funny. You couldn't say much about that in front of him because he was infuriated at that nonsense, that there was no respect

for the office. In a private conversation with just the four of us, he would say, "It's disgraceful. It's embarrassing." So that was just a subject that none of us talked about, but you could talk about it to Betty and she'd be funny about it.

Bill Hanlon: He was disappointed in him.

Smith: I heard him say Clinton had such talent. He'd say, "If there's one thing I'd do over in life, I would've give much more attention to public communications." And he saw in Clinton someone who could do it effortlessly.

Sally Hanlon: A master.

Smith: Absolutely. And I think he actually used to say "He could sell refrigerators to the Eskimos," or something like that. So he had great respect for Clinton's gifts, which made him all the more disappointed. That, you know, you never have the perfect package.

Sally Hanlon: And he would say things like, "I feel badly for him because it's an illness with him." You know, he had compassion about it even though he was angry.

Smith: That's interesting. That goes back again to this notion whether perhaps living with and learning about alcoholism broadened his perspective.

Bill Hanlon: That it's a disease just as other addictions are. I'd been out visiting him and I'd played, I think, the first twelve Betty Ford Golf Invitations out of Palm Springs Easter weekend. And I would go over just because I was there for three days or something. I'd go over and see some of the people that I knew at the Betty Ford Center who I met golfing and all. And I would just hang around for awhile and that's a complex that she was so proud of. And he was proud of her doing it. And their mutual friend Leonard was the financial force behind it. They just made it happen.

Smith: They'd have an annual alumni weekend and you'd see the President cooking hot dogs. He was one of the troops. Before the intervention took place, you obviously had established a friendship. Did you know? Was it visible?

Bill Hanlon: No, it wasn't obvious to me.

Sally Hanlon: No, because we were all smoking and drinking, so it was just part of the group. And she was never stumbling, falling down. I mean, she was always composed.

Bill Hanlon: And she pointed out in her book, she made sure she did the packing if they were going on a trip.

Sally Hanlon: She also would say of her days in Washington, "We always would have a drink before we went out just to get ready to go out to drink," which is true.

Smith: It's interesting. We've talked to so many people, it's hard to imagine, but 40 years ago, it was a totally different culture. People just drank a lot more.

Sally Hanlon: And nobody drank wine, they drank Martinis and Manhattans and it was just different.

Bill Hanlon: And whisky, they drank lots of whisky. They didn't drink that wine. There wasn't enough wine around then.

Smith: My sense was his health was really remarkably good up until about his ninetieth birthday. One of the things that must've been really difficult for him was when the doctors said you have to cut out the travel. And travel for him was—

Sally Hanlon: That was his life.

Smith: Yeah.

Sally Hanlon: And he loved speaking at a lot of those. I mean he was an invited speaker many times and people loved having him and he loved doing it.

Smith: Yeah.

Bill Hanlon: It was kind of hard to see in the last few years that he used to come to Vail, to see him out for lunch or out for dinner. And then when he'd get up from the table, he would have to stand there a second to get a breath and to make sure his equilibrium was fine.

Smith: Did he talk about it at all?

Sally Hanlon: She did. He didn't.

Smith: About the difficulties of aging? I mean, one of the granddaughters said to me that she said, "This getting older is not easy." Something like that.

Sally Hanlon: She'd say things like, "It's not for the faint of heart."

Bill Hanlon: But he had to stop skiing because it's kind of an age thing. Golf is different, but I think he always maintained fitness.

Sally Hanlon: Well, he swam every day.

Bill Hanlon: He swam every day and it was important for him to watch his weight and to maintain a level of athletic ability.

Smith: And he was a workaholic, even up here. I mean, the mail, he never stopped being a congressman in the sense that the mail—

Sally Hanlon: And he was the one in the last years who always wrote the thank you notes. It was always his writing.

Smith: Well, it was funny. I know the staff in Rancho Mirage and I assume up here, Saturdays, you worked. And Penny's story was that he'd work Sunday if he could've gotten them to. So, after 9/11 and the anthrax scare, they had to explain to him why he wasn't getting Saturday mail. Well, he wasn't about to accept that. They had members of the staff put on those costumes and go through the mail so he could have his Saturday mail.

Sally Hanlon: That's interesting.

Smith: I mean, I sensed he was very self-disciplined, for example, the fact that when she stopped drinking, he stopped drinking. When he wanted Susan to stop smoking, he stopped smoking.

Bill Hanlon: Helping the person that he wanted to help was by doing the same thing himself.

Smith: One of the most poignant stories we have is from a woman, who was their cook. And she'd been through the Betty Ford Center. She'd never been in a plane and had never seen snow. And they brought her up here and he took her

by the hand to ski school, made sure they got her ski clothes, the whole thing. And at one point, she fell off the wagon while she was working for them she offered to resign and, of course, Mrs. Ford said, "No way." She talks about how she learned discipline and having a sense of purpose, and how he in a very quiet kind of way was the teacher. She didn't want to get on the plane, so he got the pilot of the plane and they walked all around the plane and explained the engines and everything else. Just remarkably kind.

Sally Hanlon: Yeah, exactly.

Bill Hanlon: One time, they were at the Bass House and a cold weather snap came through. This was Christmas week. And on Christmas day, the Bass House lost all the heat in the boiler. Now, this is getting awful cold when dropping from 72 down to 60. The person who did the repairs was a guy by the name of Bill Burnett, Burnett Plumbing and Heating. Bill had been born and raised in Mintum and if you needed something done, he was the one who watched out for the Bass House. Bill was kind of a little historian on the town of Mintum and he wrote a little book and in the book he told the story and he told it to me. But he got a call on Christmas morning at 10 o'clock that the Bass House was out of heat and so he said, "I knew I'd be out there for a few minutes, so I packed my sandwich and thermos of coffee. And I went out there and we looked and I found out what the problem was going to be, but it would take three or four hours to fix it. So President Ford came down. I explained what we were going to do and that it'd be three or four hours. 'So, while my son goes down and gets the part, I'll have lunch.' He was going to have lunch in the garage. And President Ford brought him over to a little room and President Ford went upstairs to the kitchen and he got a sandwich and a cup of coffee and he came down and sat with Bill Burnett, the plumbing and heating guy, and they spent an hour Christmas Day just shooting the breeze and waiting for the part to arrive. He said, "There I was sitting in the little room off the garage with the President of the United States." He said, "Not bad for a kid from Mintum."

Smith: It's a great story and it reinforces what we've been told. The Secret Service agents were very appreciative because the Fords would go out of their way to

be sure that they didn't have events on Christmas day so the agents could have the holiday themselves. Which is pretty thoughtful.

Sally Hanlon: It really is.

Bill Hanlon: Very thoughtful.

Smith: Do you miss him?

Bill Hanlon: Yeah.

Sally Hanlon: Yeah, you do.

Smith: I mean, does the community, because they must have become such a part of the local scene?

Sally Hanlon: And so much has been renamed in their honor. You do miss them. You miss seeing them around.

Bill Hanlon: Like the Gerald Ford Golf Tournament, that was an event that went on for 20 years. The people that used to come to Vail, I mean, Bob Hope came 19 of the 20 years. The event was for 20 years. He was here 19 of the 20 years and the one year he missed, he was over with the USO. So, the nucleus of people that we used to have coming here was outstanding and it was always an event for everybody in the tournament.

Sally Hanlon: Even today, as frail as Betty is, like a few weeks ago, she asks by name "How is so and so doing?"

Smith: Really alert?

Sally Hanlon: And we would occasionally - and Sheika does this all the time - would send her pictures of what's going on in Vail. "You wouldn't believe the construction." And she's still very alert.

Smith: So, I assume there was never any doubt about selling the house. I mean, the house was put on the market even when he was still alive, wasn't he? Toward the very end of his life?

Sally Hanlon: No, I think it was right at the end because I saw Susan and I said, “Are you coming to Vail with the kids?” and she said, “I’m not sure, because we really don’t have a place to stay anymore.” And I said, “We always can find you a place to stay. That’s not an issue.” But she came for the ski classic that year with a friend. Their husbands didn’t come. And they really haven’t come much since that. And as she said, skiing is expensive for Mike and his family, for any of them. So, I think it was two summers ago Betty spent the summer in New Mexico. No, she was going to be in San Diego to be with Jack, but then I think she went to Susan’s because it was just a cooler climate. In New Mexico?

Bill Hanlon: Yeah. Great friends.

Smith: I think you told me the last time you saw him. Do you remember?

Bill Hanlon: That was at our lunch that we had.

Sally Hanlon: Yeah. They didn’t stay through all of September that summer. They left earlier.

Bill Hanlon: He just wasn’t feeling good and on the advice of our doctors here that told him “You’d better get out of here and get to a lower altitude.”

Smith: Were you surprised by the amount of reaction when he died? Because he’d been out of the public eye for awhile. And it seemed to build as the week went on.

Sally Hanlon: Yeah, Susan and I’ve said and people have remarked about it. It was so kind to him when he was there, all those wonderful, glorious things. It’s a shame they didn’t write and say those things when he could appreciate it. That was hard for me.

Smith: But the public outpouring.

Sally Hanlon: And the stamina that she had to go through those days.

Bill Hanlon: Well, that was a long process. We went to Palm Springs and then we went to the National Cathedral in Washington and those events were –

Smith: Demanding, physically as well as emotionally.

Bill Hanlon: Demanding.

Sally Hanlon: And then to go to Grand Rapids after that, too.

Smith: At the very end, because I'd been with ABC during the first part of the week and with the family at the second part. We'd been told at the beginning at Saint Margaret's, "Don't be surprised if you see her in a wheelchair." And, of course, we never did. And then again, in Grand Rapids, briefly, she got up with Steve and walked all that way. And the next week someone in the desert commented on that and expressed admiration for her ability to do that and she said, "Well, that's what my husband would've wanted."

Sally Hanlon: He was so considerate that he wouldn't die on Christmas day. I always said we'd say that about the Mash, that the group the doctors kept somebody alive through Christmas day so his family wouldn't have that to remember every Christmas.

Smith: How do you think he should be remembered? I realize it's colored by your own experiences and all that.

Bill Hanlon: Well, all the years that he was in the House of Representatives, I think he was honorable and everybody liked him. You know, today there's the splitting of parties.

Sally Hanlon: And the scandals surrounding everybody.

Bill Hanlon: And he and Tip O'Neill were great friends. They just liked each other. And, yeah, one was a Republican and one was a Democrat, but they had to work together. They had to work together to accomplish things. And I think that he should be remembered as a person who went in there under very tough situations. The Nixon resignation and the pardon, those were very, very controversial. And that's why he should be remembered as the leader of free world. His book was labeled correctly, *A Time to Heal*. And he had to do it. He had to do a lot of things, but he had to run the free world also at the same time. He will always be remembered as a quiet man and a quiet President. But the people that I think got to know him loved him.

- Smith: How do you think she should be remembered?
- Sally Hanlon: I think for her honesty, her openness whether it was with family conflicts or the alcoholism or whatever, the breast cancer, I mean, nothing was behind closed doors. Whenever she was interviewed on the TV talk shows, she just said it like it was.
- Smith: We talked about the change of attitude about alcohol, but it's hard for people to appreciate how closeted a subject breast cancer was 35 years ago. A, it was regarded as a death sentence and, B, it engendered almost a sense of shame. People didn't talk about it. And she almost singlehandedly transformed that.
- Sally Hanlon: And it was shortly after that - she and Happy Rockefeller were pretty friendly - that Happy was able to announce that she too had it.
- Smith: I've been working for ten years on a suitably epic biography of Nelson Rockefeller and it's a huge and very colorful subject.
- Sally Hanlon: Well, she one time called, maybe a Tuesday, and said, "Are you and Bill available tomorrow night for dinner?" And I said, "Well, I think so. Why?" And she said, "Well, Happy is coming in with her two boys," and they were thirteen and sixteen. And she said, "I don't know how to talk to a thirteen year old, so maybe you and Bill could join us for dinner." Which we did. We went to Eagle Vail to Whisky Creek Golf Club, the restaurant at Eagle-Vail Golf Course. But President Ford called in the middle of the afternoon and I was in the travel business at the time and he called and asked if I could come over to the house because Happy's plane was delayed and he wanted to know how he could get information on where she was in the air and what time she'd be landing. So, he just called the Stapleton airport and said, "This is President Ford and I want to know..." And I said, "That's what I should do. When I want information, I should call and just say, 'I'm Betty Ford and I'd like to know...'" Well, that night at dinner. It was very interesting, it was fun. There was as many security guards and Secret Service as there were just the ten of us at dinner. And it was a fun dinner. I mean, the Rockefeller kids were just so terrific and sharp as could be. And we were talking and, at one point, I think it was the youngest one that said, "We should take down the

Statue of Liberty if we don't mean that." You know, that we welcome your tired, your hungry, your poor, and that's no longer the case. And he was fascinating to talk to. And my daughter at the time was about eleven. They weren't invited to the dinner. But I came home and I said, "Meg, I found him."

Smith: That's Mark and he's every bit as impressive as an adult as he was a kid.

Sally Hanlon: As he was at thirteen.

Smith: Obviously, Happy did a great job at raising those boys.

Listen. I can't thank you enough. This has been great fun and I've learned a lot. And hopefully it was nothing painful for you.

Sally Hanlon: It's been fascinating.

Bill Hanlon: It's an honor to be asked to do this because we loved both of them and their family and their values and the work they did for America and for Vail and for the people that they've influenced.

Smith: Well, thank you for helping us.

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