

**Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project**  
**Bob Barrett**  
**Interviewed by**  
**Richard Norton Smith**  
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Smith: When did your paths first cross?

Barrett: Well, I was working as a public information officer in the army up at the Carlyle barracks at the army war college. And I had two tours at Vietnam and they had sent me back to graduate school to get a degree in journalism/public communication in Syracuse. And when I finished, the command general staff sergeant said, "You're going for what we call a utilization tour. You know, the Congress is after us for sending too many of you guys to graduate school on the taxpayer's dollar and we don't utilize you. It's just for your credentials, so to speak. So you *will* be at the war college for three years. Don't call us. We don't want to hear from you." Bah, bah, bah-bah-bah.

After about eight months, I get a call saying I was being considered for the position of army aide to the president - got the call from the White House. I remember it was ten after 10:00 on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July - all the tens. Brent Scowcroft, who was the military assistant, hadn't gotten to NSC yet. Nixon was president. July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1974, you know better than I the state of things right then. So, they called me ten after 10:00 and said they needed my answer by 11:00 o'clock. So I went in and talked to the general who said a whole bunch of good things happen to me, I've been lucky in that way. Next thing you know, it's that afternoon, I'm in a helicopter. They picked me up at Carlyle barracks, they flew me down, put me into the Hay-Adams.

The next morning, a car picked me up, put me over on a JetStar at Andrews and flew me out to San Clemente. Nixon is out there. And the final revelation and the final condemnation of the fact that Nixon *did* know about the break-in was a completed news item on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July, you know, in terms of things were bad before then, but this was really bad. People thought I wasn't knowledgeable of all this stuff at that time, I was just a military guy. And everybody that knew - Haig, chief of staff - everybody out there knew

that Nixon was either going to resign or be impeached. So then the game started and who the new military aide for the president was, on a scale of 1 to 10, dropped to minus 9 million.

I used to go in there and sit each day. It was amazing. This little military office out at the temporary place in San Clemente. I'd go in there, get there on time at 7:30. The last thing I did with any confidence was, you went through this big gate at San Clemente. You must have been there some time. No? They had a big gate and, typical White House, the gate guard which at most places would be like a private, maybe a corporal, they had a master sergeant at the gate there. They'd given me the pin to show that I was cleared in and the last thing I'd do with any confidence was I'd salute the guy at the gate, "Morning. How are you?" Then I'd look in the rearview mirror as the gate was closing and think what the hell am I going to do now? You'd literally sit there because it was panic and then - ba-da-boom - the dominoes fell like a son of a gun.

Smith: Did you have any contact with Nixon?

Barrett: I saw him. They tried every once in awhile to rejuvenate the process because the Pentagon sent you over there and say, "Okay, we think this is the guy you want." But then the White House staff has to decide and your last interview was with the president. So, they went back to Washington. I was out in the Sequoia, myself and Jack Brennan, when they brought Bebe Rebozo in and he and Nixon are sitting on the stern of the Sequoia. Bebe's job was to find out [if] he was settled down enough and everything else, that if he said he was going to resign, that they could rely on that and go ahead. Then they sent me up to Camp David. Another person that had to put their seal of approval on you was Rosemary Woods. I had breakfast with Rosemary Woods up at Camp David.

Smith: What was that like?

Barrett: Oh, it was bizarre. By this time, I'm figuring out - even *I* know - this guy's toast. It's too bad. So, it just kept on cascading and then he gave his speech

on the 8<sup>th</sup>. His resignation speech was a major speech and the next day, Ford took over. And that was it.

Smith: What was Rosemary Woods' mood?

Barrett: I remember just a few people like Haig. Of course he was down here, but like Ken Cole, Rosemary Woods, the few people I was in contact with, there was really almost a commendable façade of normalcy; like maybe it wasn't their pay grade to be deciding whether the first president in history ever is going to resign. There was just this demeanor, and that's what made it so bizarre. You'd leave these little appointments that you had and then you'd go back and pick up the paper or put the television on, and then you'd just been in la-la land with somebody there.

And then he took over. I still thought I was going to get my walking papers. I figured that he'd have some obligation to guys who had been with him as vice president. I didn't know how the system worked. Or somebody else might have an input as to who they wanted in there as an aide. It was about the 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> of August when it sort of worked down to my level, or at least got to me, and I got a call. Cheney had come in and was helping. Rumsfeld was going to replace Haig and then Cheney ultimately replaces Don. So, I get a call to go on over to the Oval Office.

First time I'd put on my uniform, the rest of the time I was in civilian clothes. I went over there and I walked in. The first thing he did - he's behind the desk - he gets up, just immediately comes out and he introduces himself and everything. And the first thing he says is, "I'm sorry there's been so much confusion." He says, "I hope you'll consider staying with us." Just like that. So, I'm a major and he's Commander-in-Chief. In subsequent times, you've probably seen the liberties that I was privileged to take with him and everything else. But I always tell this story where he said, "I hope that you'll consider staying with us." "Oh, I'll get back to you." A major, you know, but that's the tone of him. The first thing he said, "Would you please consider staying with us?"

- Smith: There's a wonderful story. Of course you know they were living out in Alexandria that first week. And the first day that he's moved into the White House and walked into the West Wing and there's a guard opening the door, saluting.
- Barrett: Mmm, Marines.
- Smith: And the president walks over and says, "Hi, I'm Jerry Ford. I'm going to be living here. What's your name?"
- Barrett: Yeah. We went to church, and we went over to the house, and he was living in the house. Went to the first state dinner with King Hussein from the house in Alexandria. And so, after church, we went over. Everything's being boxed up, they were going through all the confusion that every family goes through when they move, only theirs was a little bit more, but they got more help, too. But, he walks into this room downstairs and there's an open box and there, folded but not put in the box yet, were his Navy uniforms. And he says to Betty, "Well, look at this Betty. We ought to see whether Goodwill or somebody wants this." Just like that. And she says, "Oh, Jerry." And I say, "You know, Mr. President, I hate to tell you. I don't think that's your call anymore. They're going different places with that stuff." But he said, "Well, you know, we can't be moving this stuff around. It has to be Goodwill or something like that," talking about his uniforms.
- Smith: That almost surreal modesty was very real.
- Barrett: Yeah. It was hard to imagine. That's what I said. He never would've made it through a 25-month primary and general campaign period. He'd be the first one to admit it. He would've also admired Obama's rhetoric because he knew, you know better than myself, not only with Ford but with the other guys you've been around, that he just had the greatest regard for somebody who had that gift of speech. Not just articulation, but eloquence. Because he didn't have it, he knew he didn't have it, and he just would've had a tough time being the kind of guy that he was.
- Smith: He got better, didn't he?

Barrett: Absolutely.

Smith: Because there is that age-old argument that Reagan did him no favor by running against him, but in some ways he actually made him a better candidate.

Barrett: No, he was good. And he knew. I remember one time when we were in Chicago, Terry O'Donnell and myself, Cheney. And he gave a speech in this high school like a gymnasium and he's up there and he's giving a hell of a speech. It's just coming out right, it's really good. This is like the fourth stop of the day and everything else. And we could take such liberties with him, he liked it. He loved jokes. He never told a joke in his life. I don't know if you ever heard. I never heard that man tell a joke. He loved to hear them and he had a great sense of humor and he would laugh like a son of a gun, but the joke, himself, he never could tell one.

We knew he was going to come off that stage feeling full of himself because he knew, "Well, I hit that tonight." We were back in what was a cafeteria kitchen, old pots and pans, big place. So, what happened was, we all hide behind pots and pans, you know, these big islands of stuff. Kennerly, myself, O'Donnell, Cheney, we're hiding. And we took this mascot, they'd given him a tiger, which is the school's mascot and it was sitting tiger and it was about that high, stuffed. And we put it in the elevator and we put a sign around it that said, "Nice speech." Because we knew the whole ride back we were just going to get it.

He walked in, he's waving and everything, he turns around and looks at the elevator and looks around right away and, "Alright, where are you guys." And he was just like that. He was just something else.

Smith: He had a great sense of humor.

Barrett: Oh, he had a great sense of humor and he loved the stories. He'd [inaudible], "Bob, do this", "Do that." And some of the stories about people, he just loved it. He loved the laughter and everything else.

- Smith: My sense from being around him and little bits of pieces from others, most politicians love to gossip and I sensed he wasn't a gossip. I mean, he liked political back and forth, but he wasn't someone to gossip about other people's lives.
- Barrett: He had unbelievable discipline. I'm going to say a number and deliberately make it a little bit absurd, but I guarantee you that he could keep fifty confidential relationships without blinking an eye. Like, for example, you've had lots and lots of time with him, Richard, other people and everything else. I bet you *nobody*, nobody knows things and he's gone and nobody will ever know certain things about the Warren Commission, as a case in point. And that could have been such an exploiting big thing. If he had any grandeur or any of the quality that you're talking about now, he could've made, if not a fortune of dollars, he could've made a fortune of interest by just discussing the Warren Commission and Kennedy for the rest of his life.
- Smith: That's fascinating that you say that, because the way he did it was *so* typical, it was so under the radar. The only thing I ever heard about it, and then I thought "Oh, Jesus!", after the Profiles in Courage award, he did an oral history and in the course of it, he let slip the fact that, they didn't put it in the report at the time for reasons that would be obvious, but that one of the theories that was advanced by a number of folks that he apparently found credible as to why Oswald did what he did was because he was sexually impotent. And he had to demonstrate to Marina that he was more of a man than she thought. And, given the climate of the day, they wouldn't put that in print. That's a pretty extraordinary revelation.
- Barrett: It is. It is.
- Smith: And yet he, it dribbled out during the course of this --
- Barrett: You know, he had extraordinary discipline. I remember after she went into Long Beach, end of February '78, and she comes out and she's battling the first period of time when it's more difficult and stuff like that.
- Smith: There was nothing automatic.

Barrett: No. So, three months go by, now it's time for them to go to Vail for the summertime. So, we get up to Vail and we arrived and she's downstairs unpacking. There's like three floors in this house they used to use and we're on the center floor. You've probably seen him do this a lot, too, just talking how considerate he is. He's in his house and he's with me, you know, we'd been together quite a while through almost everything, a good number of years and all that, but always, a number of times he did this. He would look to make sure no one was around because he was going to say something that if someone else heard it and it wasn't meant to be heard by them, that'd be offensive. And he looked around the house. Of course, there's nobody there except he and I and he said, "Bob," and you know, boy, he wanted it. He loved those two martinis a night. Loved it. And we always used to fear if he went to the third one, if the day was a little bit tough, because he could turn. I used to say Ford was 98% koala bear and 2% wounded grizzly.

The thing that made it so interesting was you never know when that 2% grizzly was going to show. You kept on getting put to sleep by that 98% koala bear and then all of a sudden and he would turn into the lineman and center from Michigan and he would actually - like Les McCullom once said - "You know what happens to that man when he gets mad? He grows." That's Les McCullom, Air Force One. Because he came on to the plane one time angry. He was just this way. And he looked at me and he said, "You know, it doesn't work when one's drinking and one isn't drinking, so I'm going to stop." He turned that glass over that night and never had another drink in his life.

Four or five years later, Susan is the daughter that wraps all of us fathers around their thumb. You know, the daughters rule. The sons rule their mothers. And so Susan is smoking and we're smoking with her and sometimes we'd be sneaking and sometimes \_\_\_\_\_. We're sitting in the office out in Rancho Mirage and he says in his totally ineffective way as far as Susan's concerned, "Well, you know, Susan, I'm pretty concerned about the fact that you're smoking." And Susie being this snippet little thing that she is, she's great, she says, "Well, Daddy, I'll stop smoking cigarettes if you stop smoking pipes."

He got up from his chair, he went over, - I bet you the collection, I don't know, but it has to be worth a quarter of a million dollars. I mean, there were ivory pipes and every head of state and every time he went somewhere, he got another pipe. He gathered up all the pipes in the office, there were a bunch of them there. Got a box from the conference room in the office out in Rancho Mirage. All the pipes. Leaves, goes all over the house. Takes all the pipes, calls Penny in and says, "Send these to the museum." Last time he smoked a pipe. Forty-two years smoking a pipe and he stopped, like, on a dime.

And that same thing goes back to what you're saying. He, a relationship with a Tip O'Neill or something with a Rockefeller or something, like he used to say, "He wouldn't say you-know-what, if he had a mouthful." And he didn't. And the other thing was I used to kid him all the time. He'd get angry and he'd try to use profanity. And I said, "Mr. President, don't do it. You got no rhythm. You're really lousy when you use profanity." He couldn't complete one of the words. He'd say, "Well, Jes-!", "Well, God da-!" He'd never get through the word, let alone the sentence that had profanity in it. And that whole thing was him. He had an unbelievable amount of stuff inside him when he left this world, I guarantee you. And he kept it all.

Smith: There's a wonderful story. Stu Spencer confirmed it and actually sort of embroidered it with a sequel, which is what makes the story great. Stu's in the campaign, '76. It's not going terribly well and he's got a candidate who is not a great campaigner. They had all these surveys. And part of the problem is that the president would go out because he loved it. He would go out. He would give one of these Hartmann speeches that wasn't great and the numbers would go down. What are you going to do? So, Friday night, he's in the Oval Office, the only people there, himself, Dick Cheney, and the president. It's the end of a long week and he's frustrated and he's trying to find a euphemism and the president isn't getting it. So he finally says, "You know, Mr. President, you're a great president, but you're a fucking lousy campaigner."

Well, first of all, what other president could you say that to? And Ford, it just washed over him. But the sequel is what makes the story. That story

appeared when Germond and Witcover wrote their book about the campaign. And Stu went ballistic. He called Cheney to chew him out, he was really upset. And Cheney lets him wind down and finally says, "Stu, there was a third person in that room." And it suddenly dawns on Stu, the president told the story on himself. Which is extraordinary.

Barrett: That's it, you know. He just had this quiet discipline, he had an inner strength - and outer strength, too. He was a strong person, physically and morally and so forth. He had his own little edges of it, it was different than your morality or my morality and so forth, but within the context of himself, he just had everything buttoned down so tight it was unbelievable. It was just amazing to watch his discipline. Like the doctor, when he had a lot of the problems with a little bit of the strokes and everything toward the end and so forth, wouldn't let him swim. They were concerned about something happening, about that whole balance thing and stuff like that. So, he didn't like that.

I used to have to arrange for swimming every time we'd go anywhere. He just had to have a swimming pool. You could get away with it every now and again, but had to have that swimming pool. And he was always surprised by the response that people had to him. He just never associated himself with being a president, you know, just Jerry Ford. So he called the doctor and he said, "Doc, can you come over here, make a house call?" Of course, the doctor says yes. He said, "It's really nice, he's coming over." So he comes over, Ford takes him outside and says, "I want to show you something." So, he goes in to the shallow end of the pool and he gets to the point where the water's up to about his chest, gets his back to one side of the pool, across the narrow side, and starts this, like, running against the water to the other side. He runs around and comes back and he looks at the doctor and says, "Can I do that?" And the doctor says yes. So, that's what he did for an additional period of time before that went away, too. He was just amazingly disciplined and after that stuff, it was just great.

Smith: There's a poignant story which may or may not survive the cut, and you may have heard this. It was toward the end, not the last summer they went up to Vail. I think it was the summer before the last summer they went up to Vail.

And he was in a hurry and Reverend Cert wanted to drop by. And the president was eager to return to Vail. And Penny's trying to forestall this, and "What's up? What's up? What's going on?" She says, "Reverend Cert would like to come by and give you a blessing". "Screw the blessing!"

Barrett: He was so funny with all this stuff. Like I said, the unexpected behavior, he was so predictable, he's so reliable and he just kept on going, then all of a sudden (snaps). I tell you, this was when he was president. Century Plaza Hotel. We're up on the top floor, whatever floor it was they had the presidential suite on, we were there, and we were going to go down to the mezzanine level. It wasn't the very lowest floor, but it was a like one level above for a political rally out in there, '76. And it's time to go, so we come out and we all walk down, the entourage, four or five agents, Terry, myself, Lou Cash, and Kennerly and so forth. We all get into the elevator. They've got the Secret Service. This was great. When something like this happens, the Secret Service is always fun.

So the doors close and they've got it all cleared to go all the way down. The thing goes down two floors and stops. The door opens up and there's a guy you could only describe as Happy Herbie from Iowa. You know, I mean, like he's out in California. He's got one of these full-brimmed hats on, it's a bluish hat. He's got on a shirt, it's kind of a plaid shirt and so on. And he anticipates this door and the door opens up and this guy sort of goes and backs off. Now the doors close again ready to go down. The elevator goes up. They've got some circuitry screwed up, the elevator's going up. So Ford was like, you hear the breathing start, you hear the breathing start just like that. "Sorry, Mr. President," says the agent, and everything else. You always love to see the Secret Service get caught up in this deal, you know, everything is so perfect. The thing goes down again. Stops at the same floor.

Now, in the course of the 40 seconds this took, this little Herbie from Iowa has gone from being absolutely and totally intimidated and in awe of this situation to being totally in charge of this situation. Because the door opens up again and this guy goes (looks up confidently). And you could see the Secret Service. The doors close again and he says, "Goddamn it all, if it stops

here again, let him in on!” We rode down. But he’s just great. People just have no idea the laughter and the crazy stuff that we used to do together. And I mean everybody.

Smith: Of course, there’re stories about reporters on the ’76 campaign. And even that whole relationship. I mean, it was no accident that one of the eulogists was a journalist because of the message that he sent. He liked reporters.

Barrett: He did, he liked them. He thought they were a good bunch of guys. He liked to hang with them and he really had no qualms about it at all. I was telling Erik earlier today, it was a different deal, though. It’s changed quite a bit. Exposure to cable, punditry versus reporting, the idea that information moves so fast, so competitive, and da-da-da-da, ad nauseum. That’s the way it is right now. But back then there was fairness.

Like Helen Thomas, she wouldn’t give you a break if Betty Ford had a drinking problem, it wouldn’t matter a bit if it was impacting his ability to be president or if it kept him from going to a state dinner overseas. Oh, no, that was fair game. But if it didn’t, they’d say, “How’s he doing?” And I’d say, “Oh, he’s doing fine.” But then they would watch. Your credibility was at stake and the next time they saw him, if he wasn’t fine, they’d be all over you like a cheap suit. But if he was fine, they didn’t report about Betty Ford the whole time that she was away.

Smith: How much of that was known? More precisely, how defined was it? Because people sort of used the euphemism “Mrs. Ford’s problem” and no one ever really defined what it was.

Barrett: No, it wasn’t, but, I don’t think that, certainly not me, I mean was around a lot up in Camp David, a lot of their personal times. The aides, a little bit different in that regard, you’re with them a lot. But I think, like when she went to Long Beach, we had a real interesting \_\_\_\_\_ Persch(?), the doctor, the Navy doctor. She had gone through and was still sort of going through detox and she went through some heavy times. And we went to this office and Persch(?) is sitting there, this military place, it was a long narrow office and there was a desk at the end but there weren’t two chairs in front of it.

There was a chair on the side and President Ford and her were sitting on this side. I'm sitting on this side and he and Mrs. Ford are sitting on the other side. And we were going to go out and Persch(?) and I are going to see two hundred reporters assembled there and I'm going to read this statement. And he's sitting there next to her, and boy, he never left her side through all that stuff. May be late in arriving over the years of seeing it and everything else, but once it arrived, I mean, boy, oh, boy, he was something. That's why she was able to be everything she was, because he \_\_\_\_\_ everything to her after that.

Smith: It was a rough time for her?

Barrett: Oh, yeah, it was brutal. She was frail, Richard. She was never a large woman, the dancer, the model and everything else, but, boy, oh, boy, when the intervention took place, it was so delicate and everything else. I mean, she looked like such a small thing in his arm next to her. So, Persch(?), we're all set to do this and I know what the meetings about and everything else and so forth, and Persch(?) then says to her, and she'll tell you the same thing, "Mrs. Ford, is there anything you want to add to this statement?"

And I'm like watching a tennis match, not knowing what had gone on the previous four days she'd been there. "Is there anything else you want to mention?" Then, finally, she says, "Well, I could say that I've also had a problem with alcohol." Whereas, up until that time, you put it at the feet of loosely prescribed Valiums and so forth and everything else. But he wanted a specific reference in there saying "I also have a problem with alcohol." Just like that. So, she gets emotional, not crying or anything else like that, but that goes into the statement. And then he jumps me like one of those 2% grizzly bear moments and we're literally two feet closer than you and I are. And he doesn't come out of his chair, but he leans forward –this was for her that he did it – and said, "Now, Goddamn it, Bob, you go out there and don't you say anything else, Goddamn it!"

Persch(?) was good, Persch(?) was amazing. They were very lucky. And she'll tell you the same thing, what a difference he made. Unbelievable gentleman, unbelievable. But Ford was all over me like something else. And

we went out and showing you the press again, all these people, I got his words ringing in my ears. We go out there and I read this statement, okay? And at the end of this statement, I say, “Mrs. Ford’s doing fine. It’s not without great challenge for her right now. And I hope that this statement will suffice for your needs right now. And if you could just give her a few more days, we’ll get back to you with something else then.” With that, a hand pops up, just like that. And the guy got about half the question out, “When did she realize tha—“ Before I can make a mistake and maybe have the president take my head off when he heard about me doing it, before I can do it, all the voices in the *audience*, “Hey, hey, knock it off. Knock it off.” The press sat the person down and I walked off the stage. It was the press and they were unbelievable. Unbelievable. I loved it. Really nice.

Smith: Did he feel guilt about all those years when he was climbing the ladder and...

Barrett: You know, I haven’t seen this thing, the film that’s got Kate Winslet and Leonardo diCaprio in it about the 50’s.

Smith: *Revolution Road*.

Barrett: I haven’t seen it, but I heard it’s a pretty tough film maybe \_\_\_\_\_ somebody. But I think that’s their era. That’s the whole deal. And, you know, you drank, you had cocktails, martinis at lunch, all that type of thing. And I think that the way he was raised, he just presumed certain things about a wife. He presumed certain things about motherhood. Things were probably changing around him, but he didn’t necessarily pick up on it. And what he was doing in his own mind he was doing correctly, he was noble, he was dedicated, he was providing for his family, he was moving ahead, he was serving his country, you know, blankety-blank-blank. None of this would have been at the expense of good thinking about her, but in terms of her needing anything— I don’t think that it ever did, but when it broke, we all had to credit Susan. She was the one who pulled this whole thing off.

Ford and I were on a trip. We were up in Buffalo, New York, and he’s got, like, two more stops. There was one in Virginia it was an in honorarium thing, you know, it doesn’t sound like much for what they get these days, but

it was about \$10,000. Then there was another event, maybe in Washington, if I remember right. I don't quite remember where it was. I get a call. Susan. "We're going to do this intervention thing with Mom." Blankety-blank-blank. "You got to get him home." "Oh, yeah, jeez, okay." So, you know him as well as I do, as a child of the Depression, the idea of him giving up \$10,000 was like. I used to kid him, "Have I ever asked you for a souvenir?" He goes, "No." I said, "Anyway, have I ever asked you for an autograph? I mean, I'd ask you for somebody else that wants it." He says, "No, you never have." I said, "Well, I want something."

This was after he was challenging some expense that he had that somebody owed him for a paltry amount, it was for some \$3.80 or something like that. So, I said, "Well, I finally want something, sir." He said, "Well, what is it?" I said, "I want the first nickel that you ever made." And I jumped up out of the chair and I dove and started fumbling with his pocket. And I said, "And I know it's right in here." And he, "Well, you--! Well, they owe me that money!" I mean, whether it was a dime or a dollar or whatever. So, I said, "Okay. The first thing I've got to do is get—", because the first thing he'll do is say, "I've got to do these events."

So I called Kissinger and I say, "Okay, if I can get Kissinger to substitute for him, maybe I can sell this to the event people." So I called Kissinger. He's down in Dallas and Ed Haeger had him down there for some event. Haeger slacks. That Haeger family was something unbelievable. So I get to him and he says, "Bob, certainly I'll do it, but I'm in Dallas, I'll need some—" I said, "Okay, I'll get back to you." So, then I called Ed. And he used to come to the Ford golf tournament in Vail. Great, great people. And this is how everybody was around them. I started to ask, "I got this problem here," and I didn't want to get too detailed about it, but I said, "We got to get the president home because Mrs. Ford's not feeling well." Blankety-blank-blank. And I said, "And I've got Henry Kissinger ready to fill in for him, but I've got to complete this whole loop." He's in Dallas, Ed's in Dallas, and I said, "And I need—" and he said, "Stop. Bob, you take him home" and he says, big Texas accent, "Don't you worry about a thing. I'll take care of Henry. You get him home." That was it.

At 11:30, I went in and woke up Ford and I told him the whole deal, this, that and everything else. It went so fast, da-da-da, “Susan called”, “the doctor said this”, blankety-blank-blank, and “I’ve called the people here and I’ve got Henry and Henry says he’ll do the events.” And we went home, red-eyed back. And got in there, went down to the office at nine o’clock the next morning. The kids had flown in simultaneously throughout the day we were traveling. And that all commenced at that time. But I don’t think until that moment, again Susan’s to be heralded for that, but *at* that moment, *at* that moment, just like the pipes and just like the drinking and everything else, *at* that moment, forever, and that was 1978, I guess. I took Mrs. Ford to Moscow I guess in January of that year.

Smith: That’s where some people noticed.

Barrett: Yeah. The Bolshoi. That was the year before, I think. That was ’77. That was a trip unto itself with everything that happened there. But at any rate, when it happened, from that date forward, if you were to ask, “Mr. President, tomorrow night, there’s a group of so-and-so, would you...?” “Well, let me check with Betty.” From that moment on, he never made a move that would’ve been anywhere at the expense of her inconvenience or her health or anything like that. And I believe that’s why he didn’t run. He told me when we went through that whole routine in Detroit. I came back upstairs. There were meetings there. That’s a whole other set of stories with Greenspan, Marsh, myself, with Meese and Wirthlin on the other side of the table. I’m convinced to this day that was one of the most brilliant scams maybe orchestrated by DIVA, you know.

Smith: Because obviously the stories take hold in popular, I won’t call it mythology, that somehow Ford was putting out these unreasonable demands.

Barrett: No. What happened was, it was Ford’s birthday, Bastille Day. The deal was that Reagan, the nominee, arrived in Detroit. We’re on the 70<sup>th</sup> floor, oddly enough, and they’re on the 69<sup>th</sup> floor. There was this circular staircase you could go back and forth. So, we get to Detroit, and here’s where the orchestration of it came in. I can tell you an awful lot about President Ford and I can guarantee you that I’m right when I say something, and I can

guarantee you when I'd be wrong, and I can guarantee you when I don't know what the hell I'm talking about. But a lot of people thought, they'd make people like you with the Foundation, or me in that position, they make you into a temple door. None of us ever had the authority. Ford just amassed all the detail.

I never made a decision regarding a dollar for him. I never made a decision saying, "Ah, no, I don't think I'd like him at that event." Baloney. I was always so easy because he was always so easy. So you could never get in trouble, you know? "Mr. President, do you want to go speak to that group?" "Quite frankly, Bob, I don't like that" or "Yes, I do". Okay, that's it. Pick up the phone and that's it. But if I said 'no' even though it was his 'no,' sort of like your Spencer-Cheney story and so forth, people would never believe it came from him.

Every once in awhile, when I knew the mood was right, "Hold on a minute. Just hold on a second. Mr. President it's so-and-so, he's from blankety-blank-blank..." "Well, I just can't make that," and he would reinforce that. That's where my strength came from, is knowing him so well. But in terms of being a door, no. So, we go up there and everybody wants to see him, but they don't just want to see him. There's always I'm called down to see about the podium or I'm called down and when I'm down there, Dole arrives to talk to him. Another time, Howard Baker arrives to talk to him. Another time, former secretary of the Air Force, I forget his name. And these are all people that are going in, talking about this other deal.

So, then it's his birthday and he goes walking over to Reagan's suite. Okay, we walk in. Bill Casey's there. Reagan comes out. Bill Casey and the two of them, just Reagan and Ford, go into a room, double doors, and Bill Casey sits down on a corner of the couch here, end table here, and I'm sitting in a chair here. And Casey goes, "Well, you know he's going to ask him to be vice president." You remember how Casey talked. "He's going to ask him to be vice president." And I said, "Oh, jeez" because I knew where Ford's mind was, with everything that'd been done, that he'd been talking about. And I said, "Bill, boy, you people are a lot more knowledgeable about this stuff than

I am, but I'm telling you, fine, fine, fine. But be sure you have a back-up plan. If this isn't on the level, you have a back-up plan. Because I'm telling you right now, it isn't going to happen. I don't care what happens."

And I was panicked, okay? So we come out, Ford and I get in the elevator, just the two of us going up again. He said, "Well, he asked me to run with him. You know, Bob, he is the nominee of the party and I sort of owe it to him" and everything else. Ugh, and I'm saying, "Boy, these days... This place is going to turn into chaos real fast here." So we get back to the room and he says, "Why don't you and, like, who?" "Well," I said, "Jack Marsh is here and you trust the living hell out of him. And Alan's here." And he says, "Well, he's going to get Ed Meese and Dick Wirthlin" and it was somebody else I couldn't remember.

So we start to talk and I'm there with Kissinger. Kissinger also got a bad rap as if he were looking for a resurrection. I was there for every word that Kissinger had with them. There was as much of a discussion, in terms of certain things having a potential from them, like in terms of Ford's strength. Like I said something once, I said, "It's all well and good, but you may not – and I'm going to say this so carefully – you may not be understanding Washington." I said, "Ford's got 30-plus years here. He's respected by both sides of the aisle and he's got an unbelievable presence in the Congress. There's not as much in the Senate or anything else," I said, "And there's no way, no matter how perfectly Ford behaves or any of all that was around him, there's no way that somebody's not going to get to him and then all of a sudden you'll say, 'You've got an un-loyal vice president.'"

Then they came out, "Well, you know, if we put to his strengths certain things" and they started talking about defense, National Security Council, talking about certain domestic policy, you know that he would've been – budgetary stuff, things like that. That was as much brought up in terms of spheres of influence, just like it's no big difference whether you're mandated by a title, Richard. You know what I mean? Otherwise, you've got Joe Biden now handling that economic deal with Obama's blessing and so forth. Additional resume, so to speak. And that's all there was to it, you know.

Smith: It's amazing how things get calcified in history because it was Cronkite who used the phrase 'co-presidency' in the context of he was trying to describe this thing to Ford and Ford just sort of didn't either pick up on it or didn't—

Barrett: See, he wouldn't have seen the danger in something. He was just talking to someone he had a lot of regard for. They were close and that was just a conversation. That just happened to be on the air in front of millions of people, you know. But he would do that now and then. But, anyway, the co-presidency, there was never anything approaching it, you know, and so it continued. We had a meeting and so we took the information back to Ford and they took it back. Who knows what's going on. Then we go back for another meeting.

Now, it's about close to 8:00 o'clock. Nine o'clock, Reagan's going over to the hall to take the nomination to announce his vice president. We're in a meeting. The same people are in a meeting. All of a sudden, out of the blue, there was some point, it wasn't a very contentious point, it was some of the same kind of points we'd been talking about. All of a sudden, out of the blue, Meese said, "That's it for now. We're not getting anywhere, here."

Meeting's over. We're sitting there. You just couldn't believe how fast it was over.

Smith: Who said that?

Barrett: Meese. And they're gone. Okay? They're gone. So I go back to the President. He's inside, he's in his trousers, he's got on a sleeveless t-shirt and he's got his suspenders hanging down the side of his pants. And I start to tell him what was said. I never did get the chance to get him. I told him later on about what I just told you. But at that point in time he just says, like, very tired, very weary, "Well, Bob. I've just been thinking. It just wouldn't be fair to Betty. It just wouldn't be fair. Tell them no. Tell them no."

So, with that, I go upstairs through this back staircase, okay? And the room is in turmoil. The hangers-on and the staff and everything else is outside the doors and Reagan's obviously on the other side of these doors. And with that,

Deaver comes out and just rushes away and maybe three minutes later Bush comes walking in with him and goes in. Just like that. So, I said, "That's it." I just disappeared. I'm walking out and Deaver's got, I forgot his name, it's strong right-wing contributor to Reagan. I can't remember the name right now. It will come to me. And this guy is irate and he's making some bad comments, "That Goddamn—I don't know what the hell he was thinking with that Jerry Ford." This, that, and the other. And Deaver's saying, "No, no, no. Don't worry" and everything like that.

I'm not totally unconvinced that this wasn't a real smart deal. They went in there and Reagan had to have somebody to the center of himself and if you had left that convention open for three days without throwing something in to totally muddy the water, I think it was Deaver at his finest. Really at his finest. That he threw the whole elephant into the room, so to speak, and it consumed everybody and it was going to be Bush all along. If not Bush, some other centrist type of guy because he had to have it to give himself any balance.

So, that was it. Then he goes and we're supposed to see Barbara Walters and I had to blow off the interview. She was so upset. She wrote a letter back to me saying, "Bob, if you would just make a point in calling a couple of people to let them know that I *had* that interview, because people were saying that I behaved badly." She tried to intercept us on the stairs and everything else. She was a good friend at the time, you know. And he decided that it was better on Walters' venue to put this out, it would've been better, and he proceeded to do so.

Now it's the next day. Phil Donahue calls and says, "You know, there was so much confusion" and this, that, and everything else and blankety-blank-blank. And Ford says, "You know, Bob, I would like the chance to get this out on my basis and that's a perfect venue." So we went in and did the Phil Donahue Show the next day and he got to say all of what he wanted to say in the Jerry Ford kind of way, and it was nice, and it was good for the party and everything else. Everybody acted honorably and all that type of stuff and everything. Then we finally - I was beat black and blue - now we're on the

plane going back to Vail and I'm thinking, "I'm done with this thing." And I'm sitting opposite, my back to the front of the plane and he's sitting in the seat where he usually sits and he goes over and he kicks his shoes off just like that and he says, "Well, Robert, not a bad convention. Not a bad convention." He says, "I gave a good speech and I got Bush as vice president." And I looked and I said, "They were conniving. Were you conniving, too?" And he never would say that, but it was almost as if he played the card or maybe when Reagan and him were in the room that's the kind of confidences that he would walk away with.

That he said, "Jerry, you know what I think. I think you're a great party guy, but here's my problem." Blankety-blank-blank. Who knows? Casey telling me. Who knows? But all I'm saying is the way that thing unfolded, if not at the eleventh hour, at the nine o'clock hour, was just as I described it to a T. And I said, "My God." And it would be like Jerry Ford to have responded to Ron Reagan at that point.

Smith: That's a great story.

Barrett: He was something.

Smith: He took some heat for "cashing in".

Barrett: I have an interesting tale. Let me ask you. I know where you're going with all this, but with all your knowledge of the institution and everything else, let me ask you something. And tell me if I'm right about this.

Smith: Yeah.

Barrett: I think he established this whole thing that we've come to know as the post-presidency. And the reason I say that, Richard, is that even from my adult lifetime, I can go back and I can remember things being told to me about Roosevelt. I can remember a little bit, some small, small things, based on my age with Truman. I can clearly remember Eisenhower stuff and then forward blankety-blank from there. You have to remember that, basically, Ford was in a close election. Was it 1.2% of the popular vote, right? An 8,000 vote in three different states and he would've been president, okay. So the pardon

definitely had taken its tolls in terms of people one way or the other. But it was a close election and he didn't lose because no one liked him. He lost because of Nixon and the pardon. He lost because of change and \_\_\_\_\_.

Smith: Sure.

Barrett: So, it was a close election, but I maintain that Ford was the first presidency in all the years I just danced over in terms of my lifespan. I maintain that he was the first president that left office with esteem and energy. Because if you go back, Roosevelt dies, Truman ultimately has great esteem, but he didn't have it for the longest time. Ike was at the end of a second career and went back to the farm at Gettysburg. Kennedy gets killed in office. Johnson was sicker than anybody realized, goes to the farm and essentially dies thereafter. And Nixon leaves in disgrace.

Some of them had the energy, but not the esteem. Some of them had the esteem, but not the energy. Ford comes out at 63, 64 years old, with one strong Goddamn physical presence. This, that, and everything else. And, basically, one out of two people wanted him to be president. So, all this largesse just flowed to him, the whole idea of boards and honoraria, and golf tournaments and stuff like that. But he was the first president that did it. And he established this for all these people that have since gone into that. The library, the fund-raising, the foundations and all that.

Smith: Now, that's interesting because parts of this story never get told. The part about the Mitchell criticism of him "exploiting his office." People never factor in all the charity work that he did, all the campuses that he visited. But more than that, no one ever factors in, and apparently this is one thing that brought him and Carter together, was the realization that they had to raise, to them, a ton of money to build a presidential library. In his case, two libraries. And the dollar signs, although modest by modern standards, appeared to him to be...

Barrett: Monumental.

Smith: Absolutely. He had no money.

Barrett: Yeah. But the other thing, when he left office, he had \$640,000. That was the net worth in the Alexandria home. Now, the person that really set him on his way, and he's a really wonderful guy because this was a special gift to this person to represent Ford, and that was Norman Brokaw from William-Morris. Norman had Eastwood and Marilyn Monroe and he had been through everything. This, that, and the other. But for him, he was so respectful of that institution. That was something different. And while Norman could be that little son-of-a-gun of a Hollywood agent, he wasn't with Ford. And nobody, "Ah this event is just not right for him." No matter how much money was attached to it.

Smith: Can you think of the kinds of things that he would turn down?

Barrett: Well, he turned down a number of speaking engagements, like individual engagements, because they were a little bit too—well, he remembered some of the people. That's what it was. They were maybe not helpful during the '76 campaign, you know, like in a pretty overt way. I mean, he wouldn't have done it otherwise. There were some foreign trips that he didn't want to do. We ended up doing the foreign trips by adding all the stops in together. We'd go to Israel. We'd go to Syria. We'd go to Jordan. We'd go to Saudi Arabia. We'd go to the Emirates. And you'd balance a trip like that. He got more comfortable when I started to do that type of thing.

The other thing is that people, for the most part - and I think this is a somewhat latter day situation that's developed - people don't presume a president to be poor, a former president to be poor. Like, the nature of what a president needs just to be a part of what people are calling upon him to do requires a great deal of money. It requires a lot of travel, a lot of hotel expense, a lot of participation. Are you going to have the guy live in a \_\_\_\_\_ townhome in Pennsylvania? People just presume a former president be affluent.

Now, by today's standards, he got to be affluent, but he didn't go crazy like it's since become possible. Like, you might say that he got a stock deal by way of Sandy Weil with CitiGroup as Sandy moved through Travelers and the different companies that he had. But that was a modest type of thing that

other people on the board were getting, too, in terms of stock that he kept and stuff.

Smith: Tell me about the kinds of work that he did on boards. We've talked to a couple people--

Barrett: Drove people nuts. People would call me up and they would say, "Bob, does he have to make every one of these meetings?" He never misses a meeting. When he took that money, this was a serious responsibility for him. And I used to get the packets. The packets would come in for a board meeting. The packets would be that thick. They'd be financial statements and this and any legal matters and everything else. And for days before, he would be all over that stuff. And he went in.

There were some funny times, too, though. Marvin Davis owned Twentieth Century Fox. He knew Marvin from Colorado. And so Marvin, in his grandiose way of doing things, he gets a board and he's got Jerry Ford on the board, got Henry Kissinger on the board, got Edward Bennett Williams on the board, and Art McClelland, used to own the Cleveland Browns, on the board. Now, some of the other players from Hollywood that were on the board were Sherry Lansing who was director of production and stuff like that, Norm Levy who was a really knowledgeable Hollywood guy that was on the board, and Harris Cattleman who was TV, Twentieth Century Fox TV. They had M\*A\*S\*H and some property at the time.

These meetings were bizarre under Marvin. God love him, he was funny. He'd sit there, Marvin, 390 pounds. He'd have a chair bigger than this. I put my hands, "Eh. Eh, so Sherry. Tell 'em what we got going." And she'd say, "Well, we've have this wonderful—It's going to be a little bit risqué. We've got this film *Porky's*." You know, that little porn film, high school. And they'd come out and she'd be talking like this and you got Henry and Ford sitting there. And, I love this one. She says, "We've got a really good film coming out with Christopher Reeve. *The Cardinal*." Do you remember that film? *The Cardinal*? Where he played the corrupt money-building cardinal for the Vatican, stuff like that? So, she gives a synopsis of that and Marvin says, "Well, what do you think Jerry?" This is a board meeting. President

Ford would say, "Well, I don't know, Marvin. I mean, you've got to be very careful when you go near this religious stuff." "Henry?" "Well, I tell you. I always ask Cardinal \_\_\_\_\_ in New York City..."

The meeting would be bizarre. There would be no form or substance. Somewhere along the lines they weren't doing that well at the time. They were doing okay, but then towards the end of the meeting, Harris Cattleman, big, white curvy hairdo, Hollywood style, he'd be sitting there. "Harris! Tell us what's happening." Harris would say, "Uh, we just sold 38 episodes of M\*A\*S\*H residuals to the following markets for \$38 million dollars." "Eh, let's go to lunch!" Everyone would get up and go to lunch.

So, the board experiences were interesting, but that was the aberration. The rest of them, he was so diligent. Nobody makes all the board meetings. I've been in a corporation. There might be nine of them scheduled a year. And if you make seven of them, you're a damn good director and that type of thing. He never missed a board meeting. He *never* missed a board meeting. It was just amazing. And I think he wouldn't be at all reluctant from picking up the phone. You don't have the clout. There's a regard. You know how hard it was for us, all of us involved, yourself even more so, to get something for the Foundation or to get something by way of the archives or to get something for the Library or to get some staffing deal or to get some budgetary line moved over here or there. It's not like that Congress or that Senate is intimidated by him. We got some things and we didn't. You know what I mean?

Smith: I always said the difference between him and, say, Lyndon Johnson. Johnson's library as long as Johnson was alive would've been a national memorial.

Barrett: Oh, absolutely.

Smith: And President Ford, in some ways, was too nice.

Barrett: There's no doubt about that. That was clearly a political liability of that man. He was just too damned decent. There's just no doubt about it. There's a lot of times, a lot of people, myself included, I got much quicker and more vocal and everything than he is and so forth, but I would've taken on certain people

from physically, if he ever told me to, to something else. And Cheney's certainly capable of it. You know that Rumsfeld was capable of it. You know that Terry or all of us would've done it. But a lot of times, it was just, "Well, let it go. Let it go." And there was a lot of consequence from that, too.

Smith: A couple of things. For one, how did his relationship with Nixon evolve?

Barrett: You know, I'll tell you. I don't mean to do this and maybe it's the third time I do it and I hope it's not too much, but that would almost be something that's more your bailiwick, you know, with the historical study and all that stuff. Because, like, I was always surprised by Ford's references and most of the time it was in print, oddly enough. I didn't hear him ever say anything to me. I mean, we talked about Nixon quite a bit. We talked about everything quite a bit. But he would use the phrase, "Dick was a friend of mine." He would say 'friend.' And I never, in all the times subsequent, whether the resignation and the papers and the tapes and until they got a resolution on what was going to possibly go to go to court and what wasn't, and blankety-blank-blank. Maybe that undid something that Ford, before I was around him, had a greater idea.

I tell you, those two are like oil and water from a personality point of view. One of them is, like, he may be naïve, Ford, he may be this, he may be not. This is not a man suffering from a lack of conscience or social well-being. I think that Nixon was a marvelously intelligent person, but I think he was one of the most socially insecure people I ever met. I know, out in San Clemente, it was the first day there, you could see it in the man's body. There was always this suspicion. It was 'them.' That type of thing. It's the story we were talking about standing at the counter, that these kind of people. Okay, he's brilliant. You don't have to be brilliant. You have to be articulate and you have to be secure. People have to feel the kinship and so forth.

That some people can become the highest level occupants of some of our offices is beyond me. I'll give you another just so you don't think I'm being pompous one way or the other. I think two of the most socially inept people I've ever seen are Al Gore and Richard Nixon. And Ford was not socially

inept. He was like a hot knife through butter with people. Anything else you want to say about him.

Smith: Also, he *liked* people.

Barrett: He *loved* them. Golf tournaments, ski tournaments, \_\_\_\_\_, it was effortless to represent him. It was effortless.

Smith: Way back, were you surprised when the pardon occurred?

Barrett: I was with him and let me tell you what happened. That was on a Sunday and he was going to play golf at Burning Tree, I think it was Burning Tree. So, we get set to go. I'm anticipating that that's today. And this whole thing settles up, goes through the whole thing, and goes on. And blankety-blank-blank. And I get in the car with him afterwards and he goes to play golf. He was totally, totally at peace.

He would talk to me a lot. There were times that I would talk back and there would be times that I knew that I'm just supposed to listen here. But there was no, "Well, I'll let him chew on that" or "Well, I'm glad I got that..." Nothing. I mean, like, he was reading himself the newspaper in the car on the way over. You've seen him do that a thousand times. He loved his newspapers on airplanes or the car. And he's just reading the newspaper. It was a misjudgment on his part. He should've floated it, but that wouldn't be Jerry Ford. \_\_\_\_\_ You know, like, "I should go talk about our relationship with China and somebody's going to ask a questions" And he could say, "Well, I could never conceive a pardon at this moment." That's all he'd have to do. Let them all stew. Let all the venom come out with the actual pardon. Let that go for two or three weeks, then he comes back and says, "For the good of the country". And it would've made all the difference in the world.

Smith: It's funny, because Mel Laird - champion schemer of all times - he had a plan. And he thought he had an understanding. Now, who knows? But the plan was to bring in 30/35, members of Congress from both parties, both Houses, at the right moment, who would basically appeal to the president to consider pardoning this. The problem is, I remember once spending two and a half

hours in a hotel room in Grand Rapids war-gaming this. And I remember thinking, “Yeah, it was the right thing to do, but there had to have been a more adroit way of doing it.” But you know the problem is it’s so difficult to put ourselves back in that climate. And I don’t know if a trial balloon ever would’ve gotten above the trees before it was shot down in that supercharged climate.

Barrett: I told him, and he put it in the book *A Time to Heal*, I said, “You know what you did, Mr. President. We were all addicted to Watergate and some of us were mainlining, some of us were snorting, some of us were sniffing, some of us were smoking, but we were all addicted.” And he said, “We’re going cold turkey.” And I said, “And you’re really pissing us off.” And that’s what the people need. And the people would say, “Okay, can’t we just have an arm? We want Nixon’s right arm. Give us a hand.” Something like that. So that’s why you would think that any type of, as you said, \_\_\_\_\_, your viewing of it.

But you’re absolutely right, because that still lingered all those months later and it was definitively, he says ‘No,’ but the election was so close that along with the economic news coming out later, along with the wrong running mate. He probably would’ve been better off with Rockefeller instead of Dole. Ford says correctly so when somebody wants to blame the pardon for him losing the election, he says, “Well, in an election that close, you can’t say that that was it. It might have had a contribution to it.”

Smith: Ford was so fortunate, in contrast with LBJ who dies just four years later, even before the announcement of the peace agreement. And President Ford, on the other hand, lived long enough, first, to know that people had come around, and then that Profiles in Courage award which captured the whole process.

Barrett: In there with the Kennedys; it doesn’t get any better than that. I always said that to people. I said, “You know, he could’ve lived longer. I wish we had him around longer, because he was good in so many ways right up to the very end.” Even months before, when I was out in California, he was certainly debilitated and this, that, and everything else, but there was still humor. And

you had to speak in a different kind of way to get it, but there was still, even then. I said, "It would've been nice to have him, but even then 93 is a hell of a run. And when you're standing there and all this stuff you're looking at is in front of you as possible things that people don't know or understand or appreciate, and then all of a sudden all that comes around to stand behind you as a back-up and everything else. That's a pretty nice deal. Ninety-three years and that's a pretty nice deal." And he would've been the first one to say it, you know. "We did okay. We did okay." No doubt about it.

Smith: How difficult was it for him those last few years? I don't know what you think about the DeFrank book or the process. Put Tom aside, just talking about the president, they had a great relationship. But depersonalize that. My bias, [but] I think it's a probably an unhealthy thing for a former president to say, "Okay, you're going to be my scribe and I'm going to pour out my heart and soul and trust your judgment to edit this and decide what I want to be my last will and testament." Because commercial publishing demands not nuance, not subtlety.

Barrett: He's still thinking of relationships a la 1975 and he wasn't that good at recognizing the blogging, technological explosion of competition, that punditry that replaced reporting.

Smith: With all due respect, because you're his friend, but, you know, the story that Bob Woodward was thinking of doing a book about Ford. Maybe he was. I don't think we'd want to see it. I think we've seen what he had in mind. We saw it before the funeral.

Barrett: Right. Exactly.

Smith: And I don't think it actually moved the meter historically.

Barrett: No. Well, all you have to do is you have to remember, Bob Woodward stood up at the National Press Club in front of his peers and looked at Jerry Ford and said, "I had the information right, but I interpreted it wrong." "And," he said, "I want everybody to know, to hear that now." Now, see you can go on and write anything you want about Ford now, but when you do that mea culpa coming from a personality of a Bob Woodward *at* the National Press Club

with all those people there, Bob can write any kind of book he wants about Ford and have it be seen as a responsible thing. See, Tom's a great guy and everything else, but in a different version of a personality. We were talking about \_\_\_\_\_, Tom's got this little, quiet personality. He's very suspicious. Tom was born super suspicious, you know. Remember Haynes Johnson from the *New York Times*?

Smith: Yep.

Barrett: The only person more suspicious than Tom about all things, Haynes Johnson was that way, especially about Nixon. You know, Reagan asked the three of them – Carter, Nixon, and Ford – to represent him at the Sadat funeral. I took them over there. And that was another whole story on the airplane.

Smith: And was that where the Ford-Carter friendship began?

Barrett: That's where it went into another land. That's where it got to the point Brent said, "Oh, God. Can we throttle back on this a little bit?" But it did and that was a lot of time. That was a hell of a trip, like, all the stewards and attendants on Air Force One. It was fun. I think a lot of people have lived a much more significant life than me in terms of the presidency and stuff like that, but I don't know of anybody that got to do what I had to do on that trip.

Smith: What was the dynamic between the three of them initially?

Barrett: Well, they all arrived and went to the White House. They had the pictures there, the famous pictures taken there. And then they're out in the plane. They're in the cabin part of it and, you know, like, Haig and Cap Weinberger and the other people out there in the \_\_\_\_\_ compartment, which I thought was really tacky on their part, but not unusual. So, it was pretty good and they all handled it pretty well. You have to remember, nobody's writing speeches. I mean, these guys did a hell of a job on that trip. There was no time for this. There was no coordination, "Okay, you touch on these points. I'll touch on these points." They all had had a personal albeit different relationship with Anwar Sadat and with Jehan, his wife. And they all held that relationship dear.

So many world leaders have told me that that's *the* world leader of the twentieth century so far. That's the bravest and the best and the brightest that they've seen. A lot of people say that. So, it worked out very nicely. They went before the Egyptian Parliament; they went before the American community, the diplomatic community. And they'd speak in terms of Nixon would speak first because he was the elder statesman. And in spite of being the victim or sitting there having heard what this one just said, the next one would pop up and it would be an entirely different thing. Nixon was funny with the American community. It was a great line and I really liked him at this point. It sort of has to do with the Frank Langella representation of how we could be so mischievous. He got up and he says, "It's very special to be here among so many famous people. And I guess in case myself in from these people." (?) You know, like that, he just let it go.

Then, go back, at the end of the trip, we're all back on the plane. Hotter than hell. We'd gone through the procession and now we're about twenty-fifth for take-off because we only have former heads of state with us. And they were having the heads of state take off before that before this 27,000 took off. So we get onto the plane and everybody's hot. It worked and everybody did it. Everybody did their thing for America. And the presidents are coming on board and I walk back on the plane, you know, tie loosened up and everything else. There were press people, Steve Jones, Haynes Johnson, and I can't remember who the third one was. So they say to me, "Bob, is there any chance we can get some time with the presidents on the way back?" I said, "I haven't asked them, but I've come to know them," I said, "I'm sure that will work out. I'm sure they'll be generous with that. No problem at all." I said, "I'll come back and let you know."

So then I go back toward the front of the plane and the Secret Service goes, "Bob." So I got over there. I said, "What is it?" He said, "Nixon's not coming." I said, "What?" He said, "Nixon's not coming." I said, "Where the hell did he go?" I mean, we're in Cairo. He said, "He's flying to either Morocco or Algeria, \_\_\_\_\_. And he's flying SaudiAir." SaudiAir was really badly thought of because they had suspended operations to make it difficult to get to the funeral of Sadat who they still resent - had made the

peace with Israel. I said, "Jesus Chris, that rascal." Just like that. I said, "Let him go."

So, I walk back, Haynes Johnson is sitting there super \_\_\_\_\_. I said, "Ah, I've checked and I've got some good news and I've got some bad news." They said, "What is it?" I said, "The good news is the presidents would be *delighted* to spend some time with you." They said, "What's the bad news?" I said, "There's only two of them." And Haynes Johnson says, "Where the hell did that Goddamn son-of-a-bitch Nixon go?!" He says it just like that, just unbelievable. And Tom had that type of thing. He sort of thrives on this conspiratorial. It's just part of his demeanor.

Smith: You know, it's funny, because when you read the book, he makes such a big deal out of this little slip of the tongue where the president, "Well, he's vice president". About some appointment or something like that. And it's like you'd think the whole Watergate story pivoted on this little incident.

Barrett: Well, I think that people are prone toward that. Depending on how much time you have around the president, you sort of correctly covet a certain memory about something a president says to you, or a great athlete or a great celebrity. And for the celebrity of a president or the athlete, it's just one of 20,000 things he said that day. You know what I mean? But you heard it and you make something out of it.

Smith: Do you think Ford had any idea, when he was doing those interviews, do you think he purposefully was engaged in this as a way of communicating?

Barrett: I think incrementally he probably didn't establish, you'll know what I mean by this, like, he wasn't gifted. He probably didn't really establish a rhythm that was uniform throughout that whole process with Tom. You follow? You know, way back, hell, he lived so long. He was virile and so capable all those years. But, you know, it was, what's the name of the *Grand Rapids Press*? They had their annual meetings with him. We had, who else was in there? Brokaw was doing it for awhile. Tom DeFrank was doing it for awhile. Phil Jones would do it. There were a bunch of them that would have these obituary oriented times with him.

So, I think as he goes along, because he continued to have varied thoughts regarding the Reagans and latter day politicians and the Clintons and stuff like that. You know, like, he sort of maybe accelerated the rhythm and like he created some angst in the person who's hearing it and stuff like that. But he was capable of doing that. Clinton came to Vail in - it must have been in 1995-ish, maybe '95, '96. And it was a big deal. Like, "What the hell is Bill Clinton going to Vail for?" Democratic presidents go to Aspen. Republican presidents go to Vail. And it's basically true. You've got the whole demeanor of the population, the business, and this and everything else. But, truth be know, their daughter, what's her name?

Smith: Chelsea.

Barrett: Chelsea. Chelsea was very interested in ballet at the time and we had formed a very nice partnership with the Bolshoi ballet as a result of the trip to Russia that I was talking about earlier. And they would come and put on performances at Ford Amphitheater. Beautiful set-up. God almighty.

Smith: They loved it in Vail, didn't they?

Barrett: Ah, they loved it. I'll tell you about the last golf tournament if you want to hear about loving Vail. Beautiful thing. So the Clintons come and they not only come to Vail but they stay in Len Firestone's house who was just the pinnacle of Republican fundraisers in California. So Vail, and Leonard Firestone's, and California, and a Goddamn Democrat. I mean, jeez! But it was because of Chelsea. So they play golf. I set up for them to play golf. Jack Nicklaus wanted to play with them, so it was Jack, Ford, and, a very interesting little story. I bet you don't know this one.

Ford, Jack Nicklaus, Clinton, and the fourth was supposed to be Tom Apple, a golf pro at Arrowhead Country Club in the Rockies. So, at the last minute, Clinton calls Ford and says that he's got a fourth. And Ford has to call Tom who, of course, was very excited about playing but absolutely understood. Like, he didn't think he was supposed to be in there in the beginning anyhow. So, the replacement for Tom, so the \$64,000 question to Richard Norton  
Smith: Who was person that Clinton substituted for Tom Apple, the golf pro?

Ken Lay. Enron. How's that fit? That's a constricting and expanding kind of world that sometimes makes sense and doesn't.

So, at any rate, they're there and the Clintons could not have been better. We had an after party after the Bolshoi deal. Outdoors. It was great. He played the saxophone. He was perfect. And she was perfect, too. Hillary was perfect. They were great. And everything was a splendidly successful visit. And Ford and Betty, as you know them, were just perfect there. And everybody in Vail in spite of being Republicans, they had nothing but, "Well, that's pretty nice that that sitting president would come do." So now it's Monday afterwards and I'm over at the house with him. We're having lunch. The only person that's out, Mrs. Ford is out. The only person in the house is the woman who is a cook

Smith: We've interviewed her.

Barrett: Oh, yeah. So we're sitting there at the table, you know, just Ford and I. And I said, "Alright, everybody's gone." I said, "What'd you think?" Just like that. So, like I was telling you before, it's his own house, in this case Beaver Creek, and everything else (looks around), "Well, I'll tell you one thing, Bob. He didn't miss one good-looking skirt." That was the way he put it. "He didn't miss one good-looking skirt." And he said, "But, you know what? I don't know what's at his core." He says, "I just don't know what's at his core." But he leaned forward and points his finger and he says, "But you tell all our Republican friends that don't you underestimate this guy. Don't you underestimate this guy." He says, "I'll tell you what, he's better than John." John Kennedy. You always forget Ford and Kennedy were contemporaries. We think of John as so much younger. They were contemporaries. He had a lot of regard for John.

Smith: They had offices across the hall from each other.

Barrett: Yeah. He had a lot of regard for him. He says, "Truth be known, John was still an elitist." He says, "And he loved the press and he knew how to make the press work for him." "But," he said, "he hated the rope line." He said about John Kennedy. He said, "He hated the rope line." He says, "This guy

loves the rope line and the rope line loves him.” He says just like that. He says, “The rope line loves him.” That’s what he said about Clinton.

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

Barrett: It was about, let’s see, it had to be late spring of, he died in 2006, might have been February or March. It seemed more like it would’ve been April or May that I went out there. It was funny. John Purcell, a friend of mine from Vail, and he used to make Ford laugh so much, John is a very expert boats man. I’m a neophyte boats man, I can do fine. And, Ford, I used to ride him all the time and he used to ride me all the time about being Army, you know, because he was Navy. I said, “You know, what’s the Navy do?” I said, “When have you won a war unless you stand on the ground?” You know what I mean? And he’d go, “Well, ...” And we’d go on and on like that.

So then John would visit him and I’d have to completely tidy up after him afterwards because he would say to the President, he’d say, “Bob comes up to see me in his boat, Mr. President. He’s taken out my dock three times!” “Well, I’ll tell you, he’s an Army guy.” For as thwarted and as difficult as it was for him, he’d go, “Have you crashed into any docks? You Army guys, they shouldn’t let you on a boat.” Just like that. Through great labor, but that was the start of the conversation. He’d take it much slower and haltedly that I just did it. But I knew exactly where he was going and I’d say, “I come all this distance. I come 3,000 miles. I got to walk in and sit and listen to that?” “Well, you’re Army...” It was great. Just great.

Smith: Was it tough for his people in the second Bush administration? Because obviously there’s been a lot written, a lot speculated upon?

Barrett: I don’t know.

Smith: He didn’t talk about it?

Barrett: No, he didn’t talk about it. And it was of no interest to me because I really enjoyed what I was able to do with him. You know, like the golf tournament. I just know he stayed so viable, so energetic. The celebrities, the corporate people, the politicians, both sides, having the Danny Rostenkowsis, the Marty

Rousseaus, and Tip O'Neills out to his golf tournament as well as the Bob Michaels. And then the Eastwoods. Everybody was there. Bob Hope. It was just great. It was just so great for him to do all this stuff and the travel and everything else. It was just a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful time.

I used to speak to a few classes and so forth, people would ask me to speak. And I'd say, "You know, let me tell you something about what it was like." I said, "It never occurred to any of us in the Ford administration to be self-aggrandizing. It never occurred to us to want something." I said, "Now, before you think that I'm saying 'Aren't we special people?' I want you to parse my words. It never *occurred* to us." You see, now, the only time somebody deserves great credit for being moral is when something occurs to you and you say, "No, I'm not going to do that. It's wrong." I said, "It never occurred to us. And you know why? Because he was so Goddamn good. He was so good that there was no way that any of us could 'Well, you know, if you do this for me, I could get you into this dinner' or 'If you do this for me or make a contribution over here...'" I said, "We didn't do it." I said, "And it was all because of him. He was just so naturally good."

He wasn't a prude, you know what I mean. He liked a little bit of a racy story and this, that, and everything else. But he *was* a Boy Scout. He *was* an Eagle Scout. He was, with all those qualities, not to shove down your throat, not to be anti-gay, not to be bad-mouthing choice, or this or that. Nope, never at anybody's expense. But he genuinely was that good without being a prude. He was that good. And all of us, I bet every White House since then, you know, they all still do the same thing, the pictures go up and the carpeting is good and everything is pristine and stuff like that. There was never, I've never felt the casualness that we felt.

I mean, passing the press in the hallway like we did. This, that, and everything else. Their reverence of Kennerly or the relationship of, like, I'll show you some pictures of Cheney, O'Donnell, myself, and Kennerly, we were in the control car all the time together, you know. Cheney is falling asleep. We used to put up signs on him "Wake up, Cheney. You fell asleep

and had a wet dream.” And we’d leave him in the car and we’d go into the event. And he’d come out.

And Rumsfeld, when he was on the staff. We’d go down to an event and we’d get in back. It was all crowded and Kennerly’s cameras and I’ve got the football. Ford’s in the limo ahead. And then we’d pull up to some place, I think it was down here in Florida as a matter of fact, and Rumsfeld starts to go, “Goddamn...” There’s something wrong with the set-up and everything like that. So Kennerly’s sitting in the back. Rumsfeld’s sitting right there and Kennerly says, “I can’t tell. You think he’s pissed?” Within earshot and everything else. And Terry says, “Well, I don’t know. I don’t know if you can tell yet.” And I go, “I think he’s just venting. You know, some people have a need to vent.” And he would go on with this banter until he finally went, “Why don’t you guys shut the hell up already!” I mean, that’s the Chief of Staff, that’s what we used to do.

And, of course, there were times to be taken seriously, like, we cried. We did everything with an extreme of dedication, emotion, passion, and foolishness. You know, bop-bop-bop-bop-bop-bop-bop. And I, myself, and Flip Wilson, we entertained at Ford’s birthday at the White House. And I set up the routine like I had taken the president. You know how the president always gets the physical on his birthday? So I went through the routine. I put a hand up to introduce him and I said, “I was with the president of the United States today and as you know the president’s received a very somber military deal and,” I said, “at this time I want to bring in the assisting medical personnel that’s assisting.” And Nurse Geraldine, remember the routine that Flip Wilson used to do? “I, hear, I love this, I *love* this man!” And we just took his ass apart. It was just, “I saw parts of this man this country will *never* see!” I mean, that’s how much freedom. It was just great.

Smith: Do you miss him?

Barrett: Oh, yeah. I miss him. It ended up from ’74 until 2006. It was 32 years. You know what I mean? And I know there were a lot of people that had a more, but that was a long time. You know? And there was a lot that happened after he left office. Like just quantitatively and qualitatively. Like the trips

overseas. He was so well regarded overseas because overseas his lack of eloquence and so forth doesn't matter because the interpreters take care of that. You don't need to be. So his words and his expression and his demeanor. I mean, if we were in France with Valéry Giscard d'Estaing or whether we were in Great Britain with Callahan or with Schmidt. Schmidt loved him. All these people came to his forum. I mean, they were fantastic. And in Saudi Arabia, he and I went, and I sat with him and he met with King Saud, you know, Saud's father. And he would carry messages at the request of either Reagan or Jimmy Carter at different times and so forth. But, I mean, we would go to the Emirates and the same thing. Like the butter, a hot knife in butter. He would sit down at this totally Arab presentation with the pig in the center and they just loved him. Loved him.

Chinese trip, the trip to China, when we went all over China, down the Yangtze and everything else. There were 30 of us on a boat that was designed to carry 600 people cruising down the Yangtze. Brent was with us. And the Chinese Ambassador to the United States was our tour guide. Unbelievable guy. He had grown up and was educated in Germany. And Brent was sitting in the back of the boat one night and Brent said, and this is the kind of great conversations that we had, Brent said to the Ambassador, "Well, how did you become a Communist?" He said, "I was an oriental in Germany during the 30's, late 30's." He says, "And there was no sort of room for anything like me in anything that they had to order so the only place I could have any socialization was with other Communists." So he became a Communist. That's what he said. "So, I became a Communist." Just like that. But, I mean, they just loved him. Loved him everywhere.

Smith: How should he be remembered?

Barrett: Oh, let's see. I mean that's a very, very nice opportunity certainly not to be squandered. I would say that he was probably the best across the board representation of America that ever ended up being president. Other people, you know, whether it's a George Washington or it's an inspirational Kennedy or an intellectual Woodrow Wilson or a quasi-spiritual Abraham Lincoln, but that middle slice of America, I don't think there's ever been anybody that was

Bob Barrett

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more American. Navy, he's a hell of a Navy hero, you know that. He never made anything out of that. But he goes down three times to pull guys out of a burning engine room with ammunition and everything else. He didn't say shit about that stuff. He was the best that the country had to offer. And there's millions and millions like him.

Smith: That's perfect. Perfect.

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