

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Bob Schieffer
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: First of all, thanks for doing this. We really appreciate it.

When did your path first cross with that of Gerald Ford?

Schieffer: Well, I interviewed him from time to time. I was a young reporter in Washington when he was up on the Hill, and later when I was the Pentagon correspondent, which was my first beat in Washington. This was when Mel Laird was the Secretary of Defense.

Smith: A legendary figure in his own right.

Schieffer: Of course, he and Ford were great friends. Ford was not exactly a source of mine in those days, but I can remember going up to the Hill to interview him about military stuff, and stuff that was on my beat. Then when he became president, I replaced Dan Rather as the White House correspondent. There had been a lot of controversy about Dan's coverage of Richard Nixon and he had become the most well-known reporter in America and he had this huge following, almost a cult-like following. Part of this was the fault of Richard Nixon, because they had very shrewdly, when they decided to take on the press, they didn't take it on as some sort of a monolith, they made it personal. And they picked out Dan and decided they'd dump most of the stuff on him, so he was extremely controversial.

Well, here I was over there covering the Pentagon and about the only people who knew my name was my wife and the people in my neighborhood. Suddenly I was sent to the White House to replace the most famous person in America. In fact, Gary Trudeau, right there on the wall is the Sunday column he wrote, the Sunday strip where it says, "Look, it wasn't my fault they got rid of Dan Rather." And it was quite a thing, so I covered Ford from the time he became president and would see him almost daily.

Smith: Let me go back just a bit because everyone talks about how different things were on the Hill in those days. And Ford certainly could be partisan as he demonstrated sometimes, I think to his later regret of the whole thing about Justice Douglas. Nevertheless, there really does seem to have been a very different kind of atmosphere.

Schieffer: Oh, no question about it.

Smith: What was different?

Schieffer: When I came to Washington - 1969 was when I came to work for CBS News - many of the congressmen on the Hill didn't have press secretaries. The Hill is still the one place in Washington where you can have face to face daily encounters with the newsmakers themselves, the elected officials themselves. That's almost impossible to do that any place else in Washington, but in those days, even more so. And that was one of the reasons that reporters liked Ford so much. He was so at ease around them.

Now, Jack Kennedy had these great personal friends in the press, Ben Bradlee, later the editor of the *Washington Post*, for one. Ford didn't have any real buddies among the press corps, but he had this great working daily relationship with all of them, so he wasn't cowed by reporters. He wasn't scared by them. He wasn't one of these politicians who figured they were always out to get him. He was realistic about it, he knew they were there to write stories and if he said something he shouldn't have said that they were going to write it. But for that reason, he got along very well with reporters and it was because of that, even after we came to the White House.

If you were on Air Force One, we would sometimes tease him. I can't ever recall another President that I've actually teased. I might have made a smart remark to them some time or said things in jest, but I mean we'd go back and forth and he was just a wonderful person to be around. He was a genuinely nice man. I've said many times of all the public officials that I've covered in the 40 years that I've been in Washington now, I liked Gerald Ford most of all. I didn't always agree with him, but I liked him most of all.

Smith: Where do you think that came from?

Schieffer: I think it was just his being a regular kind of fellow. He liked to shoot the breeze. He liked to play golf. He liked to tell jokes.

Smith: Really?

Schieffer: I always said that the reason he had Dave Kennerly as his official photographer is he wanted to know all the gossip in the press corps. He wants to know who's doing who and what the latest news on all of that. And Kennerly kept him, obviously, totally informed. But we used to have more fun with him. We'd sit in the back of Air Force One, and sometimes he'd come back and say, "Now, it's got to be off the record." And he'd sit down and have a drink with us. I don't remember any other President that I've actually had a drink with as such. But he'd come back, it didn't bother him.

Later in his presidency, he came to realize he probably ought not to have that martini that he previously had at the end of the day, but he was still having that martini when he was at the White House. I'll never forget one time, we were on a campaign trip out in East Texas and it's late in the day and he came down the back stairs of Air Force One. It's a campaign rally, and the Kilgore Junior College Rangerettes were lining each side of that red carpet. Old Ford came off there and kissed every single one of them, every one of them. And Mrs. Ford was just furious about that. And, of course, we all let him know, "Hey, this sounds like Mrs. Ford she's not all that happy about it." "Oh, well, you know." He took it in good humor. He enjoyed it as much as we did. I'd like to think that.

Smith: His sense of humor, what was it like?

Schieffer: Well, he just loved a good story. You know, he wasn't a jokester, I mean, he didn't really tell jokes, but he loved politics, he loved to talk about politics and he told good stories, but you know he had this infectious laugh. He had a big laugh and it was contagious. He was one of those people, you know there are some people that you see coming and you duck in the nearest door because you say, "Oh, here he comes," of politicians, he's number one, he's got to tell you something about how great he's done something. But probably

if you're not a reporter, he's going to ask you for money, and so, they're to be avoided at all costs.

Ford was the kind of guy, if you saw him coming, and I mean, this was before he got to the presidency, if you saw him coming, you stayed where you were because you wanted to chat with him because he was so down to earth - even after he came to the White House. Dick Gowald who worked for UP and was a friend of mine, UPI, he was Helen Thomas' colleague covering the White House during Ford's day, and Ford once told him a wonderful story. He said that when he was the Minority Leader, whenever he'd go over to the White House, he would always get a handful of the matches that used to be out there in the days when people smoked. At the White House, they always had these matches and they were very elegant, they said the White House or something on them.

Ford said he would always get them and put them in his congressional office and put them in a bowl on his receptionist's desk because he said when the constituents come in from Michigan, they loved to take these as souvenirs. Ford said that one time after he became president, he said at that point, he just really couldn't believe he was president, and he would go around the White House and every once in awhile he would just pick up a handful of those White House matches because he'd just been doing it all his life. And there were things like that that were so endearing.

Smith: You know, Roosevelt, FDR, designed a matchbook cover and it said, this matchbook stolen from the White House.

Schieffer: Yes.

Another thing, I have another picture on the wall up here and a letter that President Ford wrote one time. Once I was going to interview Ford and it was going to be Walter Cronkite, Eric Sevareid and myself. And we interviewed him in, I think it was, the Red Room of the White House. And beforehand, I told my mother that I was going to interview him and she said, "Now, you remember to be polite." And I said, "Well, mother, I'm always polite to the president." And she said, "No, I mean to Walter and Eric."

Well, somehow or another, this story got back to Ford, I didn't tell him but somebody on the staff told him. Well, I know what happened, Dick Gowald heard about it and wrote a little story on the wire telling this anecdote. Ford sees that on the wire and low and behold, never said a word about it, but one day my mother calls me and said, "I just got this letter from President Ford." And I said, "What was it?" And she said, "He said, '*Dear Mrs. Schieffer, I just wanted you to know Bob was not only polite to me, he was polite to Walter and Eric.*'" You know, he took the trouble to do that and that's the kind of thing that he would do.

Smith: How much of that is the old congressman?

Schieffer: Well, it is, it's all the old congressman. I mean, because that's how congressmen were and are, you know. But he did it with such natural grace and that's what gave him such an endearing quality.

Smith: Now, how much of his presidency was defined by the need to outgrow the parochialism of Congress while retaining whatever it was, particularly those personal qualities—

Schieffer: He didn't have much of a chance. You know, I mean, there wasn't a chance for him to get much legislation done. Inflation was totally out of control. But I will say this, I was totally against it at the time. I think his pardon of Nixon was probably as significant an action by any president that happened since I was in Washington. I was against it at the beginning, I thought he'd made a horrible mistake, but I later came to realize, and especially during the Clinton impeachment days, what would've happened if this thing had gone on and you'd had Richard Nixon in the dock. I mean the country would've come to a dead stop for two years with how long it takes these legal things to play out, even for a normal person.

I think it was a real act of political courage. I think he understood at the time, he had at that point decided whether or not he was going to run for president, but I think he understood even then that if he did that, it would probably hurt him if he did decide to run for president. And he told me later in his life, after

he was president that he thought that was the main reason why he lost the election.

Smith: It's hard to imagine what the mood was like in this town at the beginning of August 1974.

Schieffer: Well, for one thing, this had been going on for a long time and we tend to forget this went on for a couple of years and it just kept building and building and building and it was awful. I mean, there were people within the Nixon administration that wanted to kill us, and I mean that literally. When you look back at Gordon Liddy and those people who talked in a serious way and admitted later that they had talked about blowing up the Brookings Institute and setting off a bomb there in order to destroy something by one of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, or maybe it was the Pentagon Papers.

But this was really nasty stuff that was going on. They were not trying to go after the press, they were trying to destroy the press. I mean, they went to our bosses in New York, Bill Paley and Frank Stanton and a lot of us didn't know about that until afterwards - how serious it had been. They'd shielded us from that because they wanted us to keep reporting, but it was like something I've never experienced. I mean, I've had public officials on my case, I've been a reporter a long time. There's nothing new about that, but this was something that was in a totally different league.

When Nixon resigned, the day he resigned, I was sent out to Andrews Air Force Base and the last time I saw him, he was still president as he went up that ramp of Air Force One and waved goodbye. Then I drove back into Washington and they sent me over to the White House because Dan was still there, but we'd heard he was going to introduce his new press secretary and it was a guy named Jerry terHorst and he was a tiny little guy. Everybody in the press corps loved him. He'd worked for a Detroit newspaper. When Ford came in there and he introduced him to the assembled press corps, Peter Lisagor, from the Chicago paper, a great guy, and he said, "Hold him up so we can all see him, Mr. President." And Ford just broke out in a laugh and the room just erupted in laughter. And somehow it seemed like maybe it was the first time in a year that anybody had laughed in that press room. It was

like after a hard rain and suddenly it had stopped raining. The air was clear and everything was different. It just smelled different in that press room after that. It was a remarkable thing.

You know, they went on to make the speech about “the long national nightmare was over”. That was a brave line. You know, he didn’t really want to put that in, but I guess Bob Hartmann wrote that and then he convinced him that that summed it up and I’m really glad he did because that summed it up.

Smith: It’s interesting, people who were in that room who have told us, and it’s not surprising, that once the inauguration was over, there was a receiving line and then I guess there was a reception in the State Dining Room and you could see the Nixon people just peel away and go back to their offices. And clearly much of that dynamic early on must have been “How do I balance fairness to the people who shouldn’t be tarred with the Watergate brush with the need for change, *obvious* change, to reassure the country?”

Schieffer: Well, I was not there for that reception. I was still out at Andrews Air Force Base. I got back when he announced the press secretary. But I mean for these people, there were some good people in the Nixon administration, they weren’t all crooks. And each of them, I mean, here they are, suddenly they were going to be out of a job. Suddenly what they had come to Washington to do, and which each of them was proud of, it was now something that were they going to be ashamed of it? I mean, it was a lot of introspection and a lot of people just were rattled. They didn’t know where this was going or what this was all about, and it was this great pall of sadness overall. I think that’s another one of those things that Ford did, because of his sort of all around good humor, I think he had a lot of do to with kind of getting people back into a better humor.

Smith: It’s interesting. When we talked to Rumsfeld, Rumsfeld felt that he should take some pretty sweeping changes early on and Ford was very reluctant to do that - in large measure because, again, he thought it was unfair to most of the White House people who had nothing to do with Watergate and shouldn’t be, as I say, tarred with that.

Schieffer: Well, there was a great humanity about Gerald Ford, and it was not something he wore around on his sleeve or anything, but he was just a great guy. He was a congressman; he had a feeling for people. He and Mel Laird, they were the real politicians in all this. I mean, Laird had become the great counterweight to Kissinger, the grand European strategist as it were. Mel Laird was the former congressman who knew what it meant back in the district when the coffins started arriving. And it was Laird, who I think had as much to do as anyone would with bringing the war to a much quicker conclusion. But he was a great influence on Jerry Ford and I think in many ways he was probably Ford's best friend.

Smith: Well, it's interesting because we talked to Laird and everything you say is completely borne out by that. But there are two things that Laird - I won't say he didn't forgive Ford - but he was very critical of Ford. Laird, of course, always had a scheme for something.

Schieffer: Oh, always.

Smith: Bob Dole said, "I always thought that Mel was the guy who poured the poison in the stream a mile up and then rushed into town to announce that he was saving everyone." But Laird thought that he could put together a bipartisan delegation from both houses to come down to the White House to petition Ford for a pardon, and that Ford should wait until he had an opportunity to implement that scheme. It just seems, you were there, but given the mood of the country at that time, how could you realistically prepare the country for a pardon?

Schieffer: I don't think you could. And now I'm not sure how deeply Ford thought about that. I think he just came to the conclusion that that's what he ought to do and did it. And whether there was a better a way to do it, or there could've been a better way, I really don't have an opinion on that. But I was just so stunned that it happened. I mean, not even in my wildest dreams have guessed that he was going to do that. And I will tell you, the press went too far, as we always do, I mean the pendulum never stops in the middle. We fell headlong in love with Gerald Ford in the first weeks because he was so different. You know, I mean, you'd been there and then going through this

thing with Nixon and all of a sudden here was a guy that made his own breakfast and I remember we took pictures of Gerald Ford making his own muffins and this was like Obama's dog.

Smith: In part because Mrs. Ford had no intention of getting up to make his breakfast.

Schieffer: Exactly, and it was like a teenager in love and because we had been so smitten when he did this, we were crushed. I mean, we were just crushed. And so how he came to that, I mean, I never would've thought about it, and I never really came to any conclusions about.

Smith: Well, let me ask you because I think the turning point - it could've been in his mind for awhile, he was being told by Jaworski that in fact it might be two years before there could be a trial - but I think the triggering event was on August 28th, he had the first press conference in the East Room. You know, there was that Boy Scout quality about Ford. You could legitimately fault him for a certain amount of naïveté. He really believed going into that press conference that reporters wanted to talk about Cypress and Turkey and inflation and everything but what they wanted to talk about. And he went in and they wanted to talk about Nixon and his papers and his tapes and his legal prospects. And Ford didn't handle it terribly well and he left angry. I think angry at himself as much as anything else. And I think that was the triggering event. Do you remember that press conference?

Schieffer: I do indeed and I do also remember that he was not happy with himself. Maybe we didn't know all that much about him, but I remember we all remarked on it and thought about it and you may be right. That may be exactly where it kind of came together for him in his own mind. But you're right, he didn't like that press conference that night.

Smith: He had a temper didn't he?

Schieffer: Oh, yeah?

Smith: Did you see it?

Schieffer: Yeah, every once in awhile, he'd get mad about something and he'd let you know about it and he knew a lot of words which you'd hear on the golf course or around behind the barn at the rodeo. I mean this is a guy, he'd let you know. He's a big guy. He's a tough guy. You know, this guy's a football player and all of that and he was in such good shape.

Smith: Did that bother him, I mean, the way the caricatures took hold that he was clumsy and all that?

Schieffer: It really bothered him. It was terribly unfair and a good part of it was my fault. I think I probably wrote one of the first stories about him falling down on his skis. I had a great experience. Once during the campaign, by now he'd fallen down a lot and we were in Kalamazoo, Michigan and what happened was he was like a kid walking down the street and he says I'm not going to step on a crack in the sidewalk and suddenly there's no way he can not step on a crack in the sidewalk. I mean, we were in Kalamazoo, Michigan, it was a whistle stop tour in Michigan on the train. He came out the back of the train to make a speech. It was a nothing, you know, it was a basic stump speech. We weren't going to write anything about it and then of course he turned to go back into the train, the train jolted and he ran headlong into the doorjamb on the back of the train. Well, then we had to do the story.

So in those days, you had to go the local television station to file your story. We didn't have microwaves and all that, so I go back into town, broke away from the campaign, put a story together and all that, was feeling real good about it and went out to catch a commercial flight to catch up with the campaign that'd gone on to somewhere else. As I walked into the aircraft and was turning to go into the seat, a guy in the back of the plane who worked in our Chicago bureau, I had no idea he was there, and he said, "Hey, Bob!" And when he did that, I turned around and just ran head on into the overhead luggage compartment and literally saw stars, I mean, I fell down and fainted for a fraction of a second. I wasn't hurt. But anyhow, some time later, after all those stories that ripped about Ford, I felt compelled to tell him about it and when I told him about it, he laughed out loud and he said, "By God, I

wish I could've been there to see it." But that's why you loved him because he loved things like that.

Smith: Did you cover him in the '74 campaign? He goes out to the West Coast, end of the campaign, Nixon is at death's door. Clearly everyone around him - Cheney told us yesterday - almost begged with him, begged him not to go see Nixon. Were you on that trip?

Schieffer: You know, I was on that trip, but I really can't help you much. I don't remember many of the details, but I remember we talked about it.

Smith: The '74 election clearly changed things dramatically and permanently up on the Hill. There is a certain irony in that this guy who spends his life up on Capitol Hill will spend his presidency in many ways fending off Congress.

Schieffer: And you know, if I remember, we were on the road for that '74 campaign, he had made all these commitments to campaign for people, so he kept them all and I mean, I think every single person he campaigned for lost. I'd have to check my papers on that, but I believe that's right. I think every single person he campaigned for lost that year. But it was quite an election.

Smith: Before I forget, of course, in the middle of all this, Mrs. Ford has her breast cancer surgery. What do you recall of that?

Schieffer: You know, we had not seen very much of Mrs. Ford and we didn't know her very well, those of us in the press corps. In fact, I think she was spending a lot of her time in bed in those days and I can remember going out in the Rose Garden on one occasion and seeing her up in the window of the White House in the residence there in a gown, in her nightgown, which she had a bathrobe or whatever, but it was clear that she hadn't gotten up. I mean, she was down there waving to him down there in the Rose Garden, but we didn't know too much about her, but there were all these rumors that she had a drinking problem and so forth.

Smith: But now when the breast cancer came along, one senses, after the fact, that people tended to almost treat it as a secret. That she brought it out of the closet.

Schieffer: My wife was a victim of breast cancer twice and they didn't talk about breast cancer very much. And as I say, we had heard about Mrs. Ford and her problems, when she did that, it really did kind of change people's perception of her and it was a wonderful thing that she did for cancer patients because she urged people to talk about it, to be open about it and people didn't do that.

Smith: She then of course gave the famous *60 Minutes* interview and I think the good grey political advisors in the White House all blanched and thought, "Oh my God, what has she done?" And inevitably the critical mail came in, but within a fairly short period of time, her numbers were much higher than his.

Schieffer: Is this when she talked about Susan?

Smith: Yes, and talked about abortion and if she'd been a teenager, she probably would've tried marijuana.

Schieffer: It was an extraordinary interview and it was seen at CBS as a real coup to get that interview. People talked about that for a long time. I mean, she was a real trailblazer in her own way. You know, it's a funny thing about Ford. He was a solid Midwesterner, just kind of a main stream, go to church on Sunday kind of guy and she was quite daring in her own way, in a very good way. But she would take a challenge. She would take a risk and I think a lot of women really admired her for that.

Smith: It's interesting...I've always thought Hilary Clinton could not have said those things when she was in the White House. In some ways, we've almost regressed. Probably three or four years before he died, she came up with this idea for their Christmas card of the two of them with motorcycle jackets. And he said, "Oh, no, no, I can't do that. That's not presidential." And apparently they made a deal where she could get 75 to send to their nearest and dearest friends who would understand. He went along with it, you know, which tells you something about their relationship.

Schieffer: I think it does.

Smith: She was out in front.

Schieffer: She was, she really was. And she, in her own way, had a great sense of humor. And I think he really adored her in his own way. They had one of those kind of congressional marriages for a long, long time where he was just gone all the time, but they seemed nice when you'd see them together. I mean there was a nice relationship.

Smith: And the kids, did you have any contact with the kids?

Schieffer: Yeah, I got to know Susan later on and she was around. I've known a lot of presidential children and seen various ones and, you know, I had a friend one time who used to be in the Senate, and I won't tell you his name, but he said, "You know, if you're willing to screw up the next generation of your family, then the rest of running for president is easy." It's awfully hard on presidential children. It's awfully hard for them to live in the White House. But the Ford kids were older for the most part. Susan was the youngest one. And they already had lives and I'm sure it was hard for them, but I always found the Ford children to be more normal than your average run of White House children.

Smith: Talk about the fall of Saigon because here's another Mel Laird ex post facto. This is where Laird gets emotional and, I suppose, as the architect of Vietnamization, you can understand that. Laird believes that if Ford had really tried, he could've gotten Congress to give him the 700 million dollars in the spring of '74 to prop up the Vietnamese government.

Schieffer: But Laird was afraid that he wouldn't do that and Laird always said he didn't want Congress to take the money away. He thought that was the worst of all worlds to have Congress to cut it off and which was one of the reasons that he worked so hard to bring the war to a conclusion. I mean, the main reason he did, he just thought it was a folly. He thought we weren't going to win and it just wasn't going to happen. But he didn't want it to be that president wanted to press on and the Congress stopped it, so that was one of the reasons he did. I think the other part of it was, and I don't mean this in an unpatriotic way, but there was such a rivalry with Kissinger that I think Laird may have sort of enjoyed sticking it to Kissinger.

- Smith: Well, and the strains in the White House. You had Kissinger, who by Ford's own words, wanted him to make the "go down with the flag" speech. And then you had other folks, including Kennerly, who were saying, "Look, this is over and why are you clinging to it?" Did you sense that division within the White House?
- Schieffer: Oh, yeah, and I remember when the stories first started going around that they were going to take Kissinger's national security hat away from him. I mean, Kissinger, it was like he was not six inches from Ford for the rest of the day. Everywhere you went, it was like it was just some sort of glue, he'd glued himself to him, because Henry didn't take those kinds of things lightly at all. But there were these rivalries. There was also Schlesinger who was in the mix.
- Smith: Was it destined to fail just because of chemistry?
- Schieffer: Yeah, and I'll tell you why. Someone, and it's not my story, but somebody told me Henry Kissinger would go in to see the president and he would say, "Mr. President as you are aware..." and he would outline the problem. Schlesinger would go in and say, "Mr. President, you don't know this..." And Ford didn't like him. Ford didn't like him because he thought Schlesinger thought he was dumb. That's about it. And everybody knew it and when he got the chance, he fired him.
- Smith: And enjoyed it.
- Schieffer: I think he probably did and I think there was some enjoyment on the part of Don Rumsfeld as well.
- Smith: Well, part of the problem is that Ford had been on the Defense Appropriations Committee all those years and he knew most of what Schlesinger thought he didn't know. I think the euphemism is "a professorial manner," but it came off as condescension.
- Schieffer: He was a very good friend of mine, Schlesinger was, and we're very good friends to this day, but his people skills in those days were not what they could've been and he would tell you the same thing now.

Smith: Tell me about the role of Don Rumsfeld.

Schieffer: Well, Rumsfeld in some ways - when I saw him in the second round as defense secretary, I didn't see much difference - he was pretty much today as what he was then. He was a guy who was very smart, but he was not to be challenged, and it was very difficult for people to work for him to challenge him. He's not an easy person to work for.

But the big change for me was the change in Dick Cheney, who was a very good friend of mine in those days and I still have very good relations with him. But he was so down the middle, there was no partisan chip, he didn't seem to have an ideology. As we later understood when he went back home to run for Congress, he did have an ideology, but we all thought, "Well, he's just somebody who votes his district." I mean, out there, gun control means a firm finger on the trigger and you can't be for taking people's guns away from them.

But I had no idea when he came in the White House for George Bush that we'd see him play the kind of role that he played. That was just totally different. I thought Dick Cheney was the single best staff person to work for anybody, whether it's some subcommittee chairman up in Congress or somebody up in the White House that I'd ever known. What we did find out during the Bush administration is he did know his way around the PR bureaucracy, and all those years, we just didn't realize how much he knew about it. He turned out to be a real operator. But the part about his very, very conservative views, that was unknown when he was in the White House.

Smith: What were the qualities in your estimation that made him such a good staff person?

Schieffer: Well, he was open, he was accessible. A lot of the reporters didn't like Ford's press secretary who had been a reporter for NBC, Ron Nessen. And Cheney, in many ways, became sort of the de facto press secretary and I used to talk to Cheney three times a day. I used to talk to him and I wasn't the only one. There were four or five of us, but we didn't fool with the press office. We'd call Cheney. I mean, he didn't tell us any secrets. He wasn't "Here's the list

of all the things we've done wrong," but he was straight. He'd tell you something, and if he couldn't tell you something, he'd say, "I can't talk to you about that." He just laid it down for you.

He was an excellent spokesman and had wonderful, wonderful relations with the press. The reporters that Cheney maintained sort of professional friendships over the years [there] were a lot of them, Tom De Frank worked for *Newsweek* in those days. Me, I mean, I used to talk to him. Later, I would interview him for *Face the Nation*. He kind of maintained those ties. He'd always come up to the Press Club, when they gave out the Ford awards.

Smith: Even when it was a little embarrassing, some of the winners.

Schieffer: Yes, yes, exactly. But it was very interesting to just kind of watch the changes in Dick Cheney. I asked him one time had he changed? And he said, "Well, the job changed, I had a different job." And then he would say, "9/11 did change me." But I've always said and I have no medical expertise whatsoever, but I've always wondered if the heart problems he had had some impact on his personality. But that's for others who have the expertise.

Smith: TerHorst publically resigned as a matter of principle over the pardon, but it's also been said, not just speculated upon, by a number of folks over the years, that there's a little more to it than that. That he found the job overwhelming.

Schieffer: I don't know the answer to that. I always liked Jerry. I didn't know him that well. I knew him, but I didn't know him that well. I've come to know him over the years in the Gridiron Club, but I don't know.

Smith: It's interesting, we talked to Bonnie Angelo. She was offered the job.

Schieffer: Yes, she was. I know that. Yes, she was.

Smith: Which is pretty remarkable when you think about it.

Schieffer: But I don't know why she didn't take that.

Smith: Well, I think she had [a child], I think she said he was 7 years old. I don't know, but a young child and she couldn't imagine the hours that the job takes. But, boy, what if?

- Schieffer: Yeah, that would've been a big headline in those days.
- Smith: Do you think they were slow on the uptake...the prospect of Reagan actually running, and then the seriousness of the threat Reagan posed. Were they slow to realize that?
- Schieffer: Yes, they were and I think part of that was that Ford just didn't like Reagan. He just wasn't his guy, you know. And for one thing, he was out there on the West Coast and he hadn't all that much dealings with him, but he didn't like him and I think that may have been one of the reasons that they were slow to realize what would happen. And I think Ford always felt had he not had to fool with Reagan in those primaries that he would've had a better chance.
- Smith: Did you spend any time around Rockefeller during his vice presidency?
- Schieffer: Never did. Never did. Met him twice and he was, you know, a hail and hardy kind of guy and everything. One of the things I always regretted, he was one of the politicians that I never really got to get much of a feel for. Just see him from afar.
- Smith: The question of whether he was pushed or...
- Schieffer: Oh, he was pushed. No question. He was pushed. They just didn't think it would work. I also think probably it was a safe choice.
- Smith: Making him vice president in the first place?
- Schieffer: No, I mean I thought it was a mistake to take him off the ticket and I don't think Dole brought much to it that year. Remember he talked about Democrat wars and he had that bad Nixon "I need to look different" make up problem. Sometimes these cutting quips, they're great cocktail parties, but it's as Gene McCarthy found out, they don't always work when you're running, I think that was also a part of it. But, you know, having said that, I mean, it was a race between Carter and Ford and after Ford had pardoned Nixon and on top of that said that Poland wasn't under the domination of the Soviet Union.
- Smith: Yeah. What was your memory of that debate?

Schieffer: Oh, I remember that very well. I remember we just gasped when we heard him. And we spent the whole next day, we were out somewhere and I can't remember where it was, but Cheney was on the bus with us and we were all on the bus, the press, and we were just chasing him around all day and they were working. And Cheney realized what had happened and he understood the significance of it, but it took him a while to convince Ford that he'd said something wrong. It went on all day.

Smith: Ford was a stubborn guy.

Schieffer: Yeah, he was stubborn on something like that. I mean, he'd get his mind set on something and you just weren't going to walk him away from it, but it was clear that Cheney knew they'd screwed up.

Smith: Stu Spencer has a wonderful story, but it's the second half of the story that makes it wonderful. Stu hadn't really wanted to get involved in the campaign but he did, and he came here and things weren't going terribly well. It was the end of a long week and he was in the Oval Office with the president and Cheney, just the three of them. The problem was that Ford would love to go out and campaign. He'd give these speeches, which weren't very good, from the speech shop and he'd go out and he'd campaign and the numbers went down. So Spencer has to come up with a euphemism as to why the president should stay home - in effect the Rose Garden strategy. And nothing was working and Ford wasn't getting it and so he finally said, "Look, Mr. President, you're a great president, but you're a fucking lousy campaigner." Now, think of another president you could say that to.

Schieffer: Especially one who'd been in Congress all his life.

Smith: And Ford just sort of took it, but anyway it's the sequel that makes the story, because that story appeared in Germond and Witcover's book about the campaign. And Stu went ballistic and he called Cheney to chew him out and Dick sort of let him sort of rumble on and finally Dick says, "Stu, there was a third person in that room." It never occurred to Stu that Ford would tell the story on himself. And he did.

Schieffer: I'll be damned.

Smith: Which is revealing.

Schieffer: And there you are.

Smith: At the convention, I mean, how close was that?

Schieffer: It was really close, I mean, we went to Kansas City thinking, boy we had a great story. We're going to have a contested election for the first time in nobody could remember when. And I guess it pretty much resolved itself in that weekend, if memory serves. But it was that delegation from Mississippi, it seems to me.

Smith: Clarke Reed.

Schieffer: Clarke Reed, yes. And it's hard now, the details are all hazy, but it was a great story. It was a great story and Reagan came and, you know, I remember when there was one night, wasn't there, that Reagan went to see Ford or Ford went to see Reagan.

Smith: And they're still debating, after the nomination was over, the winner went to see the loser. And the Reagan people had made it explicit the condition for this meeting was that Ford was not to offer the vice presidency to Reagan, which I don't think that Ford had any intention for reasons that you've outlined. And after the fact, some Reagan people were suggesting, "Well, if only he had offered." And I think that sort of stuck in Ford's craw a little bit.

Schieffer: I don't think he would've offered it. I wonder if Reagan would've taken it. I don't know. Maybe.

Smith: And then, four years later, you must've been at the Detroit convention where there's this bizarre—

Schieffer: Oh my God, I've never seen anything like it, and if ever there was a scoop, I mean, getting Ford up and into that booth with Walter Cronkite. Everything at the convention came to a dead stop while people were looking up there, watching and trying to figure out what was going on. Barbara Walters, I wrote about this in a book that I wrote, she went up and started banging on the door of our anchor booth, "Let me in! Let me in!" And we told her, "No, you

can't come in here." And we always wondered what she would've done if she'd have gotten in there. Would she have gone in there and sat down with Walter Cronkite and joined in the interview which was being broadcast on CBS or would she have tried to grab Ford and drag him off the set? We never figured out what she would do and I always teased Barbara about that in the years after that, but it was one of the great sights.

Smith: Now, I'm trying to remember, was it Cronkite who actually used the phrase "a kind of co-presidency"?

Schieffer: Yes! Yes, and it was all taking place up there and old Walter, I mean, he knew when he had something, he wasn't going to let it go. I mean he would've interviewed him for the rest of the evening if he could've made that work. You know, Ford always really liked Walter. Always liked him and so he was enjoying himself and I think he enjoyed being the center of attention and all of that, and Kissinger was supposed to have worked out these arrangements and I guess Nancy Reagan saw it and said, "This is not going to happen." Because, you know, George Bush had already packed his bags by then. They were checking out of the hotel. I mean, Jim Baker told me all about it. And he gets that call and the rest is history as we say.

Smith: And the inauguration in 1977 when Carter paid his very gracious tribute. What do you remember of the changing of the guard?

Schieffer: Yeah, and I can remember that Carter did that. It's funny, though, what I remember about that is Carter walking up Pennsylvania Avenue. That was the one thing. But I also remember this, I had covered Ford during the campaign because I was the White House correspondent and then when Carter won, I switched over and started covering Carter which meant that I had to move down to Plains, Georgia. And I stayed down there in Plains until inauguration day. I would fly up to New York on Saturday morning and did the Saturday news because I was the anchor in those days and fly back to Washington where my family was, spend the night with them, get up on Sunday and fly back to Plains.

Our kids, they were little kids about this tall those days, my two daughters, and I remember Thanksgiving and my wife brought them down for Thanksgiving dinner and the only place we could find to eat was McDonalds. And they'd been in Plains for 20 minutes and they said, "Can we go home?" And during the election, they had had the election at school and both cast their vote for Gerald Ford and my mother who was just a yellow dog Democrat, I said, "You'd better be careful. I don't think I'd tell Momo that." And I said, "Why did you decide to vote for Ford?" and they said, "Better vacations." Because they'd gotten to go, we got to go out to Vail for Christmas.

Smith: Clearly the Fords were beloved figures out in Vail.

Schieffer: They were and everybody out there loved them and they loved to go out there. It was a great thing for the press corps. Ford was very nice. I mean, he was nice in the fact that he would make sure that on Christmas day, for example, that he would have no schedule so the Secret Service and the reporters - they'd let us bring our families out there on a press plane - so we could have the day with them. And he would do things like that.

Tom Brokaw and I, Tom was the White House correspondent, the first year we went out there with Ford. Tom and I had this big party for all the press and the White House staff and my mother who lived in Fort Worth in those times brought just literally a washtub full of tamales from Texas. She didn't like Republicans very much at all, but she loved President Ford and he came to the party and so she went and made him a big plate of Mexican food and she took the shucks off the tamales and he loved them and everything.

Well, later on, as you remember during the campaign, he's standing there with John Tower in San Antonio and someone gave him a tamale and he just takes a big bite out of it, shuck and all, and my mother said, "That poor man, if I'd have just told him they had shucks on them, he would've known to take the shucks off." She always felt so bad that she had embarrassed him. But we had great times out there.

Smith: Did you think toward the end of the '76 campaign, they clearly were making up ground, did you think that they might pull it out?

- Schieffer: I thought they might, yeah, I thought they did. And, you know, it was very close. But I did think he went into it way behind because he'd taken such a battle with Reagan. But I began to think toward the end that he really might have a chance.
- Smith: On election night, were you at the White House?
- Schieffer: I was. I was, and we didn't see very much of him at all that night. You know, he stayed up in the quarters with Joe Garagiola, I remember.
- Smith: Joe Garagiola and Pearl Bailey.
- Schieffer: That's right, isn't it?
- Smith: Kind of an unusual trio.
- Schieffer: And then the next day he'd completely lost his voice and I really felt bad for him because he wanted to make it dignified and then he couldn't even talk. I mean, that was just kind of, I was just sad, I sort of felt sorry for him.
- Smith: Rex Stouten told a wonderful story because he was up there that night and about 2:00 in the morning, it was decided, at least the president decided, "Well, we're not going to know for sure. I'm going to go to bed." But it was not looking good. So Rex followed him across the hall in the bedroom and wanted to say something consoling, so he said, "You know, Mr. President, you really deserved to win" and so on and so on. "You've given your entire life in service to this country in uniform during the war and all those years on Capitol Hill and these last couple of years during an incredibly difficult time. And, you know, maybe it's just time for you to take a well earned vacation." And Ford said, "I don't think so."
- Schieffer: That's a great story. You know the guy meant well, but that's not what you're supposed to say.
- Smith: Someone else said, and in fact, it took awhile for him to get over it. He was angry at himself and he would walk around the White House and say, "I can't believe I lost to a peanut farmer."

Schieffer: He didn't like Carter either. There just wasn't any, because they were just so totally, totally different. I mean, Carter had this religious, you know, "I cast my bread upon the waters and God will take care of everything" and Ford didn't see it that way. I mean he just wasn't that kind of a guy and he never cared for Carter.

Smith: And yet they, in later years, they became—

Schieffer: Oh, in later years, they did fine. I mean, how could you not hate somebody or dislike someone when you're in that kind of a _____.

Smith: And you saw him in later years. You saw him at the Press Club.

Schieffer: Yeah, I saw him. I interviewed him several times. I'll never forget a year or so after he was president - I interviewed him a lot as the former president - and I'll never forget one time I was interviewing him up in Rochester, New York. They had Secret Service and we'd set up our cameras and stuff in this hotel room and the Secret Service came along and they made us get out of there while they brought a dog in, you know, one of those big German Shepherds that sniff for explosives. Well, the dog was in there people would come in and out and we kept fighting and we kept fighting and I thought, "Oh God, one of these members of the camera crew's got some marijuana in his camera case and the dog is smelling that and now we're going to have to go and I'm going to have to explain all that so they won't put him in jail."

And finally they open the door and they went in there and it smelled, the smell of Lysol was just so overpowering that it took us back and they wouldn't tell me what it was and finally somebody told me what it was. They'd used a local police dog and the dog had come in there and just taken a huge dump right where the president was going to sit down. Well, these guys, they didn't want me to be the first to know about it, so somebody, there was no bathroom in there, so somebody had to go in there and pick it up and put it in his pocket and take it out and they said, "Now you can't tell the president about this." And I said, "The hell I can't. Of course I'm going to tell the president about it." So, he came in and I told the president about it and he

laughed and said, “Well, everybody else does, so why not the dog?” That’s Ford.

Smith: How do you think he should be remembered?

Schieffer: Oh, I think he should be remembered as someone who had the political courage to do something that was extremely unpopular at the moment. It was the right thing to do, I think history proved it right and I think he was a very significant man. I mean, Gerald Ford was exactly what the country needed at that point in our lives. We needed a chance to rest and recoup and relax and sort of get things back on track. He was perhaps the one person who could do that. I mean, he’d come to the presidency just by happenstance, but I think the country was very lucky to have him at that time. I truly believe the pardon of Nixon was one of the most significant presidential acts of my lifetime.

Smith: I’ve often compared it to Harry Truman’s firing of Douglas MacArthur in terms of being hugely unpopular at the time, but almost impossible to criticize after the fact.

Schieffer: Yeah, very significant.

Smith: Yeah.

Schieffer: But something that had to be done. I’ve never thought of it that way, but that’s a good way to put it.

Smith: That’s perfect. Perfect.

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