

**Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project**  
**Cokie Roberts**  
**Interviewed by**  
**Richard Norton Smith**  
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Smith: First of all, thank you so much for doing this, especially here which, as you say, has a lot of memories.

Roberts: I'm thrilled to do it.

Smith: There is a lot of nostalgia for the way things used to be. Not that the Sixties and Seventies were exactly an era of good feeling. Is it misplaced nostalgia, or is it justified?

Roberts: There is a lot of justified nostalgia. Jerry Ford, in the last interview I had with him, said to me, "Cokie, you know, your dad and I, when I was Minority Leader and he was Majority Leader, would get in a cab and we'd go someplace like the Press Club, and would say on the way down, 'Okay, what are we going to argue about?'" And then they would get there, and there would be a real argument. He said, "We really did disagree about the means to an end, but then we'd get back in the cab and be best friends and go back to Hill. We might argue there, too, but we were very good friends." That is gone.

Smith: What do you think are the factors that have killed that kind of culture?

Roberts: I think a whole lot of factors are involved. There is, of course, the media component; the drawing of district lines is a very real deterrent to comity, when members of Congress choose their districts and their voters instead of the voters choosing their members. They don't have any reason to listen to anyone who disagrees with them because they have only like-minded people in their districts. The kind of ginning up of partisanship by various interest groups, I think is also to blame. But, as someone who has read and written a good bit of American history, I have come to believe that the period where my father and Jerry Ford first came to Congress and started to serve was the aberrant period; that this partisanship that we suffer through today is the

norm. And at least people are not calling each other out on the floor of the House and going to Bladensburg and shooting each other in a duel.

Smith: Was it an unusual period because of the shared World War II experience?

Roberts: Yes, I think so.

Smith: And then, presumably, also a kind of artificial consensus was imposed by the Cold War.

Roberts: Right. I think World War II and the Cold War had everything to do with it. Also, think how self-conscious these men were as veterans – that huge class of 1946, which was a Republican class. But my father came and he had been elected in '40, defeated in '42, served during the war, then came back in in '46. So this enormous Republican class – that he was a Democrat elected in, '48, this enormous Democratic class that Ford was a Republican elected in, these men were very self-conscious veterans. As you know, they ran as the men who went, not the men who sent. And they knew who the enemy was; it wasn't the guy across the aisle, it was the dictator across the ocean. And I think that the fact that the whole country had gone to war, that there was not just the Rosy the Riveter, and all of that, but there was rationing, there was a sense of sacrifice that was so strong that it really brought people together in a way that was not common.

Smith: I remember once when I was doing a project on Bob Dole, and went out to talk to Walter Mondale, I pitched an idea which he embraced – the notion that forty years ago each party had a left and a right wing, disproportionate in size. But nevertheless, you came to town and you had to learn within your own caucus how to deal effectively with people who might not be on your wavelength philosophically, which is something that presumably is lacking today.

Roberts: Well, that's what I was basically saying about the drawing of district lines. That the only way you can get in trouble in Congress today is from the right if you are a Republican, and from the left if you're a Democrat. It is somebody saying you are not pure enough. And so if you compromise, if you talk to the person across the aisle, you can get in trouble at home. The one other thing I

forgot to mention, and it's very relevant to my memories of the Ford family, is that the families all knew each other. We all moved here. Transportation was not easy. We lived here and then we lived back in the district for a period of time, usually summertime. We all went to school together; our parents were in PTAs together; we went to church together; we ran into each other at the dry cleaner; we knew each other.

Smith: It wasn't just an annual softball game.

Roberts: No, it was very close. One of my best, best friends growing up was Libby Miller, Bill Miller's daughter. And she and I are still in touch. That was just the way life was, it was a much more congenial setup. For the men who didn't bring their families here, they were batching it, as it was called, and they would all come to dinner at the homes of the people who did have families here. The wives would cook for them. And those would be bipartisan evenings.

Smith: Can you pinpoint a time when that began to change?

Roberts: Yes, I think it really changed with the class of '74. The Watergate Babies came in and so many of them represented areas that were not Democratic. So, in order to get re-elected, they set up district offices and started traveling home every weekend. They got, and you can obviously check this, I'm pretty sure that that was the year they got travel allowance upped so that they could go home all the time. And the difference between my father serving in Congress and my mother serving in Congress, when she was elected in 1973, was huge. She was back in the district every weekend. And that was just simply not the case when we were growing up.

Smith: And it is also interesting, parenthetically, the Joe Wilson incident with the President – I did some research. The fact is, Ford in April of '75 went up to the Hill to talk about aid for Vietnam, and two members of Congress walked out on him. And they were both members of the class of '74. Just representative of an era when...

Roberts: We have a house in South Carolina and we were there for Thanksgiving and there was a cartoon in the local paper of kids going Trick or Treating, and one

of them is up at the door and says, "Obama Lies," and the other kids are behind him saying, "Shoot, we should have dressed as Joe Wilson, he's mopping up."

Smith: Isn't it revealing of the political culture that an overnight celebrity, with millions of dollars funneled both for and against him...

Roberts: It's crazy.

Smith: Yeah. Do you remember your early contacts with both the Fords?

Roberts: I remember Mrs. Ford as always being just beautiful. In that era there were all kinds of teas and fashion shows and all kinds of things like that, that the Congressional wives did for good causes. She and my mother often were the ones who wore the small size that the models actually wore, so they were sashaying down the runway. She was always just this gorgeous person. But in later years we knew she was frail. There was a sense of fragility there.

Smith: Did you know she had a problem?

Roberts: No, no. And you know, nobody talked about stuff like that. And by the way, if we were talking about people with drinking problems, we would have been talking about the whole city at that point.

Smith: It was a different culture, wasn't it?

Roberts: Oh, gosh, yes. It was hard liquor and it was early and it was often.

Smith: Well maybe that fostered some of that comity.

Roberts: A lot of people do believe that. Everybody would repair to Sam Rayburn's Board of Education for some bourbon and branch, and people did get along a lot better under those circumstances.

Smith: Was she always kind of a free spirit?

Roberts: Yes. I think Mrs. Ford was not as willing as some of the other wives to just do exactly what they were supposed to do. And my mother was so willing to do that, having been raised in the South and all of that. It was kind of really refreshing to see Mrs. Ford.

Smith: On the other side of that, did you sense any unhappiness?

Roberts: No, but I wouldn't have. I was a kid. What I mainly remember as a grownup, until I re-met her as a real grownup, was after my father's plane went down, she was so upset. It was just a couple of months after the two families had been to China together, and had become quite close, and she was really very, very, undone by it. And was very sweet to all of us.

Smith: And the Congressman at that point?

Roberts: Congressman Ford was the Minority Leader, and he had – let me just say this on tape: Congressman Ford is the Minority Leader, Congressman Boggs is the Majority Leader. Their wives and staffs went to China in the spring of 1972, and it was quite a trip. It was China in 1972. So they were constantly mind-boggled by everything that was going on.

Smith: Impressed?

Roberts: Impressed by a lot, in fact. It was the cultural revolution and the kids in this country were having long hair and sex and drugs and rock and roll, and in China they were behaving. They would have gone to jail if they didn't, but still for the parents, it looked pretty good. And I remember they came home. I had two little bitty kids and they came home with funny toys and all of that. So they really spent different times together than you do on Capitol Hill. That's always true in a Congressional trip, but it was particularly true in this trip.

Smith: I assume those trips are still taking place.

Roberts: They are not as common – \_\_\_\_\_ are not as common as they used to be because they get so much bad press as a boondoggle, when in fact, they are very, very useful. And they are a huge source of bipartisanship. But, at any rate, the families – the two couples and their staffs had really gotten quite close. So after my father's plane disappeared, and there was this long search, Congressman Ford was here, at this house, regularly, checking on everyone and seeing how everyone was doing, but on the phone all the time. It was a very difficult time, as you can imagine. The plane was missing, and actually,

it was never found. We went to Alaska immediately, but then after we got back, it was just this limbo time and so he was very, very gracious.

Smith: Does something like that haunt you for years?

Roberts: Yes. You know, it's funny, we went to all the briefings, all that, and the SR71, the spy plane went in and conducted the biggest search ever and found like logs and stuff – from 80,000 feet. I intellectually understood that it was very likely that the plane had frozen up and sunk to the bottom of Prince William Sound. But when I moved back to this house in 1977, the kitchen wallpaper really did need cleaning up. And I was a little hesitant to do that, thinking that if he came back he might think strangers were here. So, sure, you have these odd things.

The other thing to remember about the relationship between my father and President Ford was, of course, they served on the Warren Commission together. And that was somewhat searing because of the criticism, but also it was not easy taking that testimony, and I think that that also made them closer than they would have been under other circumstances.

Smith: That's fascinating because, of course, as a young Congressman, the Ford you talk about, his office was across the hall from JFK. Often their votes would cancel each other out on domestic policy, but not on foreign policy - part of this (Cold War) consensus. It is interesting because a lot of people don't make the connection. When LBJ called for that investigation, Ford was not at that point Republican Minority Leader. He was just another member of Congress.

Roberts: But he was always a member of Congress that everyone admired and listened to. He came in, in the Vandenberg tradition, and that was huge. This town was still in a position where forging the institutions to try to maintain peace after World War II was still very much on the agenda. And to have that Connally-Vandenberg coalition in the Senate that really set the framework for all of the \_\_\_\_\_ institutions and all that, was something that was almost a movement. I don't know how to describe it, but particularly once McCarthy came along and all of that, this was the other side, and Jerry Ford was very

much out of that tradition, and everybody knew it. So he could be someone you could count on to be a sensible person in a situation like this.

Smith: It's interesting you say that. First of all, has too much been made of LBJ's wisecracks about his intelligence?

Roberts: Yes, because LBJ made cracks like that all the time. I mean, the tapes are wonderful. I'm such a nerd that I just sit and listen to them. But that was LBJ and he said some pretty insulting things about my father, too, and they were very close friends. So, yeah, sure. It's interesting.

Smith: Early in the fifties, he'd only been there a few years, but early in the fifties he was told by one of the old moguls to be outside a committee room at such and such a time. And it turned out that he was being vetted, if you will, or what passed in those days for oversight of intelligence. Which apparently was five veterans and one promising newcomer. No staff, no notes. They sat there until all their questions were answered and no leaks.

Roberts: Wow.

Smith: Which, again, suggests that early on he was perceived as someone who could be trusted, if nothing else.

Roberts: Those guys loved LBJ – I mean JFK – LBJ was another issue. They respected him and liked him, but these members really loved Jack Kennedy. He clearly had some aspect to his character that made them very fond of him. And, of course, he was in that class of '46.

Smith: So that personal element lent an extra pain, almost, to service on the Warren Commission. Then also, you've got this crazy Clay Shaw business in New Orleans and all that. How did all that factor in?

Roberts: It was awful. And it's still going on. Here we are in 2009 and...

Smith: President Ford once found himself on an airplane...

Roberts: With one of these nut cakes?

Smith: Oh, no. Worse. They were showing Oliver Stone's JFK. I mean, you want to get him started? It was – well, you can imagine.

Roberts: I can imagine. We actually, at the point when that movie came out, Sam and David Brinkley and George Will and I were taken to see the movie mid-day at some theater in Washington. And we all just howled with laughter. But at any rate, the attachment to Jack Kennedy made the Warren Commission service harder, and then the criticism of course, made it very difficult. And I think that had the effect of bonding my father and President Ford.

Smith: In the last years of his life, after he got the Kennedy Profiles in Courage Award, which was a huge thing. He said, "You know, for twenty-five years everywhere I go people ask the same question. And since that, they don't ask me anymore."

Roberts: Isn't that fascinating?

Smith: It was extraordinary. The imprimatur of the Kennedys. But I think he did an oral history while he was there. It is really fascinating and I wonder whether you've ever heard this: he said one of the theories, and I guess they didn't expound it in print, largely for questions of taste, but one of the theories that they kicked around explaining Oswald's motive was that he was in this very unhappy marriage, that he was impotent, that his wife was calling attention to that fact, and that he was going to show her how much of a man he was. Which may be off the wall, but it's interesting. To hear somebody like Ford discuss that as something that was, in fact, discussed.

Roberts: But just think about what you've just said; the question of taste. What a concept!

Smith: From that to the Starr Reports.

Roberts: Exactly. I have, though. I have the book, the *Final Report of the Warren Commission*, signed by all the members. So my father clearly thought that was something that was historic that he wanted his children to have.

Smith: And I assume he never waivered in his view.



- Roberts: No, Oliver Stone tried to make a case that my father questioned the findings. What he said was that with the information that they had, which is, of course, how you cover yourself as a member of Congress.
- Smith: I think I heard President Ford say the members of Congress who were on the panel insisted on this language.
- Roberts: Right. Because they know what it's like to have facts change on the ground.
- Smith: For people who weren't around here in '73-'74, can you recreate a sense of...
- Roberts: Not really, because I wasn't around here in '73-'74. I was actually out of the country for the entire Ford presidency. That's what I tried to convey to you, that I really could talk about more the growing up part and then the recent years. But we were in Greece for the entire Ford presidency. So it was quite something. But, you know, one of the things that that had the effect of, was to give you a sense of the strength of American democracy. Because I remember Ben Rosenthal, who was in Congress at the time, and he had been chairman of the subcommittee that dealt with Greek relations, and was very anti-junta and it was a big deal. He came after \_\_\_\_\_ fell, and he made the point to people there; never underestimate the strength of the American democracy. The President of the United States, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, was forced to leave office and not one soldier left his barracks to defend him. Now it wouldn't occur to us that that would happen, but to look at it from that perspective is really something.
- Smith: There is a wonderful story about the first day. Of course they stayed in the house in Alexandria for a week or so while the Nixon's stuff...
- Roberts: Yeah, I noticed that in the piece that I was looking at last night.
- Smith: And so the first day that he actually went into the West Wing as a resident, a Marine guard was saluting. Ford, ever the Congressman, walks over and says, "Hi, my name is Jerry Ford. I'm going to be living here. What's your name?" Isn't that a Congressman?
- Roberts: That is a Congressman, that's also a gracious person, and that was probably something of a change in the White House at that moment.

Smith: Mrs. Ford, in her first week there, walking through the family quarters around the permanent staff she'd say, "Good morning." And they wouldn't speak to her. So she went to the usher and said, "Do they not like us?" and he said, "But you have to understand, it was very different under the Nixons. You didn't talk to the presidential family."

Roberts: That's too weird.

Smith: But word got around and everything. The other wonderful story, to contrast with LBJ; we talked with Gary Walters. It was his first weekend in the usher's office. Sunday morning he knew the Ford's were going to church, and he gets a call and it's the President. He asks, very politely, if maybe at some point, they could come up and take a look at the shower because he has no hot water. So Gary says, well, it's Sunday and there's not a plumber, but we'll take care of it while...He's says, "No, that's alright. I haven't had any hot water for two weeks. I just used Mrs. Ford's shower." Can you imagine Lyndon Johnson saying....?

Roberts: No. Among other things he was entertaining people in the shower, so...

One other thing, though, that students of Congress should understand about Jerry Ford, is he was on the Appropriations Committee. And the Appropriations Committee is different from the other committees. It is much more bipartisan. The joke is there are Democrats, Republicans and appropriators. And it drives the members of the other committees completely crazy how the Appropriations Committee sort of gets together and sort of runs the place. But that is the case, and that does make for a lot more comity.

Smith: It also explains – remember, Ford was the last president who could get up – it was almost like a party trick – in front of a room full of reporters and introduce the budget and actually take them through the budget.

Roberts: And know what was in it.

Smith: And answer every question that was asked. It didn't communicate itself to the American people. He was never a television president; he was the least self-dramatizing of men.

- Roberts: Which was so refreshing. But the understanding of how exactly the budget works is something that very few presidents do. And being on the Appropriations Committee is the place you learn that.
- Smith: I realize you were out of the country, but looking back at the trajectory of the Ford presidency, he had to, in effect, not necessarily unlearn being a Congressman, but he had to learn the difference between being a Congressman and an executive.
- Roberts: Being a Congressman is really terrible preparation for being president. It's no accident that we've only elected a few people directly from the Congress to the White House. And most of them - I mean, Warren G. Harding, Jack Kennedy, and Barack Obama - these are not people who were known for their work in the Senate. They really weren't of the institution. Jerry Ford was very much of the institution. He'd spent his life in the House of Representatives, which is where he wanted to be. So, I think it is very difficult to then go from the place where everything you are doing has to do with consensus and bringing people together, and finding the grey areas where you can just sort of fudge it so that people can vote for it, and all that. That's very different from being in a position where you have to lead and you have to draw bright lines, particularly in a presidential campaign.
- Smith: And communicate.
- Roberts: And communicate. And you not only have to communicate differently than the way you are with your buddies, but you have to communicate on a medium that was not that common at the time. Even when Walter Mondale ran in 1984, he said, "Well, I just wasn't so good on television."
- Smith: The old line: Mondale gave a speech, it was typed better than it was delivered.
- Roberts: Right. It's true. That is true. During that campaign, I remember one day in particular, it was some Jewish organization here, it was a big thing, like the big meeting of the B'nai Brith or something. And I had the speech ahead of time and it was a terrific speech. And, of course, I had picked out the sound bites ahead of time. If I had used those sound bites it would have looked like I was sabotaging him, because he was tripping all over himself, and all that.

And then Reagan comes in to the same group. They move the flags so that they frame him. He gives this beautiful speech. My basic reaction to that is if you're not good at this, get good at it, because it's a trained...nobody was born being good on television. But Ford was that many years earlier.

Smith: And he did get better. There is this notion that Reagan actually made him a better candidate. Obviously, you can argue both ways – that the Reagan challenge fatally weakened him.

Roberts: You'd probably know this better than I would, as a presidential scholar, but my memory is that any time you challenge a president in a primary, he loses.

Smith: Yeah.

Roberts: That was the biggest thing that happened with Bill Clinton with nobody challenged him in '96.

Smith: Two quick things and then we'll talk about the post-White House. Rex Scouten told a wonderful story. On election night he was up with the family, and about two-thirty in the morning or so, it's not looking good. Ford says, "I'm going to bed." So Rex follows him across the hall because he wants to say something consoling. And he said, "You know, Mr. President, I don't know what's going to happen, but if you don't pull this out it's a shame. But just stop and think; you've given your whole life in service to this country. The war; Capitol Hill; these last two incredibly difficult years. Maybe it's just time for you to take a well-earned rest."

Roberts: What did Ford say?

Smith: Ford said, "I don't think so."

Roberts: If it had been Johnson, it would have been saltier. Speaking of going into the White House under those difficult circumstances, my mother was the only Democrat at his swearing in.

Smith: Really?

- Roberts: Yes. So that's how the families had gotten so close. She had been elected to Congress in March of '73 in a special election, and when he had that small swearing-in, she was the only Democrat there.
- Smith: Wow. And afterwards, time was pretty good to Jerry Ford.
- Roberts: Yes.
- Smith: You think of poor Lyndon Johnson, who literally died the day before a peace agreement was announced.
- Roberts: That's right. He died January 22, 1973, I remember because my father's service was January 5<sup>th</sup> or so. What had happened was that Congress had come in, for the 4<sup>th</sup>, to clear the seat vacant and then we all went to \_\_\_\_\_ and had the service, and then the special election was declared. But Johnson came to that service looking awful. And then he died a couple of weeks later.
- Smith: Were you not terribly surprised?
- Roberts: I kind of was surprised because you kind of thought he'd go on forever.
- Smith: He was a force of nature.
- Roberts: But he was clearly unwell. He also had his hair down to here. He looked like some interesting Mark Twain character, it was very interesting. Anyhow, Mrs. Johnson and my mother were really best friends.
- Smith: Everyone loved Lady Bird.
- Roberts: Oh, she was wonderful. She was just wonderful. But that's true. Time was good to Jerry Ford, but also, he made it good. And his collaboration with Jimmy Carter was really something special. And I remember President Bush saying to me, President H.W. Bush saying to me, "You know, I doubt that Bill Clinton and I would ever be able to do what Ford and Carter have done." And then they did do it. And so I think that not only was the collaboration and the graciousness that President Ford showed to the man who defeated him, something that was special on its own, but it set a model for future presidents

to follow. And that's a good thing, particularly given the partisanship that the country is suffering through.

Smith: I sometimes wondered if one of the things, though, that perhaps aided that relationship was that they both ran against Ronald Reagan.

Roberts: That probably is a bond, right. "Shoot! Did you see what he did to me? Look what he did to me!"

Smith: Mrs. Ford. I think it's hard for this generation to get its arms around just how forbidden a subject breast cancer was.

Roberts: Ah! The word cancer was really not even used. People would be described as having a wasting disease. And of course, one didn't use the word breast. So, for Mrs. Ford to go public and say that she had breast cancer has probably saved millions of lives. Nancy Reagan being the other person who followed on. To do this in the 1970s, nobody, nobody had done that. And the courage that that took, the going into klieg lights saying this, it's embarrassing. I've had breast cancer myself, and had to be public about it. And it's not easy. And that was in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. If Betty Ford had not paved the way, I think that that would have been very much harder.

Smith: And he's part of that story, isn't he?

Roberts: Very much part of that story. The pictures of him at the hospital with her, and him talking about the day of the surgery, him just welling up and saying the doctors say she's going to be fine. You have a sense of their real devotion. You know, I remember when they did move into the White House, even though I was living abroad, looking at the pictures in the paper and saying, "Oh! They're sharing a bedroom!" And, until I had noticed other White Houses as a kid somewhere along the line, I had never heard of married couples not sharing bedrooms.

Smith: They were the first since the Coolidge's.

Roberts: But then, growing up, I saw these pictures of White Houses, and saw that the presidents and first ladies had separate rooms, which I found passing strange.

But then, I noticed that they were in the same room, and by that time I was grown up with kids of my own, and I thought, good for them.

Smith: It's funny, I've seen that concerned Americans wrote to protest. They just thought this was offensive somehow.

Roberts: Well, remember TV sitcoms. Everybody was in twin beds. Boy have times changed, and not necessarily for the better.

Smith: And my favorite letter was after the *Sixty Minutes* interview, which really is a turning point. If you go back and actually look at the transcript of that interview, I remember thinking, I'm not even sure Hillary Clinton could say those things. In some ways, we've almost regressed. But the immediate reaction in the White House – everyone always fights the last war – “Oh, my god, what has she done?” And it took a little while, and some polls to come in and the country had changed. It was a time when people wanted authenticity, more than anything. She fit the bill.

Roberts: But also, again, as I was saying, about the China trip. What was America going through at the moment? All the kids were giving their parents grief. And to have the First Lady basically say, “Here's the way it is, folks, and I would have to deal with it.” That is exactly what every mom was feeling.

Smith: There was a letter from a woman in Texas who wrote in – dead serious – saying, “You do not understand. You are constitutionally required to be perfect.” No irony. Perfect wife, perfect mother, perfect...on and on. And it's in the Constitution.

Roberts: Well, you know the role of first lady is such a difficult role and it's so ill-defined, or totally undefined, and Americans project all of their own ideas about marriage and women's roles and all that onto that one woman. And there is such a kind of fear of her, because there is this kind of sense of “she's got power that we don't understand, and she can't be fired.” There is a kind of almost Greek tragedy sense of fear of women here. It's almost like Madea(?). Women are, in some ways, always doing something irrational, and perhaps a little evil.

- Smith: My reference to Mrs. Clinton wasn't meant to be critical. In some ways, I think Mrs. Ford, because she had this pre-existing image as this Cub Scout Den mother, Sunday schoolteacher, from Grand Rapids, actually had a little bit more breathing room, in effect, to be counterintuitive. Which I think in some ways was denied Hillary Clinton.
- Roberts: I think that's exactly right. Good point, because she was seen as...
- Smith: Child of the Sixties...
- Roberts: Rhymes with witch. All of that.
- Smith: You mentioned an interview you did with President Ford in '93. Had you done others?
- Roberts: 2003.
- Smith: 2003, I'm sorry.
- Roberts: No, but I had seen him in various places, and he was always incredibly gracious. And we always had fun just reminiscing. A lot of the men from that era – Mel Laird is another one. There's a real sense of camaraderie still, and with the kids. We were Congressional brats – that's what we called ourselves, and all really had that sense of camaraderie.
- Smith: I've heard Susan talk about it. Her dad really was a workaholic, and he'd go in on Saturdays, and I think he'd go on Sundays if there was anyone to work there, but he'd go on Saturdays. The kids would play in Statuary Hall.
- Roberts: Right. Well, that's the other thing. We loved the Capitol. The Capitol was our playground. And, of course, there was none of this nutsy security, and we had birthday parties in the Speaker's dining room, we would ride on the Senate subway – it was just the one little wicker subway – and the men who ran it were sweethearts, who would basically babysit us. And our parents just brought us to the Capitol. I remember when I was seven years old – this is a pathetic story – of waking up on my seventh birthday, and saying, "Great, I can go in the public gallery now!" Because until then you were only allowed



in the family gallery, and if you could go into the public gallery, you could take people on tours.

Smith: A real turning point.

Roberts: Now this still occasionally is true, I'm happy to say; any night that there was a presidential address, a State of the Union, or a Joint Session, you would see the dining room filled with Congressional families. And the difference then, though, was that we would also come up for big votes. It wasn't on television, if you were going to see a debate on some significant piece of legislation, you had to be there. So we went, and it was great because we got out of school.

Smith: On balance, what do you think the impact of television has been on the daily functioning of Congress?

Roberts: The daily functioning has been, I think, - I think television has had its pluses and minuses. It does bring it to people's homes and they get to see the workings of the place, but it also does mean that there is a lot of posturing. Particularly in the one-minute speeches in the morning – the special orders in the afternoon. The real thing, however, that had an impact on the functioning of Congress was the automatic roll call. The electronic roll call. Because it used to be that it took forty-five minutes to call the roll, and a lot of votes were by teller vote. That meant that a lot of people didn't know how you voted. And now, roll calls are called on all kinds of things, just so that various interest groups can have their score cards. And that has not been a very salutary development.

Smith: Gotcha, lots of gotcha.

Roberts: Particularly on the journal, voting on the journal every day. \_\_\_\_ was absent, five millions times!

Smith: Do you remember the last time you saw President Ford?

Roberts: I saw him at the Republican Convention in Philadelphia – what year was that? That was when he had his little...

Smith: Well, that was 2000.

- Roberts: So that wasn't the last time I saw him.
- Smith: Maybe that interview you did in 2003?
- Roberts: Maybe that was the last time I saw him.
- Smith: When you saw him in Philadelphia, did you detect...?
- Roberts: He was fine. I was very upset when I heard that he'd had a little – ischemia or something like that?
- Smith: Yeah, exactly.
- Roberts: Because I'd seen him and thought he was great.
- Smith: Apropos nothing, within twenty minutes of that news becoming public, I got two calls – one from Julie Nixon Eisenhower, and one from Tricia.
- Roberts: You know, they are nice women. I saw Tricia at Mrs. Johnson's funeral, and she is a nice woman. She really is.
- Smith: People don't realize that there is this fraternity of presidential families.
- Roberts: That's right.
- Smith: It totally transcends politics.
- Roberts: Because they've had an experience that very few other people have had, and only each other has had it. Once I interviewed Martin Luther King, III, and he said, "You can't imagine what's it like to live this life."
- Smith: With that name.
- Roberts: With that name. None of the siblings married, none of those children ever married, and he said, "I just think there's nobody who can share this." And I said, "What about the Kennedys?" And he said, "Well, I've reached out, but no."
- Smith: Yeah, that's interesting. Do you remember the last time you saw Mrs. Ford?
- Roberts: The last time I saw Mrs. Ford was 2003. We were at the house; we had a very, very, nice visit. She looked wonderful. I was out of the country for the

funeral, but my mother went to the funeral and saw her there. They really were close. But Mrs. Ford and I had a wonderful visit in 2003 where she talked a lot about the Betty Ford Center, and she was in the process of bringing Susan in to do more. But she was so knowledgeable about everything going on there, and about addiction. What a contribution she has made. It's just unbelievable.

Smith: When you combine the impact of breast cancer and alcohol and drug dependence; I've often said, there aren't a lot of presidents who have had the impact on how ordinary people live their lives that she has had.

Roberts: I think that Betty Ford and Eunice Kennedy Shriver are two people who have had more impact on literally millions of people, than any politicians I can name.

Smith: I didn't realize you were out of the country. That week I was sort of wearing two hats. I was with ABC for half the week and then I was with the family, and I sensed – and actually, some of it was pretty explicit – as the week went on, there were people in the press who were surprised at how much response there was.

Roberts: Response to?

Smith: To the President's death. Because he'd been out of the public eye and all that, and I think there were a number of factors. I think we needed something to make us feel good about ourselves at that point. But also there was a whole generation that was discovering him for the first time through these old grainy clips. And he looked pretty good compared with politics today.

Roberts: Right. Exactly. We were just on vacation and I was getting my mother up here. Oh my god, it was like Normandy. But it was very, very important to her that she come, and she was quite angry with me for not leaving all the children behind and...but I was in touch with Susan.

Smith: How do you think Gerald Ford should be remembered?

Roberts: I think Gerald Ford should be remembered as the person who tried to bring the country together at really one of the worst times, other than the Civil War,

in our history. To understand how bleak the period was is just terribly important. We were feeling dispirited about the country. There was this war going on that nobody liked, there was a generation at war with their parents and not feeling any of the sense of pride in the country that all the rest of us had been raised with. There was a president who had lied and cheated and done all kinds of things that embarrassed us and enraged us, and then to have this regular, good man come in with his regular, good family, and wonderful wife and say, "The long national nightmare is over," it was a great moment of hope. It couldn't last because the country was too divided and was too upset. And there was no right answer there. But he did his best and he carried that on after his presidency and I think did contribute to the healing over the decades after he was defeated.

Smith: Perfect. Thank you.

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