

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Dick Ford
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: It's hard to know where to begin, so let me just toss a question out. In some ways I feel like I know more about your mom than I do about your dad, and yet I read somewhere the president said probably your dad was the person who had the greatest influence on him, of anyone in his life. Tell me about your dad, and what were the qualities that presumably not only got transmitted to Jerry, but to you and your brothers.

Ford: Hopefully.

Smith: Well, I think probably.

Ford: There is no question that, in my opinion, I think Dad was a predominant force in the development of any characteristics of Jerry's that have gotten note – such as his integrity, obviously. Even the small point like being on time. We never had to worry about Jerry when I'd establish a golf game. He was there. There was a little problem with brother Tom, however. It's just a comparison. Jerry, Jim and I were extremely punctual. Tom didn't get the message.

Smith: Was that something your dad drove home?

Ford: Oh yeah, if you said were going to be home at such and such a time, even if you were a boy, you were there at such and such a time. No, it's time wise, but if you were given a job to do, it was expected to be done, period.

Smith: To someone who didn't know your dad, describe him – both physically and in other ways.

Ford: For those days, he was a relatively big man. He probably was six-one or two when he was in his youth and weighed over two hundred pounds. That was pretty big in those days. He was a very, very hard worker. Put in hours like people couldn't believe. Then he got involved in community service and

politics. Put forth the same amount of effort there. Yet, obviously in his opinion, was some concern for his life and safety of the members of his family because they just, about two years ago, found a revolver that he buried up in the attic. It was his because it had the newspaper wrapped around it. This was in the attic of the house we lived in on Santa Cruz, and this was the time when they were “fighting” the McKay machine. There were things done that people question now, but there is no doubt in my mind that they did happen.

Smith: That is fascinating. Would it be fair to say that Jerry got his interest in politics from your dad?

Ford: I couldn't be absolutely sure of that, but I would bet ten to one that he definitely did. He saw Dad's involvement and Jerry was, like the three of us, encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities as well as being involved in everything that we could involve ourselves in. Growing up - Boy Scouts we were associated with in the high schools or the junior high schools. As each one of us came up, we became scouts and subsequently Eagle Scouts because Jerry had established a pattern, which I think was influenced very significantly by Dad.

Smith: Jumping ahead, but I have to ask you, how did your dad get involved politically? Then tell me about Frank McKay.

Ford: I can't tell you much about Frank McKay, but I think my dad became involved politically when Bill Ver Meulen and a lady by the name of Koeze, and a couple of others – I can't remember right now – were very involved in the effort to destroy the McKay machine. That was, to my knowledge, Dad's first real involvement. I think he got involved partially through church and partially through business. The people who knew him asked him to get involved.

Smith: What was the McKay machine?

Ford: It was, strangely enough, a Republican machine. But there was some dubious projects. One of which was the first waterline to Lake Michigan. Tales are

told of truckloads of materials that were signed for that were never delivered. That was part of the presumed connivery of the McKay machine.

Smith: Did they have pretty much a hammer lock on...

Ford: They had a very definite hammerlock on the elections. Once the elections were completed, the individuals that were elected, cow-towed very definitely, to whatever Mr. McKay apparently determined what was right for whomever.

Smith: The story is told, didn't Jerry get an appointment one day with McKay?

Ford: Well, I'm not real privy to that. I know that he got an appointment with McKay, to inform him that he was going to run against Bartel Jonkman. And Mr. McKay kept him waiting, I think two or three hours, and then when Jerry saw him, it was like a five minute discussion in which Jerry presumably said to Mr. McKay, "I'm going to run against Bartel Jonkman." I understand his reply was "Well you're wasting your time." Or something to that effect.

Smith: Presumably Jonkman was part of the McKay organization – or at least was the incumbent .

Ford: At least was the incumbent with great support from Mr. McKay.

Smith: Tell me about your mother.

Ford: As I look back at it, I wonder how in the dickens she raised four boys. I mean we were pretty independent souls, and she put up with all the idiosyncrasies which we possessed.

Smith: Such as?

Ford: My own idiosyncrasies, I had two of them. One of them, I hated vegetables, and I oft times remember I was instructed not to leave the table until I finished my vegetables. Fortunately my good buddy, the dog, whose name was Buddy, got more vegetables than any dog in Grand Rapids, I think. I also had another peculiarity; I loved, for some reason, to apply adhesive tape, whether I needed or not, on various parts of my body. She overlooked all those little idiosyncrasies, which each one of us possessed, I'm sure.

Smith: Did Jerry have idiosyncrasies? He had a temper.

Ford: He had a temper before the war! But he changed after. I'll give you two instance: when he'd come back to take a vacation after he graduated from college, it was out at Yale, I was eleven years younger, but I was available for tennis and then I caddied for him in the mornings for golf. Then he and a couple of others would play tennis, normally every afternoon that he was in town. His temper I can remember vividly (which he denied). When he was in a sand trap, there was a big tree limb that went across the top of the sand trap and he took two shots to get out of it. The third shot just barely got out. With this he went , psst, and wrapped the club around the tree and left it.

So, in my opinion, all of us had tempers, definitely. I had a short fuse. In fact, my short fuse was probably worse than Jerry's. But just to make a point: one time my only claim to fame was as a reasonably good tennis player. Dad ascertained that if I could control my temper I'd be a much better tennis player. So he thought if Jerry could play a little tennis with me – that perhaps he could show me that losing one's temper would be detrimental to my game. I was either thirteen or fourteen at that time, and he hadn't played tennis in probably ten years. Unfortunately, it was the only sport at which I really excelled. After about fifteen minutes, I was not the one who was throwing the racquet – Jerry was. So that was an indication of his temper before the war.

Smith: So the story about your mother getting him to read the Rudyard Kipling poem *If* - as if that were kind of a cure-all – is that a little bit of an exaggeration?

Ford: I don't think so – I think that's true, because she was directing it at his temper. My younger brother, Jim, never had the temper, but Tom did, and I did, no question. But after the war, Jerry didn't. I remember one of his campaigns back here in Grand Rapids. He had a political luncheon down at the Kiwanis's Club, as I recall, in south Grand Rapids. A friend of mine invited me to be his guest and he gave his little speech and a minister who was in attendance in the back of the room, stood up and made some...I was thinking, you're not going to last one minute. I was waiting for him (Jerry) to explode, come off the dais, and he just said, "Well, Reverend, obviously you

and I have some points of disagreement.” I thought, “Oh, wow.” That was a new insight into my brother.

Smith: He was a very disciplined person, wasn't he?

Ford: Emphatically.

Smith: You saw that – he took care of himself all his life. He was a workaholic.

Ford: Absolutely. Which I think, getting back to your previous comment and question, I think that Dad was a workaholic and sometimes my wife accuses me of being a workaholic. I'm sure that applies to my brothers Tom and Jim as well, and it came from Dad.

Smith: And yet, there is the story when your mom passed away, in church, they went home and found her appointment books which were filled for the next month – is that true?

Ford: Oh – she was a goer! In fact, the best story I can tell you, after all four of us were married she took my sister-in-law, Janet, and my sister-in-law, Barb, Tom and Jim's wives, and my wife to Chicago for a weekend of shopping on the train. They got there, roughly at twelve o'clock or so and had lunch. Mom, I know, wanted to take them to Marshall Fields, because she was from the Chicago area. All three of them declined – said we're going to take a little nap. So the next day she tried to get them to go out early to go shopping with her. They did go with her in the morning, but in the afternoon when she went back again, they declined. So, for two half-days out of three, my wife and my sister-in-laws were resting while grandma was out shopping.

Smith: Was she that way, pretty much throughout her whole life?

Ford: Emphatically, yeah. She was very busy socially, and particularly in a garden club. She was big on gardens, very big on gardens. We had a garden in the back yard on Santa Cruz that was probably a yard wide and was on three sides of the back yard, with a gate coming in the backyard. That must have been close to ninety feet, at least – maybe a hundred feet and that deep. Mother and Dad would work there every Saturday and every Sunday afternoon. In my

case, I ascertained that was something I was never going to do. So my appreciation for flowers is not that great.

Smith: Were any of your other brothers pressed into service in the garden?

Ford: No. We were never asked.

Smith: Really?

Ford: They were quite content to do it all. I mowed the lawn, when it was my time, but...

Smith: What chores did you boys have?

Ford: Before the war, when we lived on Union Street, I remember I was only maybe six, seven years old at the time – eight or nine, I guess. I remember that Jerry's responsibility was banking the coal-shoveled fire furnace. That was his job every night. I know that, and probably became my brother Tom's job when Jerry was elsewhere employed.

Smith: Walk me through, because I know you lived in a number of houses. What is the first house you remember?

Ford: First house I was in was Union Street, and from Union Street we went to 2163 Lake Drive, and from there we went to 1011 Santa Cruz and from there to 959 San Lucia.

Smith: Let me back up. What are your memories of the Union Street house?

Ford: I remember Jerry and Tom had a route in which they sold magazines, and I can remember seeing the two of them go out with those newspaper sacks full of magazines. I guess they were delivering them, as far as I know. I remember that, and I can remember in my case getting knocked over by a Model-T, or something Ford. It ran right over me, but never hurt me – like that. That's about the only two or three memories I have of Union Street.

Smith: You would have been how old at that point?

Ford: I was born there, obviously, and we moved out in, I think '28 to Lake Drive.

Smith: Now that was sort of the upscale – kind of moving up in the world – pre-Depression house?

Ford: Yeah, that's right.

Smith: And what do you remember about that place?

Ford: It was virtually a brand new house. I think it was only – we moved there in 1933, and I think the house was probably built right in the end of the good times, just before the Depression. So the house was very big, by our standards as compared to where we slept on Lake Drive – the four of us slept in one room. Now moving over there, we had two to a room, and eventually, one to a room – so it was quite a change.

Smith: I'm just trying to construct in my own mind, the story where, once really hard times hit, where – didn't your dad lose the house?

Ford: I think he did, but that was before I was born. I don't believe, in fact I'm certain of it, obviously, moving from Union to Lake Drive – those were my early years, and I'm not aware of anything before that. But I've heard tales of that.

Smith: Tell me about the paint factory. Because that opened right about the time that Wall Street collapsed.

Ford: It was six weeks before the collapse, and he borrowed money to buy it from a man by the name of Simmons – Simmons Wood Finishes. They had two separate manufacturing specialties, one of which was material for the furniture trade, such as fillers and stains and varnishes. They had a very small line of house paints, etc. for the painter. My father at that time was office manager of Simmons Wood Products, I guess it was called. Which became subsequently Grand Rapids Wood Finishing. But he went to that gentleman and, again, as I understand, said he'd like to buy out the painter side, and Mr. Simmons was apparently quite happy to unload it. So they did. And as I said, they were in business for six weeks before the crash came.

Smith: And then what happened?

- Ford: All I can remember, truthfully, it seems odd that I can, I was, at point in time, six or seven years old, but I remember the meals became much plainer. I have a recollection of milk not being as available, but that's the only two things I can recall.
- Smith: Now in terms about the business, the story is your dad didn't want to lay anyone off.
- Ford: I understand that's true, also. As far as I know about it, he did not. He promised them, I guess I'd call it bonuses, when the company got on its feet, and which I also understand, he then honored and paid them.
- Smith: But, then, when the Depression really hit hard, did you move to a smaller house, or did you stay in the house you were in?
- Ford: The house on Lake Drive, a big wooden edifice, but with the restriction that the four of us slept in one loft-like deal. So then when dad moved us in 1933, it was quite an upscale. Then they stayed there until maybe 1952, in the house on Santa Cruz and moved to San Lucia.
- Smith: You, obviously, know the story better than anyone, of how your brother found out about his (birth) status. Did you know? He was what, sixteen or seventeen at the time?
- Ford: Yeah, seventeen.
- Smith: What did you know?
- Ford: I knew nothing about that. In fact, people think it is rather strange, but I personally never knew that brother was my half brother until I was probably twenty-four, twenty five. My brothers Tom and Jim knew, and when I asked them they said, "Oh, yeah, we knew it." But it wasn't any big deal and was never discussed and I certainly didn't feel any differently towards him than I did my other two brothers.
- Smith: It's interesting, because he always referred to your dad as his father, never his step-father.

- Ford: Oh, yeah. Emphatically. He took the name Junior, as you are well aware, and Art Brown, the individual who, in my opinion, was the most important factor in the genesis of this museum, was probably one of his closest friends, I think.
- Smith: Of course, he had some pretty unpleasant experiences involving his birth father, but you weren't aware of those at the time?
- Ford: Not aware at all. Never heard it until I read it in print.
- Smith: Never talked about it?
- Ford: Never talked about it. He may have talked to guys like Art Brown about it, but unfortunately Art has passed on. He would have been a fabulous source of anecdotes, I'm sure.
- Smith: Was he a popular kid?
- Ford: Oh, no question about that. I've only known, in my lifetime, four natural athletes, personally. He was one of them. He could do anything athletically. It was incredible. I can remember times we'd go on picnics or something – I can't even remember where – but they'd ask him to throw horseshoes, and he'd win. And he hadn't thrown horseshoes, *I know*, since the last time he'd did it the year before. He was an accomplished athlete, obviously, in football and basketball and track. But he was also a great swimmer. There was a Grand Rapids swim team that I saw a picture of. A guy name of Bubby Rose had it, and he was on the Grand Rapids swim team in 1928. I wasn't aware of that, but I saw the picture.
- Smith: It must have stuck in your craw, if not in his, that later on, in the presidency, to be depicted as this kind of bumbler.
- Ford: Oh, nothing angered me more than LBJ's famous comment about, been too long without a (football) helmet. Chewing gum, and too long without a helmet. That was indicative, in my opinion, of some of the uncharacteristic comments from the other side. They normally didn't do that, because he was so well liked on both sides of the aisle. But occasionally some guy, particularly the midnight commentators, would make reference to falling

down the steps at Geneva, I think it was. Not mentioning that there was a rain storm and also that his knees, at that point in time, were gone.

Smith: Did it bother him?

Ford: Not as much as it did me. No, he fluffed it off. Just said, "It's politics," or something to that effect.

Smith: Did he have girlfriends?

Ford: Yes, he did. He had some girlfriends in high school that remember. I think her name was Mary Ann Hondorp –I think was one of his girlfriends – at least there is no other reason for me to remember the name. Then, of course, everybody's well aware, he dated a gal by the name of Phyllis Brown for quite a while.

Smith: Who, I understand went on to have multiple marriages, and I guess toward the end – when she volunteered to drop by the office and was not encouraged to do so.

Ford: I think that's true.

Smith: Do you think Mrs. Ford – she had no reason to be jealous, obviously – but do you think she was sensitive about Phyllis?

Ford: I think because people kept asking about it. I don't see her jealous, I just don't think she thought it was an appropriate subject.

Smith: When he wanted to go to the University of Michigan, I take it there was really no money in the family to support that.

Ford: There surely wasn't. But, as you know, he got a job at the hospital, I think it was, and then he got \$100 from Harold Steele, who was a friend of my father's as well as being coach at South High School. Then my aunt and uncle sent him two dollars each week, which helped a lot in those days. As I said, his job helped him also. Then he came back in the summers.

Smith: I think he said from time to time he sold his blood.

Ford: Yes, he did. Yeah.

- Smith: Did you know Arthur Vandenberg? How visible was Vandenberg in the community?
- Ford: Well, he didn't have to come back to Grand Rapids very often. He was so solidly entrenched here that he spent more of his time campaigning on the east side of the state. But as I think has been indicated previously, everybody believes, as do I, that after my father, Arthur Vandenberg was probably the next most influential male person in his character development.
- Smith: What was it about Vandenberg that you think influenced your brother?
- Ford: I saw just a little bit of it after the war. I can't remember a specific conversation, but I think Jerry admired the way he could accomplish things with members of the opposition and not have it be a knockdown-drag out discussion, or with repercussions later. I think Jerry admired that style, and I believe it's exemplified by the very close relationship that he and Tip O'Neill had. They could fight like dogs on the floor of the House, but they were great buddies afterwards, I know they were. I saw on many occasions, the camaraderie between Tip O'Neill and Jerry.
- Smith: He clearly had developed an interest in politics by 1940. He is in Philadelphia shouting, "We want Willkie!" in the convention - the first convention he would attend. Which is a little ironic given the fact that he is sort of an isolationist, and Willkie's politics were not that. But he was obviously swept up in the whole Willkie movement.
- Ford: I do not know this, but I suspect that because Dad was starting to get involved in politics at a very minimal level, that he was aware of it. Dad was supporting Willkie, and, to a degree, I'm sure that influenced him and he became somewhat more determined to pursue a political field.
- Smith: After the war he came back here and set up the law practice with Phil Buchen. The way this story is told, that's all kind of a precursor, almost an automatic first step toward a political career. By that point was it pretty clear that he wanted to go into politics?

Ford: We lived together – we shared a room, after the war at Mom and Dad’s house on San Lucia. I was aware of the fact that he was out, and this would have been in ’46-47, so for a year and a half, maybe, we shared that room and I can’t say that I was aware of the fact that he was anything more than peripherally involved – I knew he was involved in something political – but I didn’t know what it was.

Smith: This raises a question, did he play his cards close to the vest? Was it something that he...

Ford: No, it’s like the fact that I didn’t know he was my half-brother. If you didn’t have anything to say that was important, you just didn’t say it.

Smith: Now that’s about the time that he met Betty.

Ford: That is correct.

Smith: Do you remember that?

Ford: I remember he was dating her.

Smith: It seemed to develop pretty fast.

Ford: Apparently, yeah. He got back in ’45, they were married in ’48. I was married the year before. He was my best man and my other two brothers were involved as part of my wedding. I knew that after the church he was going to pick her up to go to the wedding. That was expected.

Smith: Let me ask you, maybe you can clarify something, I know that he had asked her fairly early in ’48, he indicated he wanted to get married. But he couldn’t tell her when, and he couldn’t really tell her why he couldn’t tell her when. And, of course, he was going to run for Congress. Now there are two versions of the story, and they are not mutually exclusive. One is, he really wanted to take Jonkman by surprise, which he pretty much did. And the other is, he really didn’t know, at that point, how conservative Dutch-Calvinists would react to his marrying a divorcee.

Ford: I think that’s true.

- Smith: In those days that would have been, or could have been an issue?
- Ford: Oh, I know it was an issue in those days. And would have been, I suspect, a very significant impact on his electability. There isn't any question about that. That just wasn't done, and particularly in the circles of the Christian Reformed, the Dutch Reformed churches, and for that matter, the Catholic churches. With those three churches, the Catholic Church being predominant on the west side of the river and the Dutch and Christian Reformed on the east side of the river, he'd have had a very difficult time, I think.
- Smith: That's fascinating. Now, I realize you can't answer this, but at some point he must have come clean with her, or she figured it out or something. Do you think they ever had that discussion about why you didn't ask me?
- Ford: I think she probably figured it out.
- Smith: Obviously, it didn't stand in the way of their getting married or being very happily married.
- Ford: No, not a bit. After it was a fait accompli, I think then, that he'd been in there for two years and – big deal.
- Smith: What do you remember about their wedding? For years there has been this story that he showed up with one brown shoe and one black shoe. The variation is he showed up a black suit, but with brown shoes, dusty shoes from campaigning.
- Ford: I think that's true, but I'm not sure.
- Smith: Do you think she knew what she was getting into, in terms of marrying someone for whom politics would always be at the center of his life.
- Ford: Well, I think that she envisioned the life of a normal Congressman as it was portrayed in newspapers and magazines in those days - but not to the extent of the fact that he would be gone for so many, many days each year. I don't believe Betty anticipated that, and that was a difficult position to put her in.

- Smith: I sensed, in later years, he had a greater awareness of the burdens that were placed on her in terms of raising the kids. Basically she was left, in many ways, to raise the kids while he was out on the road.
- Ford: Yeah.
- Smith: Did you sense unhappiness?
- Ford: No, not a bit. They'd come back for summer – we had a cottage down at Lake Michigan – and the deal was, the first nine weeks of summer from the first of June on, my other two brothers and I would rotate: first third, second third, third third, and Jerry always got it from the second week in August through Labor Day. So we would see him every year for as long we kept the cottage, and whenever he came back to Grand Rapids, if he wasn't speaking at some dinner or something like that, which quite frequently he was. But when Mother was alive, he pretty much squired her on engagements when he came home.
- Smith: Was he good with the kids?
- Ford: Oh, yeah. They all adored him. He did everything right and didn't make any mistakes, in my opinion. So I guess they got used to being raised to some extent by their mother as opposed to, well, there's Dad.
- Smith: Of course, it reversed the roles. It sort made her into the disciplinarian.
- Ford: Yes, it did.
- Smith: Which carries its own burdens.
- Ford: Even the little bit of time that my family went down to spend just maybe a day with them, it was Betty that was directing the kids hither, thither and yawn. We went down there a couple of times, maybe three or four times, I guess, and each time, when Jerry was there, Betty was the disciplinarian.
- Smith: Were you surprised at the degree of success that he had in the House? It seems that almost from the beginning, the old Bulls sized him up as a workaholic, a work horse, not a show horse. This is a guy who asks more questions and does his homework and we can trust him. And they invited him

in, whether it was CIA oversight, or whatever. They gave him a lot of responsibility, even if he wasn't a household name. A Kennedy or a Nixon – they weren't interested in Congress – they had their own objectives. But it seems like almost from the beginning he was singled out for a lot of responsibilities that a young Congressman might not necessarily have.

Ford: I think that one of the things you notice, is, just as you said, he was a workaholic. I can't remember which general said it after he retired, but it was before Jerry was anywhere in the hierarchy of the House. There was a general quoted in the newspaper that I read that said, "Congressman Ford is more knowledgeable on the Defense budget than anybody in Congress." Well, that certainly would have been obviously recognized by the powers that be in the House, and they rewarded him accordingly, in my opinion.

Smith: Did you always know – was his ambition always to be Speaker?

Ford: I would say, yes, I knew that. There was never was any discussion about his running for president. Never. I never heard a word about that. I think, as he has reported, the only thing he was interested in was basically becoming Majority Leader of the House or House Speaker.

Smith: Did he talk to you at all about his work on Warren Commission?

Ford: A little bit. I personally had some questions about the final conclusion, but if I recall, the conclusion says, in essence, based on the evidence available, it is our opinion that Lee Harvey Oswald committed the crime. I think that's a very, very accurate depiction of the efforts of the Warren committee. I asked him a couple of times, it just didn't seem like that guy could get off two shots, or something like that. He said, "All I can tell you, Dick, is we believe he did." That was the end of the discussion. But it was a minor discussion topic – not very big.

Smith: His relationship with Nixon, obviously it evolved. Did he talk about it, in later years? One sensed that, there is this Boy Scout quality in your brother - an inclination to believe that other people are as honest and decent and trustworthy as you try to be. It may not be the best trait for a politician trying

to get things done in Washington. When the Nixon tapes were released, the thing that you sense bothered him the most was the language on those tapes.

Ford: The language bothered him and the duplicity that was obviously part and parcel of the tapes. I think the fact, not only the swearing, but the fact that he'd been lied to - I think that those *two* factors were absolutely devastating to Jerry.

Smith: Is that naïve?

Ford: No. This is our upbringing, I think. I think that we were taught to believe that everybody is right and good, and until they prove differently, you must accept them on that basis. But by the same token, once they've destroyed that illusion by factual efforts, then, obviously in his case, Nixon, per se, was done. And I know in my own personal cases, individuals that I think of over the years, I reacted absolutely the same way. Guys that were close to me on one occasion, then lied, ceased to be friends of mine - period. I'm sure that's the same thing Jerry had.

Smith: And your sense was that it really did destroy the trust that had existed?

Ford: Oh, there is no question in my mind. Maybe it didn't, but not in my mind.

Smith: It is interesting, because I know Mrs. Ford was quoted as saying the day that the Nixons left, and they moved in, in effect, was the saddest of her life. I assume that is a reflection on the personal level - these friends who were being publicly...

Ford: humiliated. Yeah.

Smith: Let me back up. Before he became vice president, obviously Watergate happens. Did you talk about that with him?

Ford: My own personal relationship with Jerry, from basically the youngest age, was - we didn't talk about things - and I didn't ask him about things. So as a consequence, of perhaps all the people that he knew, I think I was one of, maybe the only, individual that never discussed politics with him - except with one exception, never. Because I saw him down at Lake Michigan wander

into the water, and standing there trying to enjoy himself in maybe two or three feet of water, and people coming up and talking to him. I saw it on the golf course, I saw it on the tennis courts, and so I, personally, never, ever, discussed politics with him.

Smith: As part of that, he wouldn't necessarily volunteer opinions – at some point he must have – as this thing began to close in on him...

Ford: I said that I didn't, but Jerry, during all the time of the Watergate problems, when he was vice president, he'd come into Grand Rapids, we lived on almost a direct route from downtown out to the airport. Every Sunday night, or most every Sunday night that he was in town, he'd stop and sit down and say hello. My wife would, as soon as he was seated, start in and just bewail the faults of Mr. Nixon. "Jerry, you can't believe that, can't believe that." I remember he said, "Well, Ellen, you know, he was raised by the same standards that we were raised, and unless I find out differently, I have to believe him." It didn't make any difference – the next time he came into town, my wife would start in on him again.

Smith: Did she ever say, "I told you so."

Ford: I don't think she ever did.

Smith: Do you think he was surprised? When the tapes were released, that had to have come as a shock. That is not the way you were raised, the language - as you said earlier. Was there a point beyond which his faith was shattered?

Ford: This is my guess: I think about two to three months before the tapes were exposed he had reached the conclusion that Mr. Nixon was not being honest with him. I think he then, as a good party man, was put in an extremely difficult position of trying to deny that while had occurred, he had to support Mr. Nixon, but not appear to be grabbing for the presidency.

Smith: You are right. It is an impossible position because, at the back of his head, much as he didn't want to acknowledge it, there had to be the knowledge that this could play out in such a way that I find myself in this office and what's

the good of destroying my credibility in a lost cause - a cause that I no longer believe in. It was an impossible position that he was in.

Ford: You phrase it succinctly.

Smith: How did you find out he was going to be vice president?

Ford: Somebody called us about five or ten minutes before and said you'd better turn on the TV. I have no recollection as to who that was.

Smith: You go back and you look at that and it's unbelievable. I think of Mrs. Ford, what she must have gone through, and the kids, too. Because literally, they were told to be in the East Room in two hours, and be introduced to a national television audience. It just turned their lives inside out, I assume.

Ford: Oh, I'm sure. They must have been in a fog. What do you mean we're going there?

Smith: Any yet, the next day, he came back for the Cedar Springs Flannel Day Parade.

Ford: Yeah, he did. That's true, because he'd made a commitment to do it. He came and I think that is typical of "I said I'd be there, so I'm going to be there."

Smith: You obviously were following this very closely, can you remember what you thought? This is going to end up with Nixon leaving.

Ford: But I thought, it would be postponed past the – as I remember, he pardoned him on December 9th?

Smith: He becomes president on August 9th. Nixon announces he is leaving on the 8th, the swearing in is on the 9th and it was a month later that the pardon took place.

Ford: In September, obviously. Your question was whether I had suspected, and when I suspect it – I had no inkling that he was going to pardon him – none.

Smith: Go back a month earlier – when Nixon resigns. How did you find out that your brother was going to be president?

Ford: As I said, about ten minutes before, somebody called us and I can't imagine who – somebody called us and said you'd better turn on your TV – so I guess that's how we knew.

Smith: Okay – so that's not the vice presidency, but the presidency.

Ford: Yes.

Smith: He didn't tip you off that this is about to happen?

Ford: No – no way.

Smith: When was the first time you talked with him after all of that?

Ford: Probably three weeks would be my guess.

Smith: Really?

Ford: Yes. I figured that everybody in Kingdom Come was calling him, and he didn't need one more call from a brother. I don't know, very frankly, if Tom or Jim called. Tom might have, Tom was a little more politically involved than Jim and I were.

Smith: How would your parents have felt?

Ford: Oh, they would have been extremely proud, no question. In fact, I think Jerry said the biggest regret he had was that Mom and Dad didn't live to see it. There is no question that that is probably true.

Smith: So he certainly never asked your advice about the Nixon pardon?

Ford: No way. He did not.

Smith: Were you surprised when it happened?

Ford: Oh, yes. No doubt about it. Absolutely. It shocked me. My first reaction was the same as everybody else's – how could he pardon that crook? That was the expression used in the newspaper and elsewhere, and it was probably indicative of my feeling as well.

Smith: Were there other people in Grand Rapids who felt the same way?

- Ford: Oh, amen. I would bet that 50% of the people that voted for him over the years were as flabbergasted as I was. We didn't necessarily think that he'd done the wrong thing. It was just that, well, maybe he should have waited a little bit longer and made sure that there weren't some other things going to come forth. So the precipitousness of the action was, I think, just overwhelming.
- Smith: Did you discuss that then or later?
- Ford: Nope, I never did. Again, my philosophy, I guess was rather strange for a brother, but I felt very strongly that everybody and his brother, every time they saw him was, "why are you doing this..." I just felt that everything he did, as far as I was concerned, was basically the same as I believed and would do. So there was no use my having any comment.
- Smith: Did you find yourself defending him at that point against...?
- Ford: Oh, yeah. I was a little vociferous in my comments to individuals who described his motives as anything other than pure and clean. I had some contentious discussions with quite a few people
- Smith: Who thought there had been a deal...
- Ford: Thought there'd been a deal, or something, there's more coming, or he should have waited another month to make sure, etc.
- Smith: Then, of course, two weeks after the pardon, comes the news of Mrs. Ford's cancer surgery.
- Ford: Yeah.
- Smith: What a month.
- Ford: I can't imagine how they ever got through it.
- Smith: How did you find out about that? Was that also through the media?
- Ford: No, I think, as a matter of fact, Jerry called us on that. Didn't talk to me – I was on the road, I think. But he talked to Ellen and told Ellen.

Smith: He must have been pretty profoundly affected.

Ford: Ellen indicated that, yes.

Smith: When did you visit him in the White House?

Ford: Oh, boy. The family visited him twice in the White House, if I remember correctly. The first time was maybe six months afterwards when I took all our family up there for a weekend. They had to go out to dinners, but we were there with them for one dinner out of the three nights we were there, and had a great time in the White House. Then I went there on one occasion by myself when I was in the area. Then the last time we went, it was not to the White House. We all went to Camp David and Tom and Janet, and Barb and Jim, myself and Ellen, went up to Camp David along with Gail's mother and father. We had a great weekend up there at Camp David. That was special.

Smith: They really liked it up there, didn't they?

Ford: They did because people couldn't ask him, "What's your opinion on this... what's your opinion on that." He got up there and I think they looked at it as a true retreat.

Smith: Were you aware at all of any of Mrs. Ford's problems during that period.

Ford: Yeah, on occasion, when I'd see them, she appeared a little bit non-attentive. But, that was always after dinner, or maybe before dinner. I attributed it to being nothing but, "she's had a drink, maybe," or "she can't handle it as well as the next person."

Smith: I guess when she quit, he quit, too, didn't he?

Ford: I believe that's true. I don't know that, but I believe that's true.

Smith: Tell me about the '76 campaign. Remember, at the very end when they came back here out of the airport and he kind of broke down. It's funny because Marty this morning said, "I wish he'd done that earlier in the campaign, I wish he'd shown those emotions." It might have been very politically advantageous. What are your memories of that event?

Ford: When he arrived?

Smith: Yeah, and at that point did you think he just might pull this thing out?

Ford: Yeah, on election night. He was downtown and I think Betty was with him, and they were at an election eve party that we were at. We didn't expect him to come back to Grand Rapids, but he did. I thought, up until the very end, that he might pull it out. I tell you, really, truly, my feelings were - it was a big disappointment, and I understand it - but for his health it probably saved his life. I can tell you in 1976, when we went down there to Camp David, he was in the poorest health I ever saw him in, up until a couple weeks, obviously, before he died.

Smith: Really?

Ford: Oh! He was gaunt, he was tired, he was beat. He'd been working trying to get re-elected twenty hours a day, sometimes. So, he physically was just beat to a rap - terrible. So I was happy, from that standpoint.

Smith: How long do you think it took him to get over that? It took him a while.

Ford: Yeah, probably two weeks, would be my guess, he'd 95% forgotten about it. I can attribute that to athletics. I really, truly can. You give it your best effort, and if it isn't successful, there is nothing more you can do about it. You tried, and you tried as hard you can - as long as you believe you did - then c'est la vie. So I think that that was ingrained in him for his competitiveness as an athlete.

Smith: Were you surprised when later on he and Jimmy Carter became friends.

Ford: Not particularly. I wasn't too surprised. They certainly weren't for the first four years, because Jerry campaigned, as you know, for Reagan, almost as hard as his campaigned for himself. It was incredible.

Smith: Which is pretty generous considering what...

Ford: Oh, you bet your boots. I thought it was more than generous. But I think that Jerry recognized that President Carter's hometown values were pretty much the same as ours.

- Smith: I was talking to Marty, too, about whether there was criticism locally when they decided to go live in Rancho Mirage, instead of coming back here. I'm sure you ran into some of that.
- Ford: I ran into a lot of it.
- Smith: What was it like?
- Ford: I attempted to explain it to a lot of people, but basically, like myself, if I can get away from here for six months a year, I'm going to do it. The difference was that they didn't want to keep going back and forth somewhere because, as I explained to people, of the neck problem that Betty has. You've seen it when she talks, she has to move her whole body. I remember, very specifically Jerry telling me that they had gone to the Eisenhower Medical Center - I don't know exactly what the problem is in the cervical area - but Jerry told me that the doctors there told them they could attempt the operation, but the success was no better than 50-50 and it might be considerably worse. So they felt that, you can live with it. But it was aggravated very significantly by cold weather. So that's what I told people. In my opinion, that's why they chose California.
- Smith: Yeah. When they had the intervention and everything that followed, did that all come as news to you?
- Ford: Yeah. Except, when they went to Moscow and Betty got the tour of the palace, she was obviously in distress, not herself. So when Ellen and I saw that, I think frankly, we were immediately hopeful that they would have an intervention shortly, or soon.
- Smith: Isn't it extraordinary what she's done since?
- Ford: Oh, incredible!
- Smith: And wasn't he proud?
- Ford: Yes, he was, and rightfully so. She's done a heck of a job. A fantastic job.
- Smith: The wonderful thing is, he'd joke about it, but she got the Medal of Freedom long before he got the Medal of Freedom. There was never any rivalry. You

sensed that he was just – recognition and medals and all at that point didn't mean that much to him anyway – but to see her recognized meant a lot.

Ford: Yup, I agree.

Smith: I got hoodwinked into the effort when the Kennedy Library was going to give him the Profiles in Courage award. He wasn't going to go. He wasn't going to go to Boston, and it took several people, including, I think, Mrs. Ford, to make him appreciate just what a historic – and it's almost like – well, he said afterwards, people don't ask me about the pardon anymore. It's like that was...

Ford: ...it's over.

Smith: It's over, yeah. When the Kennedy Library recognizes you...

Ford: He probably figures it might set up again – he probably weighed that chance against the award.

Smith: But he was very modest, wasn't he?

Ford: Emphatically. Again, I go back to athletics. He never made any big deal about his accomplishments, even his football accomplishments, which were pretty noteworthy. But the other athletic accomplishments that he had, he never made a big deal about it. He was just, as you said, he was modest.

Smith: Tell me about how this place [Ford Library and Museum] came to be here., I guess he'd been sending papers over to Ann Arbor. Was there, in fact, an assumption that the whole complex was going to be in Ann Arbor?

Ford: A gentleman by the name of Art Brown was the genesis of this museum, and he was a teammate of Jerry's at South High School. He approached Rev. Lyman Parks, who was the mayor at that point in time, and said that perhaps the mayor would be interested in appointing a committee to consider the possibility of some sort of recognition of the president, like maybe naming a park after him, or putting a bronze statue up or something like that.

So, Rev. Parks contacted Jerry's office. Jerry's office called me and Jerry said, would you come up with a list of names for people that could be put on

the Ford Commemorative Committee – it wasn't called that at that time – it was subsequently called the Ford Commemorative Committee, and get back to me. So I contacted good friends of mine, Mary Ann Keeler, Kay McInerney, Don Matheson, and called Jerry back and gave him the list. He then added Bob Griffin, I remember very specifically. Jordan Shepherd was another I recommended. But then Jerry put Carl Morgenstern on the committee and I think we had about twelve at that time. Joe Sweeney might have been on at that point in time, but I think he was on a little bit later. Then Jerry called and added to the list Rev. Parks, and then the committee was officially formed and Carl Morgenstern was elected as chairman. He got Fred Meijer to be on the committee, which was the wisest thing they ever did to help get the thing going. Fred was a tireless worker for this museum, just incredible.

At that point in time, after the committee had been formed, Phil Buchen was the contact and we wanted to get some of the materials down here to display to build up some enthusiasm for the naming of a park or something like that. Phil directed me to contact the archivist, who was the director of the museum at that time, or the library, I can't remember his name. He was not particularly cooperative, and in effect, said that, "Well, Mr. Buchen says," or something like that, so we wrote a letter to Phil and we thought the matter had been taken care of. Then as we got going, the committee, they said, Fred Meijer particularly and Mr. Morgenstern, "Well, maybe we ought to build a museum," and I contacted Jerry and he said, "Well, that's never been done before, and I don't know if the archivist will approve."

Smith: In fact, splitting the facility.

Ford: Yeah, splitting them. It's going to make the raising of funds that much more difficult. Well, see, which was fine. Subsequently he called me and said, in effect, "I think you should go ahead – it has potential. If you can see some means of generating the necessary funds for a separate museum edifice, go ahead." So Fred Meijer got going and contacted a number of people and we thought we had the thing locked in because we had formed the committee by that time. I was down there at Thanksgiving in '76, and Jerry reaffirmed, very

significantly, that there was no question that he wanted the museum here in Grand Rapids, if it could be accomplished. There were several other comments back and forth, and the legality of it and how the funds would be split, and if someone contributed a million dollars, then sixty percent going to Ann Arbor and forty here – there were some things to be worked out. But eventually the committee did get going and we obviously were successful, but there were a lot of times when it was touch and go.

Smith: One of the things that brought him and Jimmy Carter together - people talk about the imperial ex-presidency – the fact is, you are out of office, and all of a sudden, you’ve got to raise millions and millions of dollars, and I think President Ford said it was the hardest thing he ever did.

Ford: Oh it was, no question about it. He no longer had any clout, so to speak. We approached the city and the city said it was against the law for them to give any money, but what they would do, is, if we would pick the site, they would run through eminent domain, and acquire the land for the site. The county said they couldn’t give us any money because it was against the law, but they would build the pool. So they built the pool, the city condemned and then purchased by eminent domain, all the buildings along here, and then we went to the state. Fred Meijer, Mr. Morgenstern and myself, and I can’t remember the other – it might have been Jordan Shepherd – my brother Tom had gotten out of politics by then, he had been defeated when they gerrymandered this downtown district. He’d found a job after eight years in the legislature with the Senate Finance Committee. The chairman of that was Senator Hart – not the Phil Hart over at Detroit – but Senator Hart, and I don’t believe there was any relationship.

So, we went down there and made a pitch to him, which happily brother Tom, I’m 99% certain, had pitched him before we got there, so the job was a little easier with Tom being down there. Senator Hart said, “Well, we can contribute a million dollars, but that’s all.” Well, that was a big, big million dollars. It was just about the last amount of money we got, as I remember. It was the last significant amount of money we ever got, obviously. The committee at that point in time, had been enlarged to what it is down there,

but a lot of effort by a lot of people. And, a lot of testy meetings went on, I'll tell you that. But when it was finally dedicated in '81 it was well worth the effort, obviously.

Smith: He was very proud of the place, wasn't he?

Ford: I'm sure he was, I know that he, in the end, was happy that the museum was built here.

Smith: Was there ever any doubt about the gravesite? That it was going to be part of the complex?

Ford: No. That was in it from the beginning, as far as I'm concerned. He'd indicated that he wanted it and it was maybe a subject of discussion with him and Betty for maybe a day or two, but he called back extremely promptly and said, "Yeah, set aside the site."

Smith: In his later years, he came back to town frequently, so I assume you saw him pretty often. Would he still try to drop by and get together when he was in town?

Ford: When he came back in town, most times Ellen and I'd have dinner with him and when my brother, Jim was still alive, he would join us. Tom, by that time, was living in Lansing and his wife was down in Carolina, so he was never in town. But I'd say, yeah, out of every six times he came into Grand Rapids we'd have dinner with him at least three or four of those times.

Smith: And he did come frequently? When I was around, I thought he was coming back pretty frequently.

Ford: I'm just guessing. When you say frequently, I'd say four or five times a year.

Smith: Which to me, I think that's pretty frequent. I couldn't get over it, for the 25th anniversary when we did that series of lectures and he came back from California to introduce Justice Stevens and Alan Greenspan. Then of course, the Billy Graham event.

Ford: You wouldn't have known, I don't believe, that that day, Justice Stevens and Jerry and I and Marty played golf.

Smith: What was that like?

Ford: Justice Stevens was my partner, and I was very grateful. He had a much higher handicap than I happened to have. I was supposed to be the one winning the holes, but he did and not me.

Smith: What was the interaction between the two of them.

Ford: Oh, it was good natured kidding. More so than I was used to on a golf course. But Jerry admired Justice Stevens, no question about it.

Smith: By that time had he gotten over his temper on the golf course?

Ford: Oh yeah. As I said earlier, the temper he had before the war was never in evidence again. Never.

Smith: When he came back for his ninetieth birthday, did you sense his health was beginning to fail.

Ford: No, I didn't. Other people said something, but I didn't think he was. In fact, I was obviously in denial because the only thing I saw was, I went out to California when maybe he was eighty-nine years old. He knew that myself and Dr. Bob Brown, who was on the committee, were coming out. Bo Schembeckler was with us and another friend of ours from Grand Rapids, and we wanted to have lunch with him. So Mike Ford brought Jerry and we had lunch with him. He and Shenbeckler were at the other end of the table and they talked animatedly for almost two hours – with a little bit of lunch in between. Mike kept saying, well, we'd better get going Dad. I thought well, gee, he seems to be doing pretty well. But other people said he didn't move as well. I said, "Well, he's eighty-nine years old." But I didn't see it, as other people did.

Smith: Do you remember the last time you saw him or talked to him?

Ford: Oh, talked to him – yeah, I talked to him probably a month before he died, would be my guess. It was not more than a minute or two because I could detect very easily he was extremely tired. I just said, "How you doing – and are you sneaking out for any golf?" "Naw, but I'm going to try." "That's

great.” In hindsight I should have known it, because I remembered distinctly he went from eighteen holes to nine holes to six holes, I guess down to three holes, and that should have been the tipoff to me. In hindsight I see it, but I didn’t then.

Smith: At the end, during his final illness, were you tipped off before he passed away, or did you get a call then?

Ford: No, I think we got a call. I’m not real clear on it. I think we got a call – it was morning time here, if I remember correctly, from Susan, I think. She called. But not before he died. I knew he was in poor health and I knew that he was sleeping a lot, but didn’t know that that was anything other than temporary.

Smith: You must have been overwhelmed by the reaction, particularly here, but elsewhere as well.

Ford: Oh, yeah. In regards to here, the whole family was aware of it, obviously, and my family was as impressed as I was. The number of people who were standing in rows going down Lake Drive, and when they made a final swing through East Grand Rapids, which is where he lived, they were ten and twelve deep. I expected we’d see maybe one-deep lines all the way, and it was fantastic. I’ve commented on that oft times to people and they’ve said, “Well, yeah – I believe it.” It wasn’t a good weather day either and the time, till two or three o’clock in the morning, people were still streaming in there. Fabulous.

Smith: And in Washington – what do you remember about...

Ford: Same thing – you expect a number of people at the church, but the number of people that were standing alongside the street, driving out to the airport, I never would have suspected that.

Smith: Didn’t the procession stop outside the White House – the morning of the service at the cathedral, where the staff were standing outside?

Ford: Yes. That was very impressive also – fantastic.

- Smith: I'll never forget, when were planning, the one thing he was adamant about, there was to be no cortège through the streets of Washington.
- Ford: I would have known that – you could have asked me.
- Smith: Why do you think?
- Ford: Again, it was the modest temperament – his character. He, I believe, felt that was just too pretentious, not his style.
- Smith: The service at the cathedral was very imposing. Maybe I'm biased, but it seemed like the service here was more personal.
- Ford: Oh, I think that's true. Oh definitely. A number of my friends had called and wanted somehow to get seating arrangements, and I said, I don't have anything to do with it. "Well, I've been a member of that church for so many years," and I said, "So have I." But I said, "I have nothing to do with it." I might even have said, "Call Marty Allen," or something.
- Smith: Mrs. Ford – it was pretty amazing how she held up that week.
- Ford: Yes. You could see that she was extremely tired when we went over to the Amway Hotel. You could see that she was extremely tired - and understandably so. Those four or five days of very stressful, difficult times, and she kept going through it. It was the poorest health I've ever seen her in.
- Smith: Do you keep in touch with her?
- Ford: Yeah, I call her about once every month and a half or so just to say hi, and how you doing?
- Smith: My sense is that she is still grieving.
- Ford: I don't know if she is grieving, I know she is still missing him, very definitely, and I guess that's the normal reaction. Extreme grief and just missing him.
- Smith: One final thing – maybe an off the wall question – but, if you were going to tell people something about your brother that might surprise them. Something

that the public image doesn't necessarily communicate – something about him that's really essential that they ought to know – what would that be?

Ford: Something that he probably didn't even know. I think he was almost idolized by his younger brothers – he just set the standards so high, which in retrospect, I'm very grateful for. Mother and Dad did not really involve themselves in how well we were doing at school, or how involved I was in athletics, or in extracurricular activities, but his image and things that he'd done, we tried to emulate. Whenever I would see him, when I was still in school, he would always ask, "How you doing?" or something to that effect, and then transfer it over to athletics, "How you doing in basketball?" - whatever.

Smith: Was he the kind of big brother you could go to for advice?

Ford: I never had occasion to do so. I think that if I had, he would be very willing to have given it, but I just never did. Oh, there was one isolated time that doesn't apply.

Smith: Do you miss him?

Ford: Oh, yeah – you bet. He was always fun to be around. His comments, in my opinion, were always concise, and some degree of gravity to them, which I think was typical of him. Say what you've got to say and that's it. So, when we'd be sitting around the table with the family, he was in the discussions no more and no less than anybody else.

Smith: I've been told you're more politically conservative than he.

Ford: Oh, yes. I think brother Tom was more conservative than Jerry, but I would like to correct that a little bit. Jerry always called himself, I think, a social liberal, and a conservative financial individual, and I think that pretty much covers the whole Ford family. There are limits to where I personally would disagree with him, without anything specific, but spending money on some other country when some of our own people have problems as great. There is a certain financial limit that you just have to draw as being the limit.

Smith: For example, when Mrs. Ford, in the White House, the famous *Sixty Minutes* interview, where she said some things that were pretty controversial at the time what did you hear from - this was a pretty rock-ribbed conservative area, itself – what was the reaction locally?

Ford: It was pretty favorable actually. Even some of my very, very devout Catholic friends and some conservative Dutch friends, said, well, she said it. I think my reply was, “Yes, she did.” I would then maybe soften it a little bit, “Well, it’s time it was brought up and maybe some of these discussions ought to made.”

Smith: It is amazing how she almost overnight, without intending to, really changed the role of First Lady. Simply by being herself, I think she made it easier for other people to be themselves.

Ford: Again, this is my opinion, I can’t substantiate it, but I think that is characteristic of this area of West Michigan. I feel that modus operandi now permeates the people in this area. They’ve had such good examples of unselfish people doing so much for this city that they are willing to not make any one big issue of such paramount importance that it divides us.

Smith: When he was in the White House, he was looked upon as the most conservative president since Calvin Coolidge. But it was a different kind of conservatism – it was economic conservatism. It was a very healthy skepticism of what the federal government could do constructively, it was paying attention to the bottom line fiscally. But on a lot of “social issues,” I’ve often thought that his generation, particularly Midwesterners, thought that there were a lot of things - what I call a decent reticence - there were just things you just didn’t talk about. To talk about abortion, those were just things – that’s a family matter – that’s not something to be part of the political agenda.

Ford: Nope.

Smith: In those later years, when he and Mrs. Ford would go to the conventions, and they were pro-choice, every four years they’d be lonelier and lonelier and lonelier. They were simply being true to themselves and to that different kind of conservatism.

Ford: Well, as you full well know, I think he vetoed sixty-seven appropriation bills, and Congress overrode him on what was it – fifty-seven?

Smith: Actually, he had a better record than that. He got two-thirds of those sustained.

Ford: I thought it was fifty-seven that was sustained.

Smith: Yeah, very close to that.

Ford: Which was indicative of his conservative background. I think that people in this area look at any candidate more from the standpoint of his financial approach to any problem, and then social issues. You'd better adhere to this line first, now we'll talk about that line. And I think that is typical, myself. It certainly is in my determination of whom, or for whom I'm going to vote. I can be a little bit not as hard lined over on this side as this side – the right.

Smith: It is interesting because, you go back to sports, back to athletics. He said himself, if he could do things over, he'd probably would have spent more time learning communications and all of that – public speaking. People testify to the fact, almost every year, he'd come back, often before the Michigan-Ohio game. He'd go over to Ann Arbor with no fanfare and he'd give a pep talk to the team. People who were there have testified, not once, but repeatedly, that he was as eloquent and persuasive and powerful and everything else, in that setting, where he was talking sports, and character, if you will – cheering them on – then he was the most gifted natural speaker in the world.

Ford: I'm not surprised. I've never heard that, but I'm not surprised. Anything in which he believed fervently, as he did in University of Michigan football, he would praise that particular facet very significantly and with great feeling.

Smith: We've covered a lot of territory.

Ford: The last comment I would make - for Mr. Morgenstern, and Jordan Shepherd have passed on – they were the two most influential members of the Ford Commemorative Committee that built this edifice. I know you are going to talk to Fred Meijer, but I would encourage you to have him tell you some of the problems, which he was more cognizant of than I am. Because of his

generosity, we were able to fly down to the Truman Library and the Hoover Library to see them as some sort of a guide for us. In the blackest and bluest days, he was still cheerful, saying, “We’re going to make it, don’t worry. We’re going to make it.”

Smith: And that’s what you need.

Ford: Yeah.

Smith: Is it true that he was offered land on the outskirts of town?

Ford: Oh, absolutely. Fred Meijer offered him a big orchard out there in the corner of Nap and the East Beltline. It was a great site, would have been fabulous. There was another parcel on the corner of I-96 and the East Beltline that I think where the West Michigan Heart Building is now, that was also offered. But the committee determined that this would be a great building block for the rest of downtown. That’s when they approached the city and county and said, “Can you help us?” Then they started going to individuals for contributions. So Fred Meijer can be much more insightful than I can on that.

Smith: Isn’t that interesting, because that’s a real part of your brother’s legacy, the revitalization of Grand Rapids.

Ford: Well, the community did recognize that and felt that this would be, in preference to the other sites, which were great, this one, if we could get it, assuming the city could get it through eminent domain, would be far better for everybody.

Smith: If you can try to imagine this town, with this place not here – think of all the history that would not have happened. All the things that we now take for granted.

Ford: The unfortunate thing, this is not history you would know, but there was a building just to the north of here and it was a building that was one of the first buildings for a machinery company. There was a German schoolhouse and the intent was for it to be built as a museum after this was in. It was going to be built by the Jackoboice family and furnished to what it looked like in those days. Tragically and unfortunately, it burned down, and when it burned down,

then we were able to acquire that property to the north here with a little help from the government, obviously. That would have made a great addition to this area – to have had that German schoolhouse which was at one point in time, probably as big a schoolhouse as there was in the city.

Smith: Last thing, since you mentioned schoolhouses, tell me about South. I know you didn't go there, but South – there's this sort of legend about South High. I mean in the sense that South High was a very diverse, in many ways more representative school, and that your parents felt strongly that Jerry would get a different kind of education going to South than maybe to Central.

Ford: I think so, because in those days South was the working class families and Central was all the big furniture manufacturers and their offspring attending Central. So Central had a reputation of, the old expression "a little bit more on the snob side." I guess that's probably fair. At that point in time you look where all the big family homes are that are now converted to apartments. Those houses in there are, fortunately, a lot of them still around, but that's where the big manufacturers and the bankers and lawyers built their places. They are gorgeous, fabulous houses. Have you ever gotten up there?

Smith: Yeah.

Ford: They are incredible.

Smith: It's got to be one of the ironies of history, that your brother secured the money for that Calder sculpture. I don't think of him as being a Calder-kind of guy. Although after the fact, he understood what a great boost to the city it was.

Ford: Very true. I think I was with him. I wasn't sure it was going to be a big asset, but it is.

Smith: Modern art doesn't strike me as being his cup of tea.

Ford: Interestingly enough, the space astronaut statue out here...I was the committee chairman when that piece was picked...we interviewed about six or seven artists for their conception of what would be proper and correct for this and the only thing Jerry said, "Make sure that it's representational." So I think we accomplished what he was looking for.

Smith: Well, I heard the story that it is a space man because he didn't want a statue of himself. Have you ever heard that?

Ford: No. I don't think so. Never. I was committee chairman, so that never was a discussion. I think he would have felt that that was too much.

Smith: No, no, that's my point, that it is a space man because he didn't want – I guess there were people who said, well, let's put a statue of the president, and he didn't want a statue of himself.

Ford: I agree with you – he didn't. But the subject never came up. I knew that he wouldn't want one of himself and he specifically – the only thing he said was, "Make it representational." So he learned something about art in the meantime – obviously, like we all do.

Smith: I can only imagine when he went up there and visited with the Rockefellers, I can just see him seeing Nelson's art collection which is not representational.

Ford: Hardly, or when he went to the gentleman's in Palm Springs – Annenberg. He went inside there one night – I was going to have dinner with Betty and Jerry and they very kindly insisted that I come along and, even I was overawed by the art that they had. It was incredible. It is nicely displayed, almost like the entryway to a museum, but as we came in, I followed Jerry and Betty around and we saw every piece that he had. They were all fantastic, but you're right, I think he was into the representational mode.

Smith: That's a perfect note on which to conclude. Thank you.

Ford: You are welcome.

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