

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Dick Garbarino
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
June 24, 2010

Smith: I guess the obvious first question is, how did your path cross that of the Fords?

Garbarino: When I was living in Trammel Crow's house. I was married and my wife and I were living in Trammel Crow's house.

Smith: And who is Trammel Crow?

Garbarino: Trammel Crow is a real estate developer out of Dallas, Texas. We had been living there for a couple of years and we received a call from Mrs. Crow stating that President and Mrs. Ford would like to view the house. They were thinking of staying there over the holidays. They'd always come up for Christmas with their family. That's the first time we met. We gave them a tour of the house.

Smith: Was he in the White House then or was this after?

Garbarino: No, this was 1980. This was after. And so what had happened was they loved the house, but they decided to stay at another home in Vail that they'd been staying at for years, the Bass house in Vail Village. And, then Leonard Firestone, Ambassador Firestone, stayed in that house. The Firestones asked me to come up and manage their new property in Beaver Creek. And so I moved up in 1983 and that's when I really got to know the Fords. I lived in Ambassador Firestone's home at the time.

Smith: It's clear from people we've talked to in the desert as well as up here that, although he may not be a terribly familiar name to the public, Leonard Firestone's a very significant figure in the Ford story.

Garbarino: Yes, they're good friends with the family. In fact, it's a very interesting story. When the Fords invited President and Mrs. Clinton out back in 1993, Leonard Firestone, Ambassador Firestone, offered his house to the Clintons and

Ambassador Firestone went to his home up in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. And also when they had the AEI Group come up in June, we would have dignitaries stay in Mr. Firestone's home as well.

Smith: And he and Mrs. Ford were really co-partners in creating the Betty Ford Center.

Garbarino: Exactly. They were and that was really important to Mr. Firestone. And that was a real bond, too, with Mrs. Ford and Ambassador Firestone.

Smith: Was the house that was built up there truly a joint venture? Was it something that Mrs. Ford took the lead in designing? What was your sense of how it came to be?

Garbarino: My sense was Mrs. Ford took the lead in it. She really did. She was very particular and she knew exactly how she wanted things. My job was to make everything fine when they did arrive. If things weren't quite right, President Ford would just take me aside once in awhile and laugh and say, "Dick, maybe we should do this a little differently," and whatnot. But it was her house.

Smith: In terms of the layout and the look?

Garbarino: The layout, yes, and everything.

Smith: One senses it was a house built at least in part for entertainment.

Garbarino: Right. At that time, President Ford didn't ski any longer, so they would come up the end of May, June and stay until October. Then the whole family would come up at Christmas. And at that time, Richard, when they would stay at the house, very few people came out for the summer like they would. People thought of Vail-Beaver Creek as a winter resort, not so much a summer resort. And it just kind of started to pick up more, but they would stay all summer.

Smith: That's interesting. That raises a question. What did they do with their days? I mean, were there enough friends around to socialize with?

Garbarino: A lot of Vail friends. Of course, she was involved in the Betty Ford Gardens and in the early 90s, they had built the Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater. They were involved in that and a lot of projects in the valley he volunteered his time on. And Mrs. Ford would, at times, make impromptu visits at different AA meetings and whatnot.

Smith: Really?

Garbarino: Yes, she did. I was very impressed with that. She would do that as well.

Smith: She must have been the ultimate celebrity spokesperson.

Garbarino: Yes, she would just go in and as they'd introduce themselves, she would. So they really integrated themselves into the community with a lot of different charities. But they loved the summers up here. Before President Ford passed away that last summer, he wanted to come up one last summer. They wanted to see the view from their bedroom of the ski runs. That was important.

Smith: And, of course, you know, everyone was telling them, including their doctors, "You shouldn't do this."

Garbarino: Yep. He shouldn't have been up.

Smith: If there's anything such as a typical day, what was a typical day like?

Garbarino: A typical day for them is he would swim early in the morning. He loved swimming. Back when I'd teach skiing up here, I threw out my back and he got me into swimming and let me use the pool. I went from there to a larger pool and whatnot to use. But he would swim and he would read, I would say, four newspapers a day. So, he would read. They'd have lunch. He'd play golf. When he was home. Initially, right after the house was built, I would say the first ten years, he travelled quite a bit, too.

Smith: And the mail. I mean, it's legendary. In some ways he never stopped being a congressman in the sense that you answer your mail promptly.

Garbarino: Yes.

- Smith: And there are funny stories in the desert, after 9/11 and the anthrax scare - he didn't get Saturday mail. And he didn't understand why he didn't have Saturday mail because people worked Saturdays as well. I don't know whether they did up here as well.
- Garbarino: Yes, they did. Somebody was up there.
- Smith: You answered your mail. And so, literally, there were members of the staff, it may have been Secret Service people, who put on those spacemen outfits and got his mail for him so he could have his Saturday mail.
- Garbarino: Oh, they'd pick up the mail and, of course, you'd have the x-ray machine in the Secret Service area. I remember being there a number of times. They were really watching how they were handling things.
- Smith: Were there ever any security concerns, particular concerns, or scares? I mean, he was someone who had been the target of two assassination attempts. I wonder whether that made him any more, or Mrs. Ford, any more security conscious.
- Garbarino: I think they felt very secure up here. You saw how you entered the house up in that cul-de-sac. As you enter the house, you have the one road up and back. When they would leave, I would live in the house by myself. I remember one time I was back checking on things and the swimming pool and a gentleman was on the deck looking in the house. I went out and I introduced myself and he said, "I heard this is the President's house." I said, "Yes, it's President Ford's house. You shouldn't be up here." But I've never had any really anybody too bold.
- Smith: Were tourists more or less a constant presence?
- Garbarino: Yes, especially right after the house was built for the first few years. A lot of people came out. A lot of people were aware that the President had a house there because, then, as Beaver Creek built up, the Ford house was one of the first houses up here. So, people knew President Ford had a home up there but

they weren't quite certain where. Beaver Creek security did a very nice job of not saying where the house was.

Smith: People forget, before the Kennedy assassination, former Presidents had no Secret Service protection. So the Eisenhowers in Gettysburg originally had tourists knocking on their front door, wanting to have their picture taken with Ike and Mamie.

Garbarino: Oh really?

Smith: Yeah. And I just wondered whether you ever had anything of that kind of interaction with people.

Garbarino: No, I never really did. It was just that one gentleman that came up to the pool. Nobody really knocked on the door. It was pretty quiet when they took off and I would live in the house. They would leave and I would live in the house throughout the winter until they arrived and then I would leave again and then come back, for security purposes, as well as managing the property.

Smith: What was her day like?

Garbarino: Mrs. Ford's day was very similar in the sense that she would read as well as the President, but she would go out a lot to visit friends, luncheons, and, again, whatever events that she was invited to. She was quite busy. Actually. I was impressed with both of them for their age, how active they were.

Smith: Do you think that was deliberate on their part?

Garbarino: Maybe so. They were very active.

Smith: Fight the aging process in some ways by being active.

Garbarino: By being busy and him being active, reading and swimming. He'd go out and hit golf balls. They would take the dog for a walk around the cul-de-sac, down the hill, up the hill. Very active.

Smith: It was my sense when I was around him, that they almost went out of their way to have younger people around them, that maybe that was a little bit of

part of the process of staying tuned in, at least, to a younger culture. I mean, he was certainly always a fiscal conservative. Clearly. But in terms of a lot of social issues, I've often wondered whether it was that the Republican Party just kept going further to the right, leaving them where they were. You know, she'd been outspoken on issues in terms of a woman's right to choose, but they were also outspoken on gay rights and things that you didn't expect to hear from a former president, much less a 'conservative'. What was your sense of their views, their attitudes? How much of an influence was she on his outlook? And having kids, I mean, relatively young kids and grandchildren, which also kind of keeps you plugged in, as opposed to sitting with a bunch of old guys at the country club all day long, griping about the state of the world.

Garbarino: It was interesting because they really loved having the kids and the grandkids up. But they were very open-minded. She was very open-minded to anything, anybody, she was very much that way. And I think she influenced him that way as well. It really struck me because, at first I thought he was pretty conservative, but then he seemed open to a lot. He would laugh at a lot of what young people do and whatnot and sometimes he'd just shake his head. But he was pretty open-minded. Both of them.

Smith: You think he remembered he'd been young once?

Garbarino: I think so. I think he always had a glint in his eye. You know, especially if for any reason he thought was in trouble with the missus, I would see that glint.

Smith: Explain to me - maybe it's just a case of opposites attracting, but punctuality was a religion for him.

Garbarino: Oh, yes.

Smith: And that's not the case with Mrs. Ford. Any stories? Any observations?

Garbarino: Well, it's really interesting because I would travel with him the last few years. When he would have engagements and whatnot, the family asked if I would

travel with him as an aide. And that was an eye-opener for me. You learn a lot about somebody when you travel with them. When I was managing the property, I would see him once in awhile, every couple of days, and we would chat about things. But when we were on the road, it was an eye-opener for me. I knew he was punctual and I would have the trip sheet from Penny. Sometimes, I'd call Penny with questions. But what struck me, he was very punctual, but yet when we would go somewhere, wherever he went, he would stop and he would talk to the doorman, he would talk to the bell man, anybody within the hotel we went, he was "Hi. I'm Gerald Ford." And he struck up a conversation with them. "Where are you from?" I was amazed with that, even though there was a time we had to be here or here or there, he would take that time. That impressed me. So, I saw him in a different light. But yet, when we had to be from point A to B, I'd make sure the breakfast is in the room at a certain time. We'd have the newspapers out. And then, "Okay, it's time to go now" and then we'd go.

Smith: There are those who say you didn't disturb him when he read his papers.

Garbarino: The newspapers were big. And I had to make sure that we had the right newspapers at the hotel at a certain time so he'd have the newspapers at breakfast. And then we'd go over the schedule and then go from there. He'd want the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, if we were in Michigan, we'd have the local newspapers, too, for wherever we were at. He was quite a reader. But, you're right, he had to have that newspaper in the morning and he was very much into his routine. Of course, I think we all get that way when we get older. He really had a routine down.

Smith: She was not a punctual person.

Garbarino: No.

Smith: I mean, it was part of her charm, but clearly, 50 plus years of marriage didn't budge her. Was it a kind of almost a running gag?

Garbarino: Yeah, I think it was.

Smith: He clearly adapted himself to her schedule.

Garbarino: Yeah, you could see him roll his eyes when we were leaving from point A to B and she still wasn't quite ready yet.

Smith: Is that perfectionism on her part? For instance, one thing that I think would surprise people is that she found public speaking to be a real trial in a lot of ways. No one would ever guess, but it's like any really good stage performer, if they don't have butterflies in the stomach, they've lost something. And that anything she could do to cut down that margin between perfection, which is what she wanted, and how she felt. I just wondered whether that was part of it, or whether it was just a force of habit.

Garbarino: You know, I think she was a perfectionist. She wasn't ready to leave until, if she was with a hairdresser or whatnot, she knew she was ready to leave. She was confident that she felt good about herself and everything was perfect. Then she would come. And I think he realized that, though, too.

Smith: And clothes mattered to her, didn't they?

Garbarino: Yes.

Smith: I mean, she loved clothes. She wore them well, obviously that makes a difference. She'd been a model.

Garbarino: She had a great sense of humor. And what really astounded me, was, one time, Richard, I had a gentleman over to the house, we were looking at doing work around their tub area in their master bath. And you had to step up about two feet. This was when she was in her 80s and she would just jump up. She was flexible! And the subcontractor I was with was just astounded. But because of her dancing, she was so very limber, very quick, but also had a great sense of humor.

Smith: One thing that would surprise people, she had, shall we say, a much more ribald sense of humor than he did.

Garbarino: Yes.

Smith: To the point where Ann Cullen, for example, talked about how he'd come in and say, "Alright, girls, what are you laughing about now?" and they would tell this dirty joke, which just sort of soared right over his head.

Garbarino: Exactly. That happened a couple of times. Mrs. Ford was just roaring and she would look at the President and say, "I'll tell it again to you later, Jerry." And he would just walk away. It was really funny.

Smith: Everyone says he had a sense of humor. Though he was not a gifted joke teller. How would you describe his sense of humor?

Garbarino: Very dry, but you hit the nail on the head. He wasn't a real joke teller.

If we would travel somewhere, we would go to the plane or the limo going somewhere, he would ask, "Dick, do you mind calling Betty?" And I would give him the phone because I knew he didn't know how to use it.

Smith: A cell phone?

Garbarino: Yeah, and whatnot. And then it was really interesting. We'd talk more business than anything else. Once in awhile, I'd see something in the paper, if we were flying somewhere and say, "Look at this" and he'd go "Ha ha ha" and go back to his newspaper again.

Smith: He was not a high tech guy.

Garbarino: No, he was not. In fact, Mrs. Ford was.

Smith: Really?

Garbarino: Mrs. Ford was. I mean, I would go to Mrs. Ford and say, "You know, I think we need to do this. This, mechanically, is going to be an issue." And I would tell her about it. I would tell him about it, but he really didn't have the interest that Mrs. Ford did.

Smith: For example, was she computer literate?

Garbarino: Yes, she did use the computer. I remember she did use the computer and, oh gosh, that was ten years ago and she was using the computer quite a bit. Very computer literate.

Smith: And I think Penny said he got to the point where he could play solitaire on the computer and he could get email, but he couldn't send email.

Garbarino: Yes, that's true.

Smith: That was sort of the dividing line.

Garbarino: I'd email him, but he'd never respond.

I'll tell you a funny story. I was out in Palm Springs back in 1993 visiting them and they took me out to lunch at a restaurant called the Thunderbird Country Club. Before we left the house, Mrs. Ford said, "Dick, this is the oldest country club in Palm Springs, and, by the way, there are a lot of old people there." And we were laughing. We had lunch and towards the end of the lunch, the waiter came over and put a note in front of the President. I noticed it because I was sitting between President and Mrs. Ford and there was, I think, it was either Ann Cullen or maybe Penny was with us, I'm not quite certain. And he took the note up, read it, set it down, and we kept talking. And I could just see Mrs. Ford's curiosity and finally, she said, "Jerry, what was the note about?" And he took a glance through the dining room and he said, "Somebody here knows who Deep Throat really is." I thought I was going to die. But he said it just so straight. And he looked at me and I said, "Sir, do you get that often?" and he said, "More than you think." He just made a comment, he said, "Look around in this room. Do you see anybody that would know that?" The waiter didn't say who it was from or whatnot, but it was really funny.

Smith: The last time that they'd met with the Foundation, I think it was actually here, maybe in 2004 or 2005 when they had their annual meeting. It was right at the time that the cover finally got blown on Deep Throat. And I think it was not quite official, but there was all this feverish speculation. So, anyway, it they went through the whole meeting and everything else. And then he had

his informal remarks at the end, summing it up, and he said, “Now, I just want to close this evening with an announcement.” And everybody kind of sat back. He said, “I’m Deep Throat” and he walked off and sat down. Everyone was silent for a second and then they realized it was a gag, but no one expected it, which made it ten times as effective. And he got better. Well, you saw him on the road. He got better as a speaker, I think, with age.

Garbarino: Right. In the evenings, we would go over his speech. When we’re on the airplane, usually we flew private and corporate airplanes and he would sit next to me. I’d notice he’d have 3 by 5 cards and he’d go over it and over it and over it and then that night, usually in the hotel room, he would want to read it. And I remember seeing him before and seeing him, obviously, speaking with different groups and he looked much better, I thought. I thought he did a good job, especially with his age. He did well. I was really surprised with that.

Smith: He loved to travel, didn’t he?

Garbarino: Yeah.

Smith: I often thought his health was really pretty good up until he was about 90.

Garbarino: Right.

Smith: And then, I guess the doctors told him, “You’ve got to cut out the travel.”

Garbarino: And so did the family. The family was really concerned. I traveled with him when he was in his middle 80s and at that time, he would do well with it. He loved it. He loved being on the road. He loved speaking. He really enjoyed it. But then I think the family realized, you’re right, the doctors and everybody else, when he was around 89 or 90, said he should cut back. Then I just traveled with him to functions - to the White House for his 90th birthday party.

Smith: Tell us about that.

Garbarino: That was really interesting. We stayed at the Willard. We were there just for two days.

Smith: That was always the hotel they liked.

Garbarino: They really loved the Willard.

Smith: They never used the townhouse that's provided up at Lafayette Square.

Garbarino: Not when I was with him. We always stayed at the Willard Hotel. We were back there for that function. We also went to Capitol Hill for his 90th birthday and then we were at the White House that night for dinner. A very nice dinner, really, really interesting. And Bush gave a very, very nice speech and whatnot and then they were all in the main dining room for dinner, the East Room, I guess. And then Penny and I went on with the agents and had a nice little tour of the White House from there.

Smith: I'm told that there were still some members of the permanent White House staff who had been there when the Fords were there and were grateful for the chance to reconnect. We've been told from a number of people in the White House that that staff really cherished the Fords. I don't think every family that lives in the White House has the same kind of rapport with the staff, but I think they did.

Garbarino: Yes. And it was interesting, too, when I flew back with him for President Reagan's funeral. When I went back with him for President Reagan's funeral, I saw some of the older Secret Service agents, some of the agents who used to be on his detail and whatnot. And they'd all just, "How's he doing?" I think they really enjoyed him. He traveled a lot. They couldn't keep up with him a lot sometimes with all the travel. They were just amazed at how he could travel.

Smith: Did he talk about Reagan?

Garbarino: Did he talk about Reagan? No, not to me personally, he really didn't. What was interesting was, after the funeral and we got on the airplane coming back, I was struck all of a sudden, they were concerned, I guess, they were

approached by the Air Force and how they wanted to handle things when President Ford passed on. And it was interesting, that conversation, that they were having when that was going on. But what struck me about that, too, was when we were back there and the coverage I saw on television they were talking about the love story between the Reagans. And what I realized when I was on the road with the President, there was a real love story with President Ford and Mrs. Ford. We would barely get off the airplane and he'd ask for my phone, like I told you earlier, to talk to Mrs. Ford. We'd get to the hotel, he'd call Mrs. Ford. Before he'd go to sleep at night, he would call her. And that struck me, because, again, I never saw that until I traveled with him. That was a true love story between the two of them.

Smith: The week after he passed away, I think millions of people were introduced to it for the first time.

Garbarino: I agree with you wholeheartedly.

Smith: I'm getting ahead of myself, but the fact that there was so much reaction. You know, for someone who'd been out of the public eye for awhile, and I thought it was a combination of things, including the fact that there was a whole generation who were being introduced to him for the first time. They were seeing these old clips and they were comparing it with the ugliness of today's politics and he looked pretty good. Plus, they saw the Ford family and the obvious closeness and, you know, the values and the love story that existed between them.

Garbarino: The love story was really interesting. I remember we flew back and we watched the funeral services in Simi Valley for the Reagans, and it was quite emotional to watch, especially seeing Mrs. Reagan in person and how she looked just tired. You could tell she was very tired. But I told my friend that was watching with me that night, I said, "You know, the real love story, nobody really talks about the Fords, but that's quite a story in itself." And then, what really struck me, too, was I never knew that they had such a close relationship with the Carters. I never realized that until one trip I was on with President Ford. He asked me what I was doing the following day when we

were flying home and if I could come up to the house. He said, "The Carters are going to stop by." They would stay in Crested Butte, Colorado in the summer. And I'll never forget sitting in the Secret Service area where you had that one window where you could look out at the drive and the Carters pulling up, getting out of the car, and the Fords walking out the door and all hugs and they really, genuinely liked each other. And I harkened back to the '76 campaign when, at that time, it was nasty. Not compared to what we see today, but it was interesting.

Smith: It's strange. I did the last eulogy in Grand Rapids and if you've ever been in a situation like that, you're in a fog. The thing I'll never forget I could hear Rosalyn Carter weeping in the pew. And I thought to myself, "Who, thirty years ago, would've imagined this is how the story ends?"

Garbarino: Isn't that something?

Smith: And that wasn't faked. When we left Washington and flew back to Grand Rapids, President Carter was walking up and down the aisle of Air Force One with the Fords' youngest great grandchild on his shoulder. An amazing scene.

Garbarino: See, I was on Air Force One that whole trip. I remember that. That was amazing, wasn't it? Yes.

Smith: And then you say, "Gee, why can't we have statesmen instead of elder statesmen?" Why is it that we have to wait until they're no longer politically viable for these kinds of relationships to blossom?

Garbarino: I agree and when I told people about that meeting, they couldn't believe it. People my age said, "Really? They are?" I said, "Yes." I was very pleased seeing that and they just enjoyed their company.

Smith: Let me ask you something; obviously you don't have to answer this. I only heard him speak disparagingly about two people. One of them was John Dean and the other was Gordon Liddy.

Garbarino: And I can probably understand why.

- Smith: Yeah, in both cases. Did he ever let his hair down in that sense and talk about other political or other figures?
- Garbarino: No, but I remember what struck me, one time I was with him on a trip and that was at the time President Bush 43 was thinking about going into Iraq and there was all these rumblings. We were on a trip and I'll never forget he questioned that. He really questioned the wisdom of that, because, gosh the names of some of the people escape me, but the people from Bush 41's administration were writing columns and saying "No, this shouldn't be done."
- Smith: Well, Brent Scowcroft was outspoken.
- Garbarino: Brent Scowcroft really was adamant against that. He was reading this and in his own mind, too, he said, "I don't think this is right."
- Smith: And it must've been awkward, at least, because so many of his people, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Paul O'Neill, for a while—
- Garbarino: He had a great photograph, by the way, Richard, of Alan Greenspan, Vice President Cheney, at that time he was chief of staff, and Rumsfeld. And Mrs. Ford gave it to _____ and it was really interesting. In 1977, it was taken. And I agree with you. I think it bothered him because he knew some of the players and he didn't understand that. I could tell he wasn't real comfortable with that.
- Smith: That's interesting. He was still a party man, but the Carter relationship is all the more in some ways unusual because they had such diametrically different approaches to the role of a former President. Obviously, if a president asked you to do something, he'd do it. And he demonstrated that in a bipartisan way. But he was loathe to interject himself into a situation, particularly foreign policy, where there's only one president and only one secretary of state. And he clearly, until the end of his life, cherished the relationships with Cheney and Rumsfeld and Greenspan. Those relationships were never damaged in any way by any of these potential policy disagreements.

Garbarino: No. The Cheneys were up every summer. And that summer when I think he was with Halliburton at the time, in the private sector, they were up here every summer and very nice. You know, he made it a point to introduce me to everybody. I was really very proud of that. It was very nice of him to do that. If I happened to be in the area, "Dick, I'd like you to meet so and so." It was really interesting to be part of that. And, one day, Richard, I remember walking into the house and I went to the upstairs living room and they were on the speakerphone with President Clinton when he was in the hospital and had heart surgery.

Smith: Really?

Garbarino: On the speakerphone in the living room and "How are you doing?" I was struck by that. I had no idea and I guess the Clintons really appreciated the fact that they invited them out for the Bolshoi Ballet because Chelsea really, at that time, was into dance. And they were very good hosts to the Clintons and I think they maintained that relationship.

Smith: It's interesting, because I was involved in the periphery at the time of the whole Lewinski thing when he really took heat from the Right, President Ford did, for this Op-Ed piece in *The Times* that proposed, in effect, a formal rebuke by both Houses of Congress nationally televised and then the country would move on. We would short circuit impeachment.

Garbarino: He didn't want to have to anything to do with that. It was interesting.

Smith: Who were his close friends?

Garbarino: Obviously, Leonard Firestone was a very close friend. Dee Keaton, who had the house on the other side of the Beaver Creek house, they were close friends. Kaiser Morcus, at the time. He had a hotel here in Vail. Now he's the President of some Palm Springs restaurants. They seemed to be close friends. But he really kept in touch a lot with Jim Callaghan.

Smith: And there's another kind of opposites attracting, because you stop and think. Here's a kind of a classic old line Labor Party socialist. And Helmut Schmidt

was certainly as far to the left. And Giscard, whatever his politics might be, is not exactly a hail-fellow well met. And yet they all seemed to just click.

Garbarino: They always enjoyed their time together. They would come up to the house and they would all just get together impromptu on the decks of the homes and whatnot. Callaghan was a very interesting fellow. I used to take him on hikes and drives. He always loved going to Leadville, Colorado. He loved the history.

Smith: Really?

Garbarino: I'd take him to Leadville, to Aspen, and back here. Then he reciprocated. It was very nice. My wife and I went over to England and he took us through Parliament and, in fact, I sat next to Neal Kinnock, and Callaghan leaned over and he said, "He's going to be an up and comer." And I just laughed. Remember when Joe Biden got in trouble for plagiarizing his speech? But it was interesting because they were just so down-to-earth when you brought them here to this level in Beaver Creek. It was really interesting how the dignitaries took it all in and were relaxed, very relaxed. I think a lot of it had to do with the Fords and the Fords introducing them to some of the people in town, and everybody got along quite well. It was really interesting.

Smith: What was his role in the World Forum? I mean, aside from the fact that it probably wouldn't have existed without him. What was the World Forum?

Garbarino: It was a group of past world leaders along with corporate heads. To be honest with you, Richard, I don't know who worked with him in putting that together. It was the AEI Group, I know that. They were the ones that put it together, but he was always the figurehead of that. How much more of a role he had, I couldn't quite honestly answer that. But he was the one that brought the groups together. It was very interesting.

Smith: What were they like as grandparents?

Garbarino: Very good grandparents. In fact, I would ski with the grandkids because I still teach skiing up here part-time, but he would always make a point in

calling me from the desert and say, “Dick, would you mind skiing with a couple of Mike’s kids?” Very close to the kids. Very excited when Jack had the two boys, Christian and the oldest son. One of the really interesting stories is he would take them down to ski school when it was busy at Christmas. He would have each one of his granddaughters, Mike’s daughters, holding their hands, standing in line with everybody else. He could’ve easily tried to break through the line or had the agents take him up to the front of the line. He had the agents stay outside. He stood with the two granddaughters and the reason I know this is I had friends of mine that worked ski school and they’d tell me these stories. How impressed they were and how nice he was with everybody. That he made sure his granddaughters were all set, they were with their instructor, and then go up and pick them up afterwards.

Smith: One of the really poignant stories we have is from the gal who they hired as their cook, Lorraine Ornelas. And she’d gone through the Betty Ford Center. And she’d never seen snow and she’d never been on an airplane and was petrified at the thought. So, when they were coming up here, the President got the pilot of the plane and they walked around the plane explaining all of the engines, everything, how safe it was, and all that. Then, when they get up here, he took her to the ski school, got her ski lessons. They literally made her part of the family.

Garbarino: Sure.

Smith: And she said, “I learned so much from President Ford, but above all, I learned about discipline and having a purpose in life.” And that’s a pretty good lesson.

Garbarino: That is, because Lorraine had an interesting background and for her to be thrown into this was fascinating. They loved her.

Smith: Well, it’s mutual. What was Christmas like?

Garbarino: Christmas was a lot of fun. It could be a bit hectic with all the kids in ski school and the different events, Christmas tree lighting in Vail every year. He’d participate in that for the town of Vail.

Smith: Was there room in the house for all the kids?

Garbarino: Yes. Yes, room in the house for all the kids. Quite a gang there. That's when I was on Defcon 5 always wondering what was going to happen. But it worked really well, because the house was very comfortable. And that was very special to them. They'd usually come up for about three weeks.

Smith: Really?

Garbarino: Yes. It was really interesting. You know, we talked about his schedule. One winter, he had a date set where he was ready to leave, they're going to go down to the desert, usually a couple of days after New Year's Day and we had a heck of a snow storm. Vail Pass was horrible and the airport was closed. And he would get antsy. When he was ready to go, he was ready to go. He would get very antsy. And I'll never forget, one time I said to him, "Look how beautiful it is outside, sir. It's amazing." He said, "Yeah. Yeah, you're right, but you know I was scheduled to leave today." And I said, "The worst thing you could do is get in your car because you can't get out of Eagle Airport. If you get stuck or if you get in an accident between here and Denver, you're stuck in a car for five or six hours. Enjoy the view. This is beautiful."

Smith: Do you think it was a little hard for him to slow down and smell the roses?

Garbarino: Yeah, exactly. "We have no control over this weather, but," I said, "boy, it's beautiful." And it was. It was absolutely beautiful outside. Then he was kind of relaxed about it.

Smith: He was a fiscal conservative. I mean, that's a euphemism in some eyes for 'tight'. I often wondered whether the experience of the Depression seared into him as a very young man the value of money, the importance of not wasting anything. He was not the world's biggest tipper.

Garbarino: Yeah, I understand that.

Smith: I mean, nobody's perfect.

- Garbarino: Yeah, exactly. He and my father remind me so much of each other in that way. They both grew up in the Depression. I admired him because he kept an eye on the utility bills for the house. I mean, of course, you have a house in the winter up here and gas heat can be quite expensive. But I would get a call once in awhile if a bill was more than the last bill. And I would say, "Well, sir, it was colder this month." But he would keep track of those things. But it didn't bother me because my father was the same way. He came from that generation.
- Smith: Yeah, it was nothing personal.
- Garbarino: It was nothing personal at all.
- Smith: It was almost in the bloodstream.
- Garbarino: I think so. I think it was. As far as tipping goes, if we went out to restaurants together or whatnot, I never saw how he handled that.
- Smith: We've heard stories from various golf courses that suggested that he was not a spend thrift. He left the White House with very little and he'd never had much. And I assume didn't ever expect to have much. And some part of him must have been kind of pinching himself that he had been able, among other things, to provide for his family in the way that he obviously wanted to, and enjoyed the success that he had.
- Garbarino: I think he realized he had a great marriage. Very fortunate to be where he was.
- Smith: Did you ever hear about Phyllis?
- Garbarino: Phyllis?
- Smith: Phyllis, the old girlfriend from 60 years ago.
- Garbarino: No, I never heard about Phyllis. But he was so down-to-earth. That's what I liked about him. You could tell, sometimes, he was overwhelmed with the house itself and whatnot, but he felt very fortunate to have what he had. But family was the important thing to him.

Smith: Before I forget. We were talking about friends. Frank Gifford and Kathy Lee were good friends and I know that when they went through their problems, highly publicized, that the Fords called and told them they were praying for them and wishing them all the best and just lending a kind of quiet support. Which also brings up this question. Again, I don't think a lot of people automatically assumed, because he didn't wear it on his sleeve. But the importance of faith to both of them. That was a significant factor in their lives.

Garbarino: Yes. I'll never forget. I think it was his 85th birthday party that they had at the lodge and the Giffords were there right when that was all going on. And they were just involved in everything. Clint Eastwood and his wife were there. A number of people were there. It was really interesting.

Smith: That's interesting, because this community, one senses, is accustomed to seeing celebrities all the time. Did the locals sort of leave them alone?

Garbarino: Yeah, they would know who he was. They would never really bother him. I think what bothered me more than anything was when people would go up and say, "Hi, Jerry." I have this in my mind how I kind of cringe when they'd say that. But he'd turn around and say, "Hello. How are you? How's your day going?" He would get in line like everybody else in the supermarkets and so would Mrs. Ford.

Smith: Really?

Garbarino: Yeah. People would see them and would be excited to see an ex-President and some of them would approach him, some of them wouldn't.

Smith: I assume autographs were the bane of his existence. I mean, not necessarily the kid who wants the autograph, but the professionals who are selling his signature.

Garbarino: There were?

Smith: Yeah. When you traveled with him, what kind of buffer were you between him and the public, generally?

Garbarino: When we'd initially go, we'd get out of the car and people would come up to him and want to shake his hand and whatnot. He would receive everybody. Very seldom did anybody want his autograph when I was with him. He would talk to them and move on and talk to the next person, but he would stop and take his time and chat with everybody. And, of course, when I was with him, too, when he was getting a bit older, he would get tired pretty easily and would retire in the room and we would go out to dinner or else we would have dinner in the room. Then when he'd go out to play golf, after he'd give a talk, the norm was he would give a talk and then we'd play nine holes of golf. And people would approach him all the time on the golf course. But he was very accessible, I thought. That's what impressed me. I didn't expect to see that. I don't know why I didn't expect to see him as accessible as he was and just willing to talk to anybody.

Smith: When you would go out golfing, did he dress conservatively? Did he have the crazy tangerine—

Garbarino: You know, he was more conservative. I saw some of his clothes. He had a pair of pants with Bob Hope's face all over the golf pants. But he was a pretty conservative dresser.

Smith: Also, it was well-known that he never threw away clothes. He had *old* suits.

Garbarino: He had old suits when they couldn't come up anymore and we decided to put the house on the market. Susan came up and we went through some of the clothes. I mean, there were things we found that I thought, "Oh, my God." He would keep everything. And that, again, came with that generation, I think. My dad was the same way and would just hold on to whatever he had.

Smith: Did he call you Garbini?

Garbarino: Call me?

Smith: I'm told that on occasion, he would call you Garbini.

Garbarino: No, instead of Garbarino, what'd he say? Garbino. I think it was Garbino. It wasn't always Garbarino, but he was pretty close. Then he'd have Garbarino

right on the money. Penny and those guys would laugh. They had a nickname for me - Gambini. That kind of thing. But he was pretty right on with it. I was divorced and I had a young daughter. I'd have my daughter periodically and they were just always so kind. They always wanted to see Danni and before she left here, I'll never forget, Mrs. Ford said, "We want to have a picture taken of Danielle." Danielle and her mother moved back to Iowa. And Danni was out of school and I had Danni out, she was 12 years old. Mrs. Ford went up, beautiful clothes, dress changed, President Ford made it a point to go up and put on a nice shirt and I have a beautiful picture of the three of them on the deck of his house. They didn't have to go through all of that trouble. They could've just walked out on the deck and had a quick shot. Those are the kind of people they were.

Smith: That's revealing. How did he deal with aging? Was it frustrating?

Garbarino: He was getting frustrated because you could tell he had a hard time walking. He had two knee implants. I think with aging, he would get frustrated. That's when once in awhile he would have a little temper tantrum periodically - because of that.

Smith: I was going to ask you about his temper because he spent a lifetime controlling it. But nobody controls it always and I wondered if you'd seen it.

Garbarino: I saw it a couple of times, but I wish I had his temperament in the sense where he would just blow up and then five minutes later, "It happened and I'm over it." He would let it go.

Smith: Like a summer thunderstorm. It comes out of nowhere and it's gone.

Garbarino: Oh, exactly. If the private airplane was late in getting to the airport to pick him up or this or that, then he'd get real antsy and sometimes he would lose it but then it would go away. But then he would be fine five minutes later. I was always amazed at that.

Smith: Toward the end, how did you feel? Clearly the doctors were telling him, "You shouldn't come up here." Did they talk about that at all?

Garbarino: He would tell me on the phone before they'd come up, I'd usually talk to him and once in awhile I'd go down to the desert and see them before they'd come up. But he told me on the phone, I'll never forget, towards the end, he said, "They don't want me to come up, but we want to come up." They were determined to come up.

Smith: Between the Fords, the Ford family, the staff, Penny, you, the cooks, Secret Service, where did people stay? Hotels? How'd people get around? Where did people park up at the house? How did that work, that many people in that small an environment?

Garbarino: That's a good question. Penny and the staff would have their own apartments throughout Vail. Obviously the Secret Service would usually stay at the Charter Hotel. If they were up for Christmas, they'd have apartments throughout. The cook, Lorraine, would stay in the house. So, there was very limited parking up there, but they would park just in front of the house. Let's see, Penny, Ann and Judy each had their own separate cars up there, but they all had apartments throughout the Vail Valley, yeah. That was about it for cars up there. The cook would always live up there. Once in awhile they'd have a cook that wouldn't live in the house, but that was where the cook would stay. With them in the home. That's how they would arrange that up there as well. And he would get upset if there were too many cars around there because he was really conscious of the neighbors. And especially when we had a group up for the World Forum, he was always concerned there was going to be too much disruption. And I knew all the neighbors and I would just go around and tell everybody what was going on and what was happening. Steve Fossett was great. He would buy pizza for the guys because they would do the checkpoint right in front of his house. That's when Fossett was doing all the balloon trips and whatnot.

Smith: Did he offer to take the Fords up in a balloon?

Garbarino: No, I don't think he ever did. He had dinner with the Fords every once in awhile. He was really nice. The Fords really liked him. I thought I'd heard the one time Fossett crashed his balloon off the coast of Australia, he almost

made it around and he lost his passport and everything. I guess President Ford was instrumental in getting him back here from Australia and somehow working with the State Department. But they always liked Steve. And it was a pretty close neighborhood up there as well.

Smith: You traveled with him in those last years. You know, he took some heat from people for 'commercializing' the former presidency. Specifically, people criticized him for serving on boards.

Garbarino: Yes.

Smith: Our sense is, after talking to a number of folks, that he was never window dressing on any board. I mean, he took those very seriously.

Garbarino: Exactly. Yeah. In fact, a lot of his travel was going to different board meetings. He never missed a board meeting. He was really upset if he couldn't make a board meeting. But when I traveled with him, we didn't really go to any board meetings at the time. He was just asked to speak or go out of town.

Smith: I guess they would go every December to New York and she would shop and they would see shows. I think they liked New York a lot.

Garbarino: They liked New York. I never went with them on the trip. I was supposed to go with him on one trip, but it was canceled. It was more of a business trip. Mrs. Ford wasn't going on that trip. But I went with him to D.C. and different other trips.

Smith: Did you ever go with him on foreign travel?

Garbarino: No, I never went with him on foreign travel. Penny would go with him on foreign travel as well. They didn't go overseas that much when I started working with him. It was just his age and he really didn't want to fly that long and we made sure everything was so or that a corporate jet was provided for his comfort as opposed to commercial.

Smith: The last summer up here, was it tough? Was it kind of touch and go?

- Garbarino: It was very tough. Then he went to the Mayo Clinic for a period of time. I think he had a couple of mini strokes. And so he was up at the Mayo for a good part of it. Then they went directly from the Mayo as I recall back down to the desert. And that was it. That was his last time up here and that was the summer of 2006.
- Smith: And my understanding was that he went to the Mayo because he had said something to the effect that, "I don't want to live like this." And the folks at the Mayo Clinic had convinced him, notwithstanding his age, that they could in fact address the problems, circulatory problems and all that. And I guess when they got there, they decided otherwise. And then I think actually Mrs. Ford wound up having some leg surgery done.
- Garbarino: She had to have a leg stint. I think that was it as well. Because the doctors sat next to me on one of the legs on Air Force One. I was with the physician that worked with them up at the Mayo Clinic. Yes, so she had issues as well at that time. And Mrs. Ford was having more and more problems with oxygen. What was fascinating about President Ford, as I mentioned earlier, he would swim at that pool at 85 100 feet in his late 80s and 90s. He made it a point to go up and swim every day. It was that last summer, obviously, he couldn't. Then he really, really was slowing down. That's when he went to the Mayo. He wanted to get up here one more time. They came up and they went to the Mayo Clinic and then back down to the desert. The last time I saw him was about two or three months before he passed away. I went down to the desert that fall, I think it was October. And he was pretty excited. Rumsfeld gave him a model of the fleet that was going to be named the Gerald R. Ford fleet, one of the smaller carriers. He wanted me to see that when I met with him the last time. It was pretty emotional because when I saw him that one time, I thought, "You know, I don't think I'm going to see him again." And sure enough, that happened. You could just see where he was just very, very tired. But he was a very interesting man to work for.
- Smith: Do you miss him?

- Garbarino: Yeah, I do. I do. In fact, I made the comment the other day, I said, "It's not the same."
- Smith: Do you think a lot of people in Vail feel that way?
- Garbarino: I think a lot of people feel that way. A lot of people feel that way. I was glad they named the Gerald R. Ford Village Hall of Beaver Creek after him. Just small things. I was driving back from Denver and you see the Gerald R. Ford Highway. You glance at that and all these things go through my mind. And the way he treated my daughter. My daughter is Navy ROTC and going to the University of Wisconsin. And I said, "Wouldn't it be something, Danielle," because they loved her, they really were so kind to her. And I said, "Wouldn't it be something if you served on one of his ships named after him? That'd be amazing." But, no, that was quite an experience in my life. Twenty years.
- Smith: Two last things. Can you think of a story or anything that might surprise people? That might tell people something about him that might come as a surprise? Also, how sensitive was he to the Chevy Chase caricature?
- Garbarino: You know, it's really fascinating. It was back in the 80s, he came out with that book *Humor and the Presidency*. I don't think it really bothered him that much. I think at that time during the campaigning, it did a bit, the way he was treated on Saturday Night Live. I think people would be surprised how athletic he was. I remember, Richard, and I was living in Vail at the time in '77, I was watching him ski one day, and this was when he was President. And I think it was '77, he's making absolutely beautiful turns skiing. And the press corps was down at the base of the mountain. Beautiful turns and there's not a camera, not one shot of those beautiful turns. The moment he caught an edge on his ski and accidentally just fell sideways, that's when the shutters flew. That's when everybody was taking the photos and I don't think people realized how athletic he was. What a good athlete he was. He was a beautiful skier, very nice skier. A man of his age doing it. I learned a lot from that one moment. I thought, "This is what it's all about, isn't it."

- Smith: Well, you have to develop a thick skin.
- Garbarino: That's what struck me, too. You have to have real thick skin. But that's one thing I don't think people really realized - how athletic he was.
- Smith: How do you think he should be remembered?
- Garbarino: That's a good question. Probably as one of the most honest men that ever served our country. And, knowing him personally, and up front with everything, you just had to be straight with him and he was straight with you. Honest.
- Smith: He deliberately made an effort to see the good in everyone. I think that was part of what he was brought up to believe.
- Garbarino: To see the good in everybody.
- Smith: To see the good in people. But I'm wondering whether that left him vulnerable in any way to people who thought, rightly or not, that they could—
- Garbarino: That they could take advantage of him in a sense?
- Smith: Yeah.
- Garbarino: You know, I never saw that. I can't say that I ever did. It could've happened, but I never did see that. He found the good in everybody. It's really interesting. Once in awhile, you know, you could see him shake his head after he met with somebody, but then he had something good to say about them afterwards. But that's how I'd like to see him remembered, as a really fascinating, very bright man. But very honest as well.
- Smith: We saw the pictures on TV from D.C. and Grand Rapids and everywhere else. What was the reaction locally when he died?
- Garbarino: I was fascinated by the lines. I was fascinated when we arrived in Washington that first night, that evening, and the people that were along the highway going into Washington. But what really struck me was the group in Grand Rapids. We were sitting at the Amway, the Grand Rapids Amway, and

the line of people waiting to pay their respects...but what really struck me, too, was the family, with the kids standing in line greeting everybody coming through. They did the same thing on Capitol Hill as well. That said a lot to me for the family. That struck me. It really did.

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