H. Meijer: What we were talking about is your recollection of when you were in Washington for a meeting, and Mom was with brother Doug and me at – what was it, Fourth of July or Memorial Day?

Meijer: I don’t know. I can’t tell you the holiday or what the occasion was, but if it was Cedar Springs, it would have been Red Flannel Days, but it wasn’t Cedar Springs, it was Standale. And I think President Ford was a friend of Howard Stanton, etc., etc. But he stopped or saw Lena on the curb and went up and talked to her. So he must have known who she was.

At that same time I was in Washington, trying to get the station that became WZZM. I was the president of that group, and I don’t think any of us deserved it, but we deserved it as much as anybody else. None of us did, we were just scrambling to get the license. I don’t know but maybe Lena told him, that I was in Washington, but he said, “Betty and Fred are in Washington and here I am in Grand Rapids with you.” Just that comment.

H. Meijer: Now, you mentioned Red Flannel Days, when would you first have met President Ford? Do you think it was Red Flannel Days in Cedar Springs?

Meijer: No, and I don’t know when I first met him. But he was very faithful in coming to the parade on Red Flannel Days. And he was a friend of Nina Babcock and Grace Hamilton, the two women who ran the paper up there. I think they were very staunch Republicans, and in their newspaper they were very supportive of Ford. They knew him better than I did.

H. Meijer: Well, you and Grandpa opened the first store in Grand Rapids the same year that President Ford went to Washington as a Congressman in 1948.
Meijer: Okay. I don’t remember that, but I believe you. I don’t know how we got acquainted, but he knew who I was and I knew who he was because we were never involved in politics.

H. Meijer: Did he come to Rotary at all?

Meijer: Not that I know of. But then – unless I’m hurrying too much – the library came into question. He didn’t get elected; Jimmy Carter beat him. But Ford, I think, was as honorable a man that could be, and I just never saw him do anything I didn’t think was very fine. And he got beat.

When Lyndon Johnson announced – this is another time. I don’t know if that’s later or before, but Lyndon Johnson said, “I’m not going to run for re-election,” he immediately put the arm on everybody and their uncle to do a job for – to contribute to his museum. Money, artifacts, everything. Lyndon was a pretty heavy salesperson. But Ford, when he was defeated, he would not do anything during his lame duck session, from November to January, or whatever it was, for the museum while he was still president.

Then after he was done with his presidency - somehow, I don’t know how I got involved - they wanted to build a Ford Library or Museum. We didn’t know about the library, it was all one building as far as we were concerned. But then later on Ford said, “I want my library in Ann Arbor, and I want the museum in Grand Rapids.” Or we could have had the museum in Ann Arbor with the library. But he wanted it in Grand Rapids. So I think it’s the only presidential library and museum that’s split – where it’s in two different cities.

H. Meijer: Yes.

Meijer: So, I’ll kind of think through the sequence. Now the Democrats are in office, and there were some Democratic bureaucracy who came up here to talk about the museum, and they suggested that President Ford wasn’t elected president, therefore, a building like the Red Junior College Gymnasium on Lyons Street would be all that he really should have. And of course that made us angry because he was playing it down and we liked President Ford. So I don’t think I went to Washington, I think I went to Florida, I went there twice for him. But I went down there and said, “President Ford, you haven’t wanted to raise
money or these things during your time when you weren’t elected and you
were out of office, but you’ve got to get some attention to this because these
Democrats don’t care much for what you get. And if you want something
decent, you’ve got to give us some support.” And from then on he did do that.

Another time – I’m skipping some time now – they were talking and talking
and talking about where he wanted to buried, but nobody wanted to ask him. I
think it’s strange because I don’t think that’s an unfair question. And so we
went to Florida. He was coming in off a golf course, and I suppose he knew
we were coming. I said, “I’m here to ask you where you want to be buried. Do
you want to be buried at Beaver Creek where you have a home? Do you want
to be buried in Rancho Mirage?” or wherever that was.

H. Meijer: Palm Springs.

Meijer: Palm Springs? Yeah. “Do you want to be buried in Palm Springs, do you want
to be buried in Washington? Do you want to be buried in Ann Arbor, where
you went to the university? Or do you want to be buried in Grand Rapids?”

“Oh, in the museum in Grand Rapids, of course.” That was after we had it
built. That was my whole conversation on that subject. It was easy to ask and
got a quick answer.

H. Meijer: You were reminiscing with him once, or he was talking with you once, in a
pretty unusually setting – in the men’s room. Was that about the election of
1976?

Meijer: They ran a trial balloon at some time for him to run for president when
Reagan got it. And the people that were really pushing him to do it, I think
kind of deserted him, because Reagan got the nomination, and I think he was
either embarrassed or just plain angry and embarrassed. “Doggone it,” he
says, “I’ve been doing all this speaking for the Republican Party and they
haven’t paid me anything. From now on they are going to pay me. And I’m
going to give it to the museum.” So it was just a little tidbit of history that he
emotionally spoke about it. I just thought, well, I got to his emotions. I just
found him an interesting man, and I was involved in the location of the
museum. I realize there was a group of us. There was really four of us who
were kind of the wheel horses for the Board of Directors for the Foundation.

H. Meijer: You and Jordan Shepherd.

Meijer: Jordan Shepherd became president, chairman, or whatever we called him.

H. Meijer: Or an executive committee, or however you did that.

Meijer: I think that’s what you would call it – whether it was officially that or not, but
it became Jordan Shepherd, who was the head of the Foundation, on getting
the building built and so forth. And there was Carl Morgenstern, Dave
LeClaire, the photographer, and I – the four of us. And we met almost every
week for a while to get the museum built. And then when we picked the site
for it, I remember touring around. I had Mary Ann Keeler in the car, and there
were several of us touring around at the same time. I was driving our car. We
looked right behind where Source Club met the street to the airport there.

H. Meijer: Patterson and south of 28th Street.

Meijer: Patterson, south of 28th Street, west side of the street. There was a barn there
for years. I think it’s gone now. That was one place. We offered to give them
the corner at Knapp and East Beltline, the northeast corner where the little
shopping center is going now, because we had it for a store and they wouldn’t
give us zoning. So we were going to give that to the Ford Museum if they
wanted it.

H. Meijer: Now, you were a little bit of an advocate for that site, weren’t you?

Meijer: I was an advocate for the Knapp site. However if they wanted to put it
downtown; I liked that, too. But I had some stipulations. It had to have good
access by car; and it had to have parking; and it had to have a green front
yard, so it wasn’t just sitting in a sea of asphalt and sidewalks. If we had the
property where the museum is now, except for the north side right where his
grave starts, I’m not sure where the line was. We had the property where Days
Inn and where the Van Andel museum is now. And the city had agreed to give
us all that, because we had to have the property free, and because of my
insistence, I think they gave it to us.
Then, when we had a bridge – I didn’t know how much parking we’d need, and from our store experience, I wanted plenty of parking. So we had the parking on the south side of Pearl Street, but I said, “Now, if some little kid there is eating lunch by the museum and some runs across the street to the car, it might be run over.” And I said, “We don’t want any fatalities because of the museum.” So that’s how we got the property on the south side from the city. Now we didn’t have any contract written, but it was ours for the Ford Museum. We went down to Joe Van Andel’s office because he was going to be a big sponsor of the public museum, and he practically gave us instructions. He was going to put that museum on the river and they wanted that property. No money if it remained at the old location.

H. Meijer: You’re talking south of Pearl Street now?

Meijer: South of Pearl Street from wherever Days Inn is – Days Inn and the public museum and _______________, took up the site. So Bob Sullivan property owned it north of the Ford Museum. I remember I was there with Dave LaClaire and Jordan Shepherd and Carl Morgenstern and I, and we were meeting with Bob Sullivan to buy it. And he wanted $2.6 million. They all agreed that’s too much, too much. I called him in a separate room, I said, “Listen, he’s not going to sell it for less, if I can read his mind at all. And either we get it or we don’t get it.” And we got instructions to get the property so we could give that back to the city, which we did. So I called the three in a private room and, whether the $2.6 million was too much or not, we just had to quit quibbling, just nail the deal down. And so I was surprised that Carl Morgenstern, who was a banker, agreed with me. He agreed with me on quite a few things that I would think a conservative banker wouldn’t agree to. But I respect him highly because he had the same vision that the rest of us did, and he was going to see it through.

So, we bought it for $2.6 million, and gave back to the city what they gave us. (South of Pearl St.) But they gave it to us. It wasn’t on paper, it wasn’t a contract. But in the meantime, during all this, some people that wanted it downtown at all costs got very excited, and really chewed me out. But I’m not going to mention names. I said, “Well, I want the same thing you do. But I
want grass, I want access, I want parking room, and I like the setting. But we won’t get it unless we insist on it.” So, anyway, we were all friends. I can’t say I’m friends with Carl and Jordan now because they passed away.

H. Meijer: But you and Mary Ann Keeler are friends.

Meijer: Mary Ann Keeler is kind of an interesting character, and she thought I was opposing downtown. I said, “No, I’m not opposing downtown. I don’t want downtown regardless of what we get.” And so, we got an access, if you think about the location. From the east they have to go through town coming in from the Lansing side. But from the north you can get off there at Pearl Street, from the south you can get off at Pearl Street, and from the west you can get off at Pearl Street. So it’s right in the center there, and it’s a darn good location. Everybody was happy.

H. Meijer: Did you walk it with President Ford before the construction started?

Meijer: I don’t know whether we walked it or not, but he seemed to be perfectly happy with what we were doing, and then we were going to have a bridge made to go across Pearl Street before we bought the Sullivan property because I didn’t want some little kid to get killed going across the street. So President Ford heard about it and he wanted what I wanted, so I got my way.

H. Meijer: And that was to add the north side, the Sullivan parcel.

Meijer: No, before the bridge. I was talking about we wanted the bridge so you could walk across there from the south side of Pearl St.

H. Meijer: Okay.

Meijer: Who is the architect? Help me out.

H. Meijer: Marv Dewinter.

Meijer: Marv Dewinter – and the bridge over Pearl St. would have cost $160,000 – and he had a fountain in front of the Ford Museum designed. And it was supposed to cost something and it cost $160,000 more, I guess. So the county gave us a bridge – the money. So the county agreed to use that money for the fountain, so that’s how we paid $300 or some thousand for the fountain, I
think about $350,000, I’m not sure. And we never got the bridge. It was a
dandy bridge he had designed, but we went through all those arguments and
we ended up all being friends on the committee and pleased that it worked out
as well as it did.

H. Meijer:  Now, you would have met President Ford, of course, a number of times when
he was still in Congress. Did you ever get to his office in Washington?

Meijer:  No, never was at his office. I really wasn’t that close to him while he was in
Congress and when he was president. He never invited me to the White
House. I went there when Nixon and Jimmy Carter – I think there were only a
couple of times I’ve been there – two or three times.

H. Meijer:  But of course, after he left the White House and you became involved in the
Ford Museum, then you saw him pretty regularly.

Meijer:  Yeah. I remember - I guess I’m always kind of the radical one - but two
things: when we were building the museum – no, we were taking in money to
build the museum, getting donations – in the meantime, Ann Arbor, U of M,
moved ahead with their library, and we had to delay the Grand Rapids project
because they dug up the museum for the library – they dug up the money for
the library. I didn’t have any part in that, except that we were involved. But
they knew how to get the money. Then they go up with the library next to
Bentley, and I said, “Boy, oh boy, that was fast.”

Inflation was bounding – “as fast as we get the money, we’re losing out on the
cost.” I suggested we start building it without the money. Oh – you can’t do
that – we’ve got to stop, maybe. I said that I suggested we start building it and
stop if we have to. We did that with a couple of stores, too. We did stop. One
in Lansing and one in Battlecreek, I think. But I was surprised that Carl
Morgenstern, the banker, would go along with that, but he did. And so we
started building, and during that time is when, at the library - I guess we were
at the Bentley then, having our meetings, Ford mentioned in the restroom
about he was going to charge Republicans for speeches from now on and was
going to give it to the library.
H. Meijer: Then you said – hadn’t he also expressed some bitterness with Ronald Reagan not campaigning for him?

Meijer: He expressed, I thought, bitterness, because the people that wanted him to come to his trial balloon, you might say, reception, talked him into having it and doing these things, I don’t think showed up for the reception. They went to Reagan instead, somehow. It probably wasn’t the same time, but he was bitter, as I recall. Very bitter. I don’t think there was a lot of love between him and Reagan, regardless of the public face they put on the Republican Party. I was surprised he’d say as much as he did.

H. Meijer: When you picture him in your mind, what stands out about him in your recollections?

Meijer: Well, I got to like him very much. That’s why we loaned him the eagle on a permanent loan in front of the museum. That’s why I bought the Berlin Wall at some point, a piece of it. Ask me the question again.

H. Meijer: When you picture him, or you imagine him, what stands out about him, about his voice, or his manner, or his appearance? What do you think about?

Meijer: Well, you think about political people, and you think about what’s going on now between McCain and Obama, and they are starting the dirt throwing era. But I really think that Ford was honorable beyond, way beyond the normal. He was one of the most honorable guys you could get. And I learned to respect him highly.

Then we got involved in the various other things. His bust, that’s in the Ford Museum, is a copy of the bust that’s in the Capitol, or wherever they have the vice presidents and so forth. But it didn’t start out that way. And I suggested Marshall Fredericks, [I] had a price from him, and I think he probably would have done a decent job. But they wanted a different sculptor, and so we got the bust. There’s a Greek man that was going to pay for the bust. I think it was around $25,000, but they didn’t like the bust. The artist made the real sculptor of it. And I said to him, “Well, take his $25,000 and put it in the bank and get the bust later,” we wanted the bust. No, they didn’t want to do that, I guess, as I remember. So we got another bust. That bust wasn’t any good. Finally, the
third bust they took off a mold or whatever you call it from the ones that were in Washington, and that’s what’s there now. Then when they wanted to commission this bust they said, “But you haven’t got the money.” Well, get it. He’ll do it without the money. Of course I wanted to buy the bust in the first place. He said, “Oh, no, we’ll get it.” I guess they ordered it and then the Greek man wasn’t interested anymore. So I said, in the process, “Okay, well, order it. If the Greek man doesn’t come through” – I never knew his name – “then I’ll donate it.” Then, “Oh that won’t be necessary,” but they were disappointed that he didn’t come through. I donated the bust. So, basically I donated the bust and the piece of Berlin Wall and the eagle out in front and the medallion.

H. Meijer: We need to jump ahead a little bit because you also were involved in the Vietnam staircase on the American Embassy.

Meijer: Yes, but only to the extent that you, Hank and the Mark saw it there and thought that it’s going to be junked because the embassy in Vietnam was shot up.

H. Meijer: We saw it there, but then there was the debate about whether or not it was appropriate for the Ford Museum, and you had some different ideas than some of your fellow trustees.

Meijer: The trustees – I don’t know, were there twenty of them there?

H. Meijer: Bigger now, but probably there were twenty plus at the meeting.

Meijer: Whatever it was. And I’d already – I don’t know if I’d talked to Jerry Ford or whether Marty did, but we knew he’d wanted it, and so I thought after you were there that maybe we could get an agent of some kind to pay somebody $10,000 or something, and just ship it over to the United States. Then they said, the Democrats said, or the State Department said, “That’s government property. You can’t touch it.”

H. Meijer: This was during the Clinton administration now. Madeline Albright was Secretary of State.
Meijer: Madeline Albright, that’s right. Madeline Albright was Secretary of State, and so I knew that Ford wanted it so I brought it up at the Foundation meeting in Washington. Kissinger said, “We don’t want that…” – I think there was some profanity there – “so and so. It reminds us that we lost the war.” And I said to Kissinger, “I don’t think we lost the war. We won the Cold War, and this is just a battle on the way.” Of course, President Ford is sitting there laughing because I’m getting into a little argument with Kissinger. Those are the only words I ever had with Kissinger. And I knew President Ford was in my corner, so anyway, Ford called Madeline Albright and so she arranged that we could have the stairway. Actually, we didn’t really pay any money for it. I don’t know how it got here. The government must have taken care of the whole thing. It’s like several other things I’ve been involved in, we started them and they never cost us anything.

H. Meijer: What did President Ford say to Kissinger? Did he speak up at all in that meeting?

Meijer: I don’t think so. I think he just sat there and laughed, just smiled or whatever it was. You could tell he was in favor of getting the ladder over here. It was kind of a humorous episode. But I didn’t realize at the time, and I should know history better, but poor Kissinger, he had to get _______ with the Vietnam when they’d already beat us. And so when I knew all the facts, I kind of felt sorry for him because that was a tough job. We beat up on Vietnam and then we lost the war. How can we expect them to be very friendly.

H. Meijer: We might be out of questions here.

Smith: You might want to talk about Maury DeJonge. [Unintelligible] Peter, Marty, there were several points dealing with construction where things weren’t going right. And more than one person said that at each of those times, that one person would come in the room and say, “No, we’re going to do this!” and it was you. Can you talk about that?

H. Meijer: Some of the other people involved in the creation of the museum said that you were a voice of encouragement sometimes when people were down. Do you recall cheering on this project?
Fred Meijer
August 26, 2008

Meijer: Vaguely, but I know I wasn’t on the Ford Foundation right at the beginning. Peter Secchia got me on there. And I do think I probably gave it more time, not compared to Marty Allen. I mean, he did a fine job. And I guess he wasn’t on that Foundation either. But I gave quite a lot of time, going to Florida and seeing Ford, and various other things. So many people are busy and I’ve been on boards where I haven’t done much. But anyway, once I got on – and they used to laugh at me – because they always knew where I was coming from - we had this money and they said Ford is conservative. Well, I wanted to invest it in stocks, at least 60-70%, and Ford would want this. The last time Ford was in a meeting with us, and I was expressing myself again, I said, “Well, Lena and I have all ours in stocks. If it goes down, it goes down. If it goes up, it goes up. But you sure don’t accumulate having it just strictly in interest and bonds.”

And I did this with the art museum, too. One lady who promised they would never lose money again – well, the only way you can be sure you don’t ever lose money is to put it as fixed income – and then when the market went up, they were complaining because their values weren’t going up. But anyway, I suggested that, and at one point Ford was in the meeting, in the Ford Museum, and I said, “President Ford, you’ve got a reputation of wanting to be very conservative, and I’ll tell you what we did, Lena and I.” And I said, “There’s no sign it’s prudent, but this is what I believe we ought to do. But it’s your call, it’s your museum.” And he said, “I agree with Fred.” And I think that’s when we went to 70% stocks. I remember that.

H. Meijer: Was there ever a time during the planning and construction of the museum, or in the early days when you thought it might not come about?

Meijer: Well, it was inflation under Jimmy Carter. As people get older, like Firestone, who died, and now President Ford has died, and so forth, if we couldn’t get their attention, and his former Cabinet, like – Kissinger wasn’t involved in this – but people like that. Brent Scowcroft, I’m trying to think – there were a lot of well-known names. I don’t know whether Cheney was on that or not. But I kind of think he was, I’m not sure. And the big meeting was in Washington, and when we had them in Grand Rapids there were not that
many proportionately came. But, yeah, we were discouraged several times because the Democratic administration, the locals, not Madeline Albright, I never met her. But they say, well he wasn’t elected president and they were playing him down.

Then, of course, he was getting criticized for pardoning Nixon at some point. I know that one lady – my mother-in-law – voted Republican all the time, but she voted for Carter because he went to church a lot and he was a good man, and thought Ford was a crook – he pardoned Nixon. And you could easy come to that conclusion, I suppose. But he told me several times, he said, “It’s the only thing I could do. I had to pardon Nixon. Otherwise they would have indicted him. There would be lawsuits, there would be accusations, and I couldn’t get on with any business. And so I pardoned him. Unconditionally.” So he told me that, but he said that publicly many times.

H. Meijer: To the extent that that affected his popularity, did that affect the fundraising for the museum, too?

Meijer: I don’t know. I’m trying to think who was Secretary of Energy – he wanted to make a substantial donation to the museum, but he wanted it in his own name, and it’s still in his own name.

H. Meijer: Are you thinking of Secretary of the Treasury Bill Simon?

Meijer: That’s who I’m thinking of, yeah, Bill Simon. He was dealing with oil shortages, or whatever that was, back in that time. We went to see Bill Simon – I didn’t, but Jack Koetie did, and we tried to be sure we had fuel in our own company. But, yeah, I think one of the best things I did, or the most proper thing, is that we kept right building. And we didn’t stop. We would have stopped if we’d run out of money.

Then I was suspicious of U of M. I didn’t trust them one minute, because they had the money and they were building their library. I said, “They’re going to use the money and we will sit here with no museum.” I was wrong. I mean, there is nobody more honorable than our dealings with U of M. I can’t say enough good about them. But whatever money I think U of M promised Ford, a million dollars for supporting their campaign for a fund drive back then, U
of M never gave us the money. They invested it for us and they did better than we did. And so we have a separate Simon fund, I think, and a separate U of M fund that they administer, and then we have the main fund. But U of M was very honorable and I should have known that, but I didn’t trust them at the time. It proved that I should have.

H. Meijer: You had a bit of business relationship with Frank McKay, and that’s a different discussion. But President Ford’s father was part of that reform group that was fighting Frank McKay back in the 40s.

Meijer: I didn’t really realize that, but I believe it. And so was Mrs. Judd or somebody from far ____________.

H. Meijer: Dorothy Judd and Dr. Ver Meulen.

Meijer: Oh, yes. Yeah, McKay owned our Standale store. We had dealings with him on that.

H. Meijer: I’m just trying to think – when you first met President Ford and before you got to know him well at all, back when he was a Congressman, would it have been at a parade or a community function of some kind?

Meijer: Well, at a parade you just really wave. I don’t know, really, when I met him. I don’t know. I met him later years, I think, his eightieth birthday in Washington, because I know Barbara Bush and President Bush were there, and the younger Bush was there. It was really a party of names. Kissinger and his wife were there – I can’t tell you who all. What was the question?

H. Meijer: I was just trying to think about when you had first met President Ford, back when he was a Congressman.

Meijer: I don’t know, I really don’t know.

H. Meijer: Because you would have voted for him for the first time in 1952, when you moved to Grand Rapids, probably.

Meijer: Probably. But I just had high respect for him that I don’t know how anybody could get to be President of the United States, being as honest and forthright
as he was. And of course, he didn’t get elected, but I think he had high integrity.

H. Meijer: Now, you had some misgivings about the Vietnam War when he was still supporting President Nixon pretty strongly on that.

Meijer: Yeah, and Nixon was in office and the parade from Arlington to the Capitol with a dead soldier’s sign on your chest, I think, and here Nixon appointed me to be chairman of employing, not the handicapped…

H. Meijer: It was the Jobs Commission or something?

Meijer: Some kind of a jobs commission where people that didn’t have the education to hold a job, we were supposed to help them get a job or get an education. And so I was in Washington and had supper in the East Room. There was a big supper. I say I had supper with Nixon. And what I remember about the supper is they had mementoes you could take along, matches and little things. Somebody got mine before I got them. But that was in the White House. But I never was in the White House with President Ford.

H. Meijer: Did you ever have any conversations with Betty Ford?

Meijer: Not a whole lot, but I think she sensed that I was sympathetic, or in agreement with her stands on Planned Parenthood, on the right to have an abortion. I know that’s a touchy subject. I had a doctor talk to me here in town one time when I came out of a country club. He said, “Fred, I hear you aren’t supporting this or that. But you’d be surprised how many people are totally against abortion, until their daughter gets pregnant and then they say, ‘Doc, can’t you do this for us?’” He says, “We are at risk for our license.” And I think that was Dr Vandenberg. He’s passed away now, so he can’t defend himself in case I’ve said it wrong. But I had great admiration for Betty Ford. We were with them to a dinner I think Pete Secchia and that restaurant that went down on the southwest end. I guess it’s in Wyoming. And I was sitting next to Mrs. Ford and she had her addiction problems with alcohol and drugs, and she dropped her pocketbook on the floor, and so forth. And I think she did the same thing in Russia when she was there, before the family got together
and really turned the heat on her, and said, “Mother, you can’t drink anymore and you can’t take these Valiums,” and so forth.

One thing I admire about Ford, from the day that they asked Betty to quit drinking, he never took another cocktail. Not one. No wine, no liquor, no beer, no nothing. If she was not going to have it, he wasn’t going to have it. That’s pretty honorable, I think.

Smith: One final question that Richard likes to ask. Tell us something, maybe personal, that may surprise people about Ford, who never knew him.

Meijer: I forgot to mention, he was here at the dedication of the garden.

H. Meijer: That’s right. We’ll get to Erik’s question, but he helped dedicate the garden. In fact, Erik was here that day, as well.

Meijer: And I think Betty Ford and I forget who, walked through. And I walked through with Mrs. Ford, I think, and behind us came Lady Bird Johnson, and I think Lena was with Lady Bird. She was impressed with how much Lady Bird knew about the plants and flowers. She was knowledgeable. But I think President Ford had been here twice when we asked him.

H. Meijer: If you encountered somebody who was flying in from another state or another country making their first visit to the Ford Museum, and they asked you what President Ford was like – and you get beyond the nice guy and the honest politician and that sort of thing, what would you tell them that they might not otherwise hear about him?

Meijer: Every time I proposed something, I supposed it was what I liked, but he’d agree with me. Whether it be on the money or on the building of the building and all that sort of thing. I do think I gave it a lot of attention, and he was very appreciative of the eagle in front and the garden that got built. I don’t know whether I was involved with that garden, I know that Hillary Snell – is it Hillary is a lady’s name or is that her husband?

H. Meijer: Husband – Connie Snell.
Meijer: Connie Snell. I think she’s the one that laid out that garden. I had this letter Bill showed me just now. I got a handwritten letter from Ford thanking us for furnishing the birthday cake for all the people that came through that day at the museum. And we supported them in many ways, in many minor ways, but I think he wrote me two personal handwritten notes thanking us for that and whatever it was. I don’t remember, besides the cake, what it was.

H. Meijer: Well, and a thank you for bringing the piece of the Berlin Wall to the Ford Museum.

Meijer: I think so. Did he in one of those letters?

H. Meijer: Yes.

Meijer: Okay, I can’t tell you. I gave it a lot of time and I don’t regret it. It was joy.

H. Meijer: Thank you.
INDEX

D
Dewinter, Marv, 6–7

F
Ford, Betty
  health issues, 14–15
Ford, Gerald R.
  character traits, 8
  embassy staircase, 9–10
  first acquaintance with, 1–2
  as fiscal conservative, 11–12
  funeral plans, 3
  remembrance, 15–16

G
Gerald R. Ford Library and Museum, 2–7, 10–13

S
Shepherd, Jordan, 4