First of all, thank you for doing this. Let’s start at the beginning. How did your path cross that of Gerald Ford?

Well, my first experience was when I was a student at Kalamazoo College. Sophomore year there was a career service quarter where we go off-campus for a career opportunity where we work – whether it’s in the medical field if you are in pre-med, or legal. I’d been in pre-med and switched to philosophy, so there were some real challenges in terms of a career service opportunity. There was an opportunity if you were interested in political philosophy, an opportunity to work as an intern in the House Minority Leader’s office. I applied for the position, and I was successful in gaining it. I went to Washington – it was in 1971 when I was nineteen years old – for three months, working as an intern in his office.

And how did you get it? What was the selection process?

I believe it was my academic credentials. And I also was from Michigan. But a lot of the students from Kalamazoo College were from Michigan as well.

Did you interview with him for the job?

No, I did not. I interviewed on campus with the individual in charge of the program.

Okay. And how many interns were there in the Minority Leader’s office?

During a three-month period in spring – there was a guy who was there with me who was from Michigan State. I was very fortunate, as they were short one staff person and they asked me if I would take that position. So I did case work in the House Minority Leader’s office for my internship, and the other intern worked in the mailroom.
Smith: What was your first impression of Gerald Ford? Had you met him before?

Raiman: I don’t believe that I had met him before. When I came into the office I had the chance. He greeted us and talked with us initially as an introduction. I was very impressed, and I was very quiet, listening and thinking, “Oh, wow, this is a tremendous opportunity and I want to do the very best I can.” He was very busy as the House Minority Leader, and I was doing my job on the staff.

Smith: And how was the office organized? Who was in charge? How did things function? How did priorities get set, carried out?

Raiman: Well, there was Frank Meyer, his administrative assistant, with whom I worked. Mildred Leonard was his personal secretary. There was Anne Kamstra, who was the receptionist in the office, and there were a number of other people. It was funny because almost all of the individuals in the office who reported to him were older, single women. A number of them from the Christian Reformed religion in that area and were known by other offices on the Hill as the six nuns. It was kind of interesting when I blew in and worked there.

Smith: Now, presumably there was the Minority Leader’s office, but then there was the local office, the office for serving the Michigan district?

Raiman: No.

Smith: They were one and the same?

Raiman: He was unusual. He was a very frugal person, and he had one office. A combination of the House Minority Leader’s office, as well as his congressional office.

Smith: Tell us about his frugality.

Raiman: His frugality? I think it was legendary. It was reflected in how the office operated, being very careful about how you spent taxpayer dollars, which I thought was a very, very good and positive thing. It was reflected, too, in
staff member salaries, though at that time I was getting paid – it was a paid internship - so that was wonderful.

Smith: And presumably answering mail was a religion?

Raiman: Yes, oh yes. I can comment on that because I did case work and was trying to help constituents solve their problems; that was a wonderful opportunity for me. I contacted the different agencies to solve visa problems or veterans problems and other issues. But we would also get mail from people who, you might say, was nut mail, for lack of a better word. Usually on yellow legal pads, written in green Magic Marker on every line.

Smith: With lots of exclamation marks?

Raiman: Yes. And he asked us to respond to all of those letters – to every single one from a constituent, and we did.

Smith: That’s interesting.

Smith: Did you see his temper?

Raiman: I heard it a couple of times although I didn’t see it. I was with him through a number of different jobs, and I certainly saw it a couple of times at the White House. But when I was working for him up on the Hill, a couple times he got ticked off about what on, on the floor of the House, or with certain individuals, and he would vent in his office. But it was not something you ever really saw. He was such a warm, friendly, caring person. He knew every person’s name. He knew about their family and their kids – the elevator operator, the guy who swept the hallways outside of the office, of staff members. And I remember thinking to myself - how can he remember all of this information? I was always impressed by that.

Smith: Did you ever resent on his behalf the whole Chevy Chase business, which was a euphemism for “this guy’s not bright enough to be president?” The
stereotype that was created of a guy who was physically clumsy and not as intellectually adept as he ought to be.

Raiman: Yes, it angered me. It angered me for a number of reasons. One, Ford is the most athletic president that this country has ever had. He was a Big Ten football player, tremendously successful; he was a tremendous swimmer—he swam every day, and he was a great skier. I remember when I was working on his confirmation hearings for the vice presidency, after we were successful, he and the family were going to Vail to go skiing. The Secret Service had a very difficult time because they could not find a Secret Service agent who could keep up with him and protect him on the slopes. They had to send an alert out all over the country to try and find agents who could protect him, who could ski as well or better than he.

But it also angered me because he opened himself up the media. Previously, my understanding was, in the Nixon administration and I’m sure other administrations, they restricted media access—when you could shoot film or not. And Ford just opened it up. So when he tripped coming down the jetway— they’d shoot it and show the same piece again and again. And that angered me.

Smith: Tell me the mood when you arrived in ’71. Those were eventual days, even before Watergate—clearly Vietnam was still very much on the front burner. How did that find reflection in the office?

Raiman: I think that everyone, certainly on Capitol Hill, and all around Washington, was very concerned about Vietnam because of the mood in the country reflected in the media and all of the demonstrations. It was the time of the Black Panthers and the White Panthers, and Rainbow Peoples Party, as well as demonstrations led by the SDS and other groups. So there was a lot of concern about it.
Gail Raiman

Smith: And some of that, in fact, spilled over to Grand Rapids when you had some urban violence in Grand Rapids. I believe on at least one occasion, his office was taken over by protesters.

Raiman: I’m not familiar with that at all. I was in college at the time. When I came to Washington as an intern I’d already been demonstrating against the war in Vietnam back in Michigan, when I was in college. And when I came to town, it was an interesting juxtaposition because I was in a different role now - I was part of the government.

Smith: Establishment.

Raiman: Yes, Establishment, which I had been protesting against. So it was an interesting juxtaposition for me, providing me with a very good perspective of both sides. And he was always very fair and open.

Smith: How did you and he handle that?

Raiman: Well, we had an interesting experience when I was an intern. I was in Washington with a number of my friends during the big May Day and other demonstrations. There were hundreds of thousands of people in the street. I felt very strongly against the war in Vietnam and I was also protesting against Richard Nixon as president. I’ve got to make that clear.

I was going to engage in the demonstrations the coming weekend, but I felt it was my responsibility to make sure that he knew. I had to be upfront with him. I’m a good Midwestern girl – open and honest – I didn’t want to cause any problems, but I wanted him to know. I also was concerned that if something happened to me; that they would know. It was the Friday before the big demonstrations, and there was a lot of concern in the city because the numbers of protesters were legion and they were not prepared for it. He was in the office and I asked if I could talk with him for just a moment. We literally stood right in the middle of the open area in the office, and I said, “Mr. Ford, I just wanted to let you know that I plan on participating in the demonstrations against the war in Vietnam this weekend.”
Meanwhile, in my peripheral vision I see his entire staff freaking out behind him. And he’s just talking with me. I said, “I wanted you to know this. I’m not stupid, I don’t believe in violence. I just feel very strongly about this and I want to participate and wanted you to know. If I’m not here on Monday, it’s because something has happened to me and I wanted you to know that.” And he looked at me and he said, “Gail, you need to do what you feel strongly about. You need to participate in those things you feel strongly about.” And I said, “Thank you, very much, Mr. Ford.”

Smith: And that’s how you addressed him – Mr. Ford?

Raiman: Yes.

Smith: You wonder if any of his children…

Raiman: I don’t think they were out there. In some ways I always wondered if he had a better understanding or appreciation for that kind of thing because of his children. The whole staff was – oh my God, what is Gail doing? I was just protesting like everybody else. There were incidents because the SDS was there. I did get tear gassed on my way to work on Monday, in the work outfit and everything. It’s kind of ironic. But something I’ll always, always remember, is talking with him about this. I wasn’t sure how he was going to react, but I really wanted to be honest with him, and he gave me his support.

Smith: I’m sure he appreciated your candor. When Watergate first occurred, of course it was widely dismissed. How did it evolve into something larger? During the ’72 campaign, where were you?

Raiman: I was in college, and part of that time I was in school in Europe.

Smith: Okay. So when did you next work with Ford?

Raiman: I had completed my three-month internship and was asked if I would stay and continue working, which is a wonderful compliment. But I was interested in going back to Kalamazoo College and completing my college education,
which I did. When I graduated from K, my plan was to get my PhD in philosophy and teach. But I needed a summer job to make some money and my mother said, “Gail, why don’t you call Ford’s district office and see if you can work there as a summer job?” To which I responded with a huge eye-roll –“Ohhhh, Mother.” But I did it, and the district office called the Washington office about me and it happened. That summer, which was the summer of 1973, I worked in his district office. As each person went on summer vacation, I did their job. And I saw him when he came back to the district, and I participated in some events.

Smith: It’s interesting because, for someone who had a safe seat, plus all the demands of the national job, one senses that he spent more time in the district than he had to.

Raiman: I wasn’t in a position to make that judgment, but he did come back often and there were dinners and events in town. He really wanted to meet and talk with his constituents. He was totally committed to his constituents. When he was in town, different groups would come in, different individuals, and he went out to different dinners and events. So he was there.

Smith: He really liked people.

Raiman: Yes, he did. He loved people, and he really did like getting out and meeting with folks and finding out what was on their minds. That was his job and he really relished that.

Smith: And he was seemingly comfortable with all kinds of people?

Raiman: Yes, from all walks of life. And I can attest to that because I was working in the office when everybody and anybody would come in and talk with him.

Smith: Really? Like?

Raiman: He was very comfortable with people from all walks of life, with different needs. A couple of people who I thought, “Holy cow, should we even be
talking to this individual?” He didn’t spend tons of time with them, but he was always there and paid attention. He was always totally respectful and open and responsive.

Smith: I’ve always wondered what kind of support he had in the African-American community. Obviously, it tends to vote Democratic, but you wonder on the personal level, how’d he get along with people?

Raiman: He was such an open, warm person he just really liked everyone.

Smith: How pervasive was the Christian Reformed culture, for lack of a better word? Years ago it blanketed West Michigan, defined it. In some ways it’s almost amusing to modern sensibilities, and clearly it was something that he had to factor into his own political outlook. To people who didn’t know West Michigan, the West Michigan that produced Jerry Ford, what would you tell them?

Raiman: It was really, truly Midwestern. Very open, frank, and friendly. He was that way. I think a lot of us Midwesterners are that way. We are comfortable and not interested in trying to be important or something we’re not - just being there to serve. And he reflected that Midwestern sense.

Now, the Christian Reformed Church. What they brought into the culture was an increased religious conservatism: no drinking, no dancing, no this. And it was there as an influence, but I don’t see that it had a real impact on him. He was their representative and the local joke is: whenever there are three people in the Christian Reformed community they form their own church, which is more conservative than its predecessor. The Christian Reformed, the Dutch Reformed, it has different grades of conservatism. My step-mother was brought up Netherlands Reformed, so I’m familiar with this. But she broke away.

It was a backdrop at that time and it has changed dramatically over the years.

Smith: But certainly his fiscal conservatism would appeal…
Raiman: Tremendously. They were in sync.

Smith: So the vice presidential nomination – where were you when all that happened?

Raiman: Well, to backtrack, when I was working in his district office in Grand Rapids, he asked me if I would be interested in working for him in Washington in the House Minority Leader’s office. And I said thank you, but no. I’m going to grad school in philosophy and I’m going to teach. And he responded, “Well, Gail, really think about it, okay?” And he left and came back to the district a few weeks later and called me into his office and said, “Gail, I really think that you are much too smart to waste your time getting your PhD in philosophy, and then teaching the rest of your life. You need to come to Washington and work for me and go to law school at night.” I knew how hard he worked and I’m kind of a workaholic too.

Smith: He really was a workaholic, wasn’t he?

Raiman: Yes he was. He worked late as I did. So I was familiar with this. And my thought was, if I did that, I would never get to law school at night. So I told him no, thank you very much, but I’m not interested. And he went back to Washington again and a number of weeks later he came back and he called me into his office to talk about working for him again. I can’t believe this – I was twenty-one years old and I told the House Minority Leader that I would consider it if was a part-time position. I actually said that to him. Which I cannot believe to this day. Anyway, twenty-one and what did I know?

So he said, “Okay, let me check in Washington and I’ll get back to you.” I said thank you, and I didn’t expect anything to happen. So the next time he was in town he called me into his office and he told me he had great news for me. And so I thought he probably had a part-time position, and I was thinking holy cow, now I’m going to law school. So I met with him and he said, “I have a full-time position for you in my political division and you can start right now.” And I said, “I’m sorry Mr. Ford, I told you I really didn’t want to
do that, and I’m going to go to grad school in philosophy. But thank you very much.”

So that was, I think, the fourth time he approached this topic with me, and I figured that would be the last time. My internship ended. When I got on the campus I stood there and had an epiphany. Why am I going to do this? My epiphany was totally disconnected with Ford or anything we’d said. I thought - if I’m going to be here for five years and study all this time, and I’m going to teach for the rest of my life – no, do I want to do that – no. I want to “make a difference”. I was there with my mother and my brother and I said, “I’m not even enrolling. Let’s turn around and go home.” They were very concerned because of my father, who was chief of staff and chief of surgery at Blodgett Medical Center. And as a surgeon, you could probably anticipate he was a perfectionist, and this action was an indication that I wasn’t perfect. A big surprise. But they were concerned because my father was going to be so angry.

So we went home, and boy, they were right. My father was absolutely livid. We got in this huge fight, and it was horrible. We weren’t speaking to each other, and there I am now, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, wondering, “Okay, here I am a philosophy major in Grand Rapids, Michigan in this really terrible economy, and what am I going to do?” And fortunately, for me, I was in the right place at the right time. I think it was four days later, Agnew resigned from the vice presidency, Nixon named Ford to be his vice president, and I got phone calls from Ford’s office saying, “Get to Washington as fast as you can.” I didn’t need to be asked again.

Three days later I was on an airplane, had three suitcases, and I flew to Washington, DC – National Airport – staff picked me up and took me and my suitcases over to the Minority Leader’s office. We had a separate office where we were going to work on the confirmation hearings for the vice presidency. They put my suitcases in the corner and said, “Here’s your desk, Gail.” And then introduced me to Bob Hartmann, who was his chief of staff, who was
going to be heading the confirmation team. I’d be working with the attorneys on Ford’s confirmation hearings for the vice presidency before the House Judiciary and Senate Rules (committees).

Smith: Did that include Phil Buchen?

Raiman: In fact, I’m not sure – my biggest involvement was with Bill Kramer, former member of Congress, with the law firm, Kramer, Haber and Becker. Bill Kramer, Benton Becker, and a gentleman who is now my husband, Bob Hynes who had worked with Ford as Minority Counsel on the House Rules Committee. Bob left the year earlier to go to NBC and Ford contacted him and asked him to take a leave of absence and come back and work with the team on his confirmation hearings at that time.

Smith: Tell us about Bob Hartmann. Because he was clearly a pivotal figure in the Ford story.

Raiman: It is very funny, because when I was an intern in Ford’s office, I really did not see him because he was the Minority Sergeant at Arms of the House, and he had an office downstairs, along with his secretary. One day, though, I had to talk with him about some issue and I remember people in the office kind of twittering, like being a little nervous about calling him on the phone. And I was just an intern. I was like, “Holy cow.” I had no choice, so I called downstairs and he picked up the phone, “HARTMANN.” So I went, “RAIMAN.” And he answered my questions, and I was on my way.

When Ford was talking to me about working for him in Washington, he said, “Gail, you’ll be working with Bob Hartmann. Bob can be a little difficult at times, but he’s a good guy and you’ll enjoy working with him.” Well, that was kind of an understatement, as you probably know. It was amusing, when I look back on it. What I also didn’t know until quite some time later, is that Vice President-designate Ford told Bob Hartmann that I was going to work for him. He did not get to pick his own person.

Smith: Oh, really.
Raiman: Which I find kind of interesting. And I was shocked when I found out. That explained some things, certainly. So I arrived on the scene, just out of college. “Hello, here I am.” And very funny when we started – he was very particular about spelling his name correctly because Hartmann had two n’s and lots of people spelled it with only with one. And of course, when I first came on board I spelled it with one n, and that was one of my first experiences with him telling me I spelled his name wrong. He had put my name on some materials and he’d spelled my first name wrong. Gail is spelled G-A-I-L, but he was spelling it G-A-Y-L-E, and I mentioned to him very politely that he had spelled my name wrong as well. And he corrected it, that was fine and off we went.

He was an incredible mentor. I really looked to him and saw how he handled situations. He had been the Washington bureau chief for the LA Times for fifteen years. So through his working relationships with the news media, having been a member of the news media, I saw how he operated and dealt with politics which was tremendously insightful for me. It was a baptism by fire. When I arrived, it was the first time the Twenty-fifth Amendment was being put into practice. We were really going to be setting precedent with these hearings. The country was ripped apart by Watergate and the war in Vietnam. It was a siege mentality. And it was horrible. And I’m popped down right in the middle of it, fresh out of college. I’m answering phone calls from the Washington Post, from the networks, everything, wanting to know all about the hearings, the details and everything else. I was also trying to deal with people making false accusations, going to the media and having to disprove what these were. One of the things I was responsible for were Ford’s political contribution files, which were locked up in a very safe place. That was one of my responsibilities in terms of checking against accusations. And when I think back on it, Richard, I am just out of college and twenty-one years old, and I had this incredible responsibility.

Smith: What kinds of allegations were you having to refute?
Raiman: Oh, that some organization gave him money or not, or how much, or who gave it – things like that. Whether it was a foreign country – Korea or some big businessman or something like that. And I’ll tell you, I poured over those files backwards, forwards, every way for my job, and I continued to do that when I moved over to the White House with him later, working with the General Counsel’s office. The man was so clean, precise, everything was in its place and there was absolutely nothing that even had to be explained. It was all to the letter.

Smith: Remember Mr. Winter-Berger.

Raiman: Yes, I do.

Smith: What was his story?

Raiman: I kind of remember - because he had leaked this to the media and one of the things he said is he’d come to Ford’s office and spoken with two of the people who were upfront. Their memory is that they never saw him before in their lives. I’m trying to remember if he said he contributed some money or something – I can’t remember. But I checked everything and the whole thing proved totally false. There was something that involved Korea, as well. That was another issue where there was nothing there. But it was fascinating to me that these people would actually lie and put out all this misinformation to hurt an individual’s reputation when there was absolutely nothing there whatsoever.

So I had a baptism by fire in that position. I was dealing with the national news media in the middle of Ford’s confirmation hearings for the vice presidency, and the confirmation hearings in the middle of Watergate.

Smith: Let me get back to Hartmann because Ford’s loyalty to Hartmann was such that at the White House there were, in effect, two separate speechwriting operations. There was the official one which Hartmann was doing, and then there was the David Gergen, eventually Dick Cheney unofficial one. And it’s curious because of what it says about Ford. Clearly there were problems and
he was prepared to accommodate them, in some ways, rather than making them accommodate him. And certainly there were any number of people who thought to themselves, why doesn’t he just get rid of people or whatever. One senses that he was aware of Hartmann’s shortcomings, but they were dwarfed by his contributions and his own sense of loyalty. Is that a fair description?

Raiman: Some of it is. My take, which might be a little different than yours because I was right there where the rubber meets the road through all of this, is that Bob Hartmann was tremendous. I mean, he had Ford’s back and he was someone who would tell him if something was wrong - this looks horrible, this should not happen, you cannot say this, you cannot do that.

Smith: He in some ways saved Ford from himself when Haig was pulling strings, trying to get a commitment on a pardon.

Raiman: Yes. Oh, in many different ways he was doing that. He was incredible. He really put himself at risk and in jeopardy through all different situations. I remember too, when Ford was vice president, I was in the secure area there. The Nixon people would send over speeches for Ford to give all the time and Hartmann would sit in his office and just rip them up. Of course, they hated him because he was not letting Ford be an apologist for Nixon. The pressure was so intense, and if you look back on the record, during that time period, you’ll find that Gerald Ford was very rarely in Washington.

Smith: Right.

Raiman: And the reason why was to get him out of town, so he could speak and do his own thing. And Hartmann was doing the speeches with a different focus, to keep him away from that mess.

Smith: Clearly, there were people in the Nixon White House – and this probably applies to every vice president – particularly under these circumstances, there were people in the Nixon White House who thought the vice president was insufficiently loyal or outspoken, or all of these things. Was there a tension
that you sensed? And I’m not talking about the principles, but at the staff level.

Raiman: Well, definitely, because they – the Nixon people – really wanted Gerald Ford to be an apologist – that’s my view – for Richard Nixon. Now my view is colored because I really did not like Richard Nixon in any way, shape or form. And that happened when I was in college and I felt that way very strongly. I was certainly wasn’t announcing it to the world, given my position, but I saw this every day. And they were frustrated because Hartmann was the chief of staff, and he was the interceptor, and there were certainly attempts to go around him.

Smith: Which is interesting because it explains why long before August of ’74, for example, Al Haig would have reason to resent Bob Hartmann.

Raiman: Yes, oh yes. It was not pretty. And Hartmann was protecting Ford. And Ford was very open, warm, friendly, and a very trusting individual. The fact of the matter is, there are some individuals you cannot and should not trust.

Smith: So Hartmann was performing a function vital to Ford’s success, and in some ways taking a lot of the heat himself so that Ford didn’t have to.

Raiman: He took a tremendous amount of heat. He did. A lot of heat, a lot of flack in the media, particularly, as well. But Hartmann was pretty good at giving flack back through the media as well. He had a particular talent for that.

Smith: Pretty good leaker.

Raiman: That’s what I understand.

Smith: One of the great, overriding enigmas of that period – sure, he wasn’t vice president terribly long – but it’s an utterly unique vice presidency. And he was in a terribly awkward situation. And he was, by nature, a loyalist and all of that. But as you say, he was out of town a lot. So the question arises, he could never have a transition, for obvious reasons.
Raiman: That’s correct.

Smith: He couldn’t say or do anything that gave the slightest impression that he was even thinking about…

Raiman: I was talking to the news media, at least being an intermediary for these calls, because they were so high level at this point. You can’t even imagine. And the questions were, of course, coming up all the time because the media was anticipating what’s happening, with tapes and everything. The whole thing was blowing up. But with Hartmann in this role – one thing you have to remember, and I don’t know what the numbers are – I think Ford’s congressional staff was about fourteen people. But what you have to realize is those were the fourteen people who went over to be in the vice president’s staff. Now, can you imagine the vice president of the United States having a staff of fourteen people? Well, Hartmann hired a few more people, brought Jack Marsh on board in terms of congressional relations and a couple of other people – Jerry terHorst in terms of press secretary – things like that. It was also such a short period of time. You are exactly right about the transition. I remember all the time being so careful to make sure whatever we said or did could in no way be interpreted as desiring a transition – Ford was not interested in becoming president of the United States.

Smith: Hartmann liked a drink or two. After a couple of drinks, did that conversation ever take place? Did he talk about when you were all going to the White House?

Raiman: No. No, he did not. He was very quiet and again, I think it was his loyalty to Ford, and that was not something that I think he would ever have done. Very quiet, everything was kept between people. I was right there in the secure area with the Vice President and Hartmann, and was in the middle of this. Now, what they said to each other was in complete privacy, but there was no…

Smith: Did you ever hear him say anything – the Vice President – say anything that might be interpreted as anticipating a possible change?
Raiman: I remember a situation, I don’t know who it was, who brought something like that up…and he totally and immediately discounted it. That was his response to that.

I have one interesting story – about Ford’s character, during the brief time in the vice president’s office. Of course, at that point they were starting to conduct Secret Service investigations of the staff. I was up for top secret clearance, and they were interviewing everybody under the sun about me – just like they do with everybody. And I went through the process, and I remember being in the office. Bob Hartmann had been in with the Vice President, came out, walked past my desk and said, “Gail, the FBI is not approving you to work here in Vice President Ford’s office.”

If somebody told me that now, I would really be upset. Then, I was very young, but I was also so intent, we were working so hard because of all the crises happening, that I just kind of went, “Okay.” And just kept working. I didn’t have time to sit and really think about it. I recognized there was a problem and what am I going to do? But I was so busy. And I remember going home that night and thinking, “There’s nothing I can really do about it. I wonder what that’s all about, and why wouldn’t they?” And all I could figure out was that protesting against the war in Vietnam, protesting against Richard Nixon were the reasons. There was nothing else really in my background that would have caused them concern, as far as what I saw.

I don’t know how many days it was or what happened because it’s a kind of a blur at this point, but a number of days later Bob Hartmann came over to me and says, “You’re going to continue to work here. The Vice President told the FBI that you were going to continue to work for him.”

Smith: Benton Becker told us a wonderful story that when Chief Justice Earl Warren died during that period, and Benton said, “It might be a nice gesture if you went up and paid your respects,” because Warren was lying in state at the Court. And of course, there was the Warren Commission in addition to everything else. And Ford was kind of thinking, well the White House
probably wouldn’t like that very much. But he took it under advice. He clearly was going to think about it. And later in the day Benton discovered through other parties, that the Vice President had taken it upon himself to go up to the Supreme Court and to place a wreath at the casket and pay his respects. And sure enough, Nixon gave him hell.

Raiman: He’s this warm and gentle guy and you’d talk to him and he’d smile and he’d listen. He was a very strong individual. With me – think about this – he doesn’t know me very well; he got me to work for him. I came there, I worked very, very hard; he knew that I was very loyal, and the FBI is telling him they will not approve me. I don’t know what in heck they showed him, I don’t want to see my report, I’d probably get ticked off. He saw it all and they said she should not be working for you, and he told them he didn’t care what they had to say, I was going to. Period. Can you imagine how much that meant to me and how I felt?

Smith: Oh, sure.

Raiman: That was incredible.

Smith: Tell me about the workaholic, because Saturdays he was in the office. There are people who think he would have been in on Sunday if he could get people to work with him. And it was something that continued really to the end of his life.

Raiman: Well, I saw it just when I was an intern on the Hill for the first time, because I’d come in early – I’m an early bird. I’m a workaholic, too. So I was even a workaholic intern, and I’d come in early and I made coffee. When staff realized that I was there early when he was there, they asked me to give him cup of coffee. I hadn’t because I didn’t want to interrupt him. So I’d load up a cup of coffee, take it in, say, “Good morning, Mr. Ford,” and deliver it. Well, what was really funny is that – I’d been doing this for probably about a month – and one of the women from up in the front office talked with me and said, “Gail, if you are giving Mr. Ford coffee in the morning, you really need
to use the very attractive bone china cups and saucers that are there. That’s what we give him his coffee in.” I hadn’t even thought about it. I’m giving him the old mugs that the rest of the staff uses and he never said peep to me. I don’t think he said peep to them. I think they probably wondered why he had the mugs on his desk. My whole point is, he was there early, and would work late. Now, I didn’t see it so much when I was an intern because I left fairly early.

While working on the confirmation hearings for the vice presidency, I left where I lived, which wasn’t that far away, at six in the morning. I was there at seven in the morning to begin work and I used to work until nine, at least, at night. That was during the confirmation hearings for the vice presidency, and that was seven days a week, and it had to be. And he was always there. It wasn’t as if we were working and he wasn’t. He was there sometimes longer than we were. So I didn’t think of it as a good or bad thing, I thought of it as here we are all together.

Smith: Was there ever any significant threat to his confirmation? One gets the sense that it was as smooth as the process could be. Of course, it was the first time.

Raiman: It was the first time and people were trying to sabotage it through the media. And there were members of Congress who wanted to do what they could to make sure it didn’t happen. I remember sitting in the hearings with Liz Holtzman, and if you go back and hear that…

Smith: Was it personal? Ideological? Some combination of the two?

Raiman: I don’t know. But I was so shocked at how mean spirited and personal it was. Father Drinan – here’s this Catholic priest, and of course he’s very liberal, but I was shocked. It was really disappointing for me to see. In preparing for the hearings, we uncovered everything. I remember us having Betty Ford’s dental bills. And we had binders with all this information that we prepared. I helped put the binders together and they were asking about Betty Ford’s dental bills. It was so shocking it was unbelievable.
Smith: The fact that she had been to a psychiatrist, was that in play?

Raiman: No. It really wasn’t. And he was so good in addressing everything. He had the information in his books, and he was very strong in making his statements.

Smith: Did you know at that point that she had a problem, however euphemistically defined?

Raiman: No. Not then. I think there was just a little bit of a buzz when I was in the White House.

Smith: But it was not something in the investigation, the vice presidential investigation – something that came up?

Raiman: No. No there wasn’t.

Smith: So he becomes vice president, then what’s your role?

Raiman: Well, we all, fourteen or so of us, have to clean up all the files and move, get everything together, and move over very quickly to our office in the Old Executive Office Building. It was a very bizarre situation. It had never been done before, there was no transition, it was here you are. And Bob Hartmann was his chief of staff trying to set up this operation, and Bob, with his personality, didn’t want anybody in conflict with him. He wanted to assert that he was, indeed, the boss. I certainly saw examples of that when I was there, having people come in to talk about positions and he was not as warm and welcoming as he could have been or should have been. But his primary focus was the success of Gerald Ford.

Smith: We’ve been told that he, like everyone who has ever held the office, to varying degrees, didn’t really like the vice presidency a whole lot. When you think of his openness and his temperament, and then shoehorn that into this unique circumstance – you really couldn’t say what was on your mind.

Raiman: And he was in a particularly difficult position. Let’s be frank about it. The war in Vietnam continued and every day new, terrible information was
coming out about Nixon, learning that Nixon had lied about the tapes and lied about what he said. And Rosemary Woods – the missing excerpts. Every day it was a new revelation and the media were on a feeding frenzy. And it was every day. In our office where I was, there were sixteen telephone lines, and there were times when every single one of them would be ringing with reporters calling for this, that or the other thing.

Smith: It’s interesting, because one thing I associate with him is unflappability. I assume he maintained that, even under the pressure of that uniquely pressure-full time?

Raiman: Yes, he did. There were a couple of times, I’m sure, when he was frustrated - you could hear something coming from the office, and you’d kind of go whoa, because this was such a rare occurrence. I’m sure he was frustrated, and I’m sure because there were so many things going on with the Nixon people trying to keep him under control, or make him an apologist for Nixon, or say, “Hey, everything is just fine here.” If he remained in town, he would be forced more so to do that, and that’s why I mentioned getting him out of town was key to this. I’m sure he did not enjoy being away from his family, his wife and kids that much, but he was out there. And there were a couple of nice trips that combined some time away, which was good for him, as well. But it was such a difficult time, as you know. One of the most terrible times in this country’s history.

Smith: I only ever heard him speak disparagingly of two people. And the worst he could come up with was, “He’s a bad man.” And one of them was Gordon Liddy and the other was John Dean.

Raiman: I can understand that. I had a friend who worked for John Dean. And she tried her darnedest to not work for John Dean. According to her, he had her going to phone booths around town and being at certain phone booths at certain times, taking messages and bringing them back to the office.

Smith: Why?
Gail Raiman

May 6, 2011

Raiman: She didn’t know why. Once she was instructed to go to a movie theater and sit there for some message.

Smith: Really?

Raiman: Really, she could not deal with this. She worked in the Nixon White House. It just reinforced my feelings about that, I must tell you.

Smith: Was there a moment when it dawned on you that this was all going to end badly? That, in fact, the unthinkable is inevitable?

Raiman: With Nixon? To me it was not an “end badly.” I wasn’t sitting there cheering for Ford to be president of the United States, because I know he wasn’t interested in it. But my concern was that Nixon really did need to go, because I saw examples that increasingly showed that it was getting worse and worse. And he was getting worse and worse and more disjointed from what was actually going on. We were overwhelmed because of all the rumors. And I remember getting all kinds of calls about who was in Ford’s office - all of that kind of stuff, and what was going to happen.

I remember Ron Nessen, who was then with NBC news, was one of the calls I picked up. My feeling working with the news media was always been, I’m going to be a straight shooter. And I’m not going to say something that’s not true or lead them the wrong way. And I am pretty good at doing that, but I knew there were certain things that I could not say or was not going to say. And I remember Ron, with NBC News. I was sitting there, picking up call after call, and Ron – I cannot remember exactly what it was – but [he] really asked the question. And I was like, holy cow, now what am I going to do? And what I did was say - as I knew he’d been bicycling on the George Washington Parkway bike trail before, because we’d talked on trips. “Ron, have you done any bicycling on the George Washington Parkway bike trail lately?” Because, Richard, I thought, “What am I going to do?” And Ron goes, “Huh? What?” And he repeated it, and I think he understood that I
couldn’t go anywhere, but I wasn’t going to say anything. It was all happening, and then it just exploded.

Smith: Woodward and Bernstein famously portrayed Nixon in the final stages of his presidency as a man, shall we say, not all together in control. Was that portrait of the president something that people were aware of at the time? Was there a sense that this presidency was coming unglued?

Raiman: It’s a very difficult question to answer, Richard, because you had the media who was feeding that, because they wanted to destroy Nixon. And you had other people who were trying to support him, and he was making it very difficult to do that. And then the rest of us were kind of sitting in the middle going, “Holy cow.” And my sense - and I did not see it because I was not in the White House, I didn’t see Nixon - but certainly my sense internally was that he was not in as great a mental shape as he should be. That was my impression. That’s not a fact, and I didn’t have anybody tell me that.

Smith: Understood.

Raiman: I was not aware of the drinking issue at all, but it just seemed he was not all with it. It was coming apart.

Smith: I understand that within the vice presidential office people were beyond discreet – self-disciplined, buttoned-up. Did Hartmann, for example, remind everyone of the need to be careful in what was said? Or was there that awareness of the constant danger that you were all in, just in terms of the natural kind of gossip that most people would indulge in.

Raiman: We really didn’t. I remember being asked about this numerous times. I was very conscious, and certainly everybody I knew at work there was. We didn’t talk about what we did outside the office. Period. When I met people, I didn’t tell them where I worked.

Smith: Really?
Raiman: Really. I made up stuff because I wasn’t going to tell people where I worked and put myself in a difficult position. I had a situation when I was at the White House, I was called in. My friend, who was head of the FBI at the White House, and I had breakfast together and he was asking me all kinds of questions about had I seen anything or talked with anybody unusual. I’d basically been working on the State of the Union Address 24/7 for the past three weeks. And I’m saying, “No, I don’t know what you are talking about.” And he kept asking me these questions. Finally I said, “George, what?” And he says, “Well, I’ve gotten a call and I’ve been asked to bring you over to the Old Executive Office Building for a meeting.” I said, “With whom?” He said, “I don’t know.” He’s the head of the FBI at the White House – “I don’t know”? And I said, “What’s it about?” “I don’t know.” He was really upset and I was searching in my mind about what could this be – and scared – “Oh, my. Did they see my boyfriend’s car out in front of my apartment at one in the morning?” It was kind of silly. I was really nervous, particularly because he was so nervous. So he made this appointment – this is hilarious – it was George Sanders, who is head of the FBI at the White House. He said, “Gail, I’m going to be at your office, on the first floor of the West Wing, at X time. I’m going to take you over to this office and leave you there to be interviewed for this meeting. I was told I could not be there. I was told I could not even wait for you there. I’m going to be waiting around the hall up where they cannot see me. So when you come out, walk down that hall and I will be there and we will walk back together.” Well, how about that? I’m like – what is this?

So George takes me over to an empty office in the Old Executive Office Building. I walked in, there is a woman at the desk, the receptionist or whatever. And then I’m taken into an inner room, there’s a desk and there’s a guy sitting across with a light and he starts asking me all kinds of questions about what have I noticed unusual, have I talked with anybody unusual, have I…? And I’m answering honestly. No, and I don’t know what you are talking about, and no.
And finally – the guy was turning more and more red – just exploded and said, “Don’t you know what in hell is going on around you?” And I said, “I guess not.” Which made him angry, too. And he said, “There is a Russian spy who has been tapping your telephone.” Well, that was quite a surprise to me. He said, “I can’t believe you don’t know what’s going on right under your nose where you live. He moved in right below you a number of weeks ago and he’s been tapping your phone.”

This evidently happened over Christmas or right after Christmas. Well, for those first three weeks in January, all I did was work on the State of the Union Address. So I’d be going in at seven in the morning and going home at nine, ten or eleven every night. Well, I’m not seeing anything, okay? I’d try to get some sleep before I’d go in the next day. I explained that to him. That didn’t particularly give him any pause, but evidently this happened and he was all alarmed and upset about it. And obviously they found out because they were tapping his phone, and found out he was tapping my phone. I was not concerned because I didn’t say anything, so I felt okay about that. In some ways I was relieved. So I was at least able to tell my friend at the FBI what happened.

This was obviously the CIA, who was not telling the FBI what was going on. I thought that was interesting during this whole time where we were trying to broach the whole topic of détente, which we were so focused on with Mr. Kissinger at the White House.

You also asked a question before that I wanted to address a little bit about the different speechwriting operations in the White House. It is kind of interesting. I have a little different take on Hartmann and his team doing the speechwriting. As you know, because you’ve talked with a lot of people, the President liked to have different views. He liked people to come in and make the case for different sides of the issues so he could hear both sides of the issue and then get the best. A kind of competitive approach. And I don’t think, in some ways, it’s the greatest for team building because you end up having
people vying against each other. But with Hartmann and the team, I worked in that area like they did, I thought they were doing a very, very good job. But I think, in some cases, you have people who, politically wanted to take that over, or get their own view in. The State of the Union Addresses were bloodbaths. I’ve never seen anything like it. They were bloodbaths – just to get your sentence in, or this sentence out. So I look at it all somewhat in that way, in terms of having more of a competition. That’s perhaps a more friendly approach, but to be getting these drafts and different ideas so he would have the benefit of that.

Now how people operated in that system, I had problems with because I saw how up close and personal it was, which I did not like.

Smith: The President clearly was an Eagle Scout in every sense of the world, and chose to find the good in people. Which in some ways leaves you vulnerable.

Raiman: Yes it does.

Smith: And in some ways, Hartmann offset some of that, playing the role…

Raiman: Yes, he did. A very important role, because he really protected him in some ways, or brought him back, or prevented an opposing view very strongly to one that had perhaps more access to the President.

Smith: Which again, puts Hartmann’s role in a different perspective – a very useful perspective. It would also tell you something about Ford’s loyalty to Hartmann. I mean, recognizing the unique service that he provided. Were there people who tried to take advantage of that aspect of the President’s personality?

Raiman: I think so.

Smith: Yeah. It would be surprising if there weren’t.

Raiman: And it also frustrated Bob Hartmann. But you know, the White House is very, very political, and lots of times you’re not getting stabbed in the back,
you’re getting stabbed in the stomach. It’s an incredible place to work, and
you have to understand the level of stress and competition.

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

Raiman: It was right before. Because then I was involved immediately. It was before it
was public. It still hadn’t been announced, but it was right before because I
was helping putting together the list for the ceremony in the White House.

Smith: Okay. And were you at the Nixon farewell?

Raiman: No.

Smith: Because afterwards there was a reception, and you could see the Nixon people
staying away rather than going. Which again, you certainly can understand,
given the emotions of the time. But it gives rise to a larger question of how
much difficulty was there meshing the Nixon people. Rumsfeld was very
frank in saying he thought he should have cleared house across the board very
early on. They should have been more ruthless. Again, classic Gerald Ford, he
didn’t want to tar all the Nixon people with guilt – most of them were
innocent. Secondly, there were lots of very talented people. And third, he
needed some degree of continuity. He needed to keep a government running.
So all of those factors came into play, but it does raise a question: how much
friction was there between the Nixon people and the incoming Ford people?

Raiman: When I came into the White House, the Nixon people who remained there in
their offices – and it was interesting to me, Richard, in fact, I was frankly
really disappointed – shocked and disappointed – because of where my office
was I could see people going up and down and around the corner and talking.
And I would see Ford people coming in and moving in their offices and I
would see the Nixon people the Ford people to each other. That really angered
me.

Smith: Wow.
Raiman: And I thought, well, who in hell are you? And I’m all for working together, but what happened was, there really wasn’t a lot of working together. They weren’t interested. They felt they were superior, they should be there, a wrong had been done. They were interested, I’m sure, in preserving themselves. But that was one of the biggest mistakes, I believe - that they did not really clean house. Because my view is they worked against Ford internally.

Smith: And that’s where you get this notion there’s “the Grand Rapids crowd,” which was the euphemism for the people on the Hill, the people around Ford who were deemed to be not quite up to the job.

Raiman: Yes. I was part of that crowd, just because I was a member of his staff coming in. But I don’t think that would have had anything to do with it. On reflection, they were really under siege because look at what happened to their boss. But it was mean spirited for the people coming in. That’s what I saw. When we first came over I saw them not helping, not cooperating, but trying to find ways to undermine what Ford was trying to accomplish for the country.

Smith: And where were you physically when you first moved into the White House?

Raiman: I was in what is now the Vice President’s office, and that is on the first floor of the West Wing. At my desk I could look down the hall and see the President’s office, the Oval Office. I had Rumsfeld and then Cheney in the office on the right, and down the hall, Kissinger’s office on the left. So we were in prime real estate.

Smith: Phil Buchen was?

Raiman: Upstairs. And the people in the Domestic Counsel and Government Relations were upstairs as well. It really was Kissinger, Hartmann, Rumsfeld and Cheney and Jack Marsh. And the Oval Office. Those were the guys on the first floor of the West Wing, and then other folks were upstairs and then more over in the Old Executive Office Building.
Smith: Was it different under Rumsfeld and Cheney?

Raiman: Yes.

Smith: How so?

Raiman: I think it was more in terms of their personality and outlook on life. Rumsfeld was going to do what he thought he should do, no matter – he did not take advice or even think about anybody else. Frankly, he was going to do X, Y, or Z. And just do it. And not, perhaps, in the kindest way. Though there are some things, of course, you can’t be kind about. But it really set a tone, and a very adversarial one in the West Wing and other places. Very much so.

Smith: Unnecessarily.

Raiman: Unnecessarily. There are times for it, as I said, and certainly support that. But this was unnecessary - his decision about what should be done or shouldn’t be done - and had a lot of people up in arms. He was not somebody who would listen to anybody’s concerns or other ideas. And when he left and Dick Cheney came in - Dick was schooled by Don – but there was not as much “in your face” behavior.

Smith: Did the pardon take you by surprise?

Raiman: A little bit. Because I knew how people would feel about it, certainly where I was coming from. My feeling was that it was the right decision to make for a number of reasons. One, I personally thought that Nixon was really having psychological problems. In addition to that, we’d get the President’s schedule every day. And every day there were hours scheduled for meetings with Nixon’s attorneys. And how can you run the country when you are spending all of your time dealing with legal questions about the tapes and everything else. And he was spending – instead of running the country in this terrible situation we were in – the first time this had happened with a president and the war and everything else, he was spending hours every day meeting with
Nixon’s attorneys and other people affiliated with that. And that could not continue.

Smith: It’s interesting, because I’ve often wondered if the event that triggered this was his first press conference at the end of August, I think it was the 27th of August. Again, it’s that side of Ford – naïve is a pejorative – but he went into that press conference really believing that the press would want to talk about Cyprus and Greece, inflation, and all those things that he, as president, felt he should be dealing with. But the only thing they wanted to talk about was Nixon. And it didn’t go terribly well, and I think he left kind of angry – mostly at himself. And I’ve often wondered if that was, in some ways, the event. There was going to be a pardon at some point, but it dramatized to him the obsession that Washington had that was never going to go away until he pulled the plug. He was the one person who could make it go away.

Raiman: I don’t have personal knowledge of this, but as you know, Gerald Ford was not somebody polling the public to see what he should do, for God’s sake. His focus was what is the very best thing he could do for this country, and if they are going to toss him out because he’s doing something unpopular, so be it. “I’m going to do the best job I can”. So what I sensed was part of this, which you didn’t mention, was Nixon and where Nixon was in all of this – mentally, physically, and a recognition that – just get him out of there.

Smith: Do you know if Hartmann tried to talk him out of the pardon?

Raiman: No, I don’t know that. I wouldn’t think so.

Smith: What was it like once the news broke? It was a Sunday morning, early, and took the country by storm. I assume the phones were ringing off the hook. What was that like?

Raiman: Well, we were besieged, and there were a lot of angry people. Frankly, even angry reporters were coming at the story from a very skewed perspective. They were particularly interested in “How in hell can he do this?” and “The
country is outraged,” and all of that versus, “Oh what are the reasons behind this?” If I got that question, it was unusual.

Smith: Well, the wound was still raw.

Raiman: It was very raw. Nixon, as you know, hated the media, and it was mutual, it really was. And I’ll tell you, seeing Ford with the media again and again, and you know some of the folks I worked with at the White House, whether it was Tom DeFrank of *Newsweek*, Phil Jones of *CBS* and others – Ford was open. He was honest and he told it like it was. And they would ask him the most horrible questions time and again, and there were frankly times I was so surprised, the man just answered them and they were, too. But he was so open and they had such tremendous respect for him, I think that helped. But you had to get over that huge hump, so they got to know him better. They’d ask him – always – about the Nixon pardon, and it was not something he’d planned on talking about, but he would talk to them about it. Rather than these days, as you know, you find a way to deflect it and move on to your other topic. But he respected the questions on behalf of the country.

Smith: How long were you there?

Raiman: I was there until I was blacklisted by the Carter people, which is right up to the end.

Smith: Was the fall of Saigon the worst period?

Raiman: I think so. We had the *Mayaguez* incident when I was there, and that was certainly very, very difficult. I think I was probably there until three in the morning when this was all happening. We were trying to get more and more information. But I think the fall of Saigon was the worst. It really was just devastating and affected Ford deeply. All of us deeply. It was tough.

Smith: What was the best time?

Raiman: What was the best time?
Smith: The Bicentennial must have had all sorts of highlights.

Raiman: It was fun. During the Bicentennial I was so busy, I can tell you about all of the speeches. I was so exhausted from the Bicentennial that I didn’t even want to go to the events. I’m serious, because I’d been helping and working on the speeches so much that it was again, 24/7. But it was very exciting because it was the country’s bicentennial and there were wonderful celebrations. I think that was great. For me it was just those personal moments where you have a sense of how fortunate you are to be in service of the country with this great man. They were more personal moments, which I think we each had, versus one big event.

Smith: Were people slow to take the Reagan challenge seriously? That he would, in fact, run and that he would turn out to be as formidable an opponent?

Raiman: I don’t know.

Smith: And a variation of that, a question, purely and speculative: Did Reagan make Ford a better candidate? Which is not the same thing as whether he complicated his chances of winning. But did the competition that Reagan forced make Ford, for example, a better speaker, a better campaigner over the long haul?

Raiman: I think he probably did because he had that competitiveness. But I also think, and feel strongly, that – it was amazing to me – Ronald Reagan refused to do anything beforehand to help Ford.

Smith: That really was a problem.

Raiman: And I was very surprised and disappointed, thinking, what kind of man was this? He refused to even give one speech and that was such a disappointment. And he split the RNC in half. Then after everything was said and done with the election, I remember when Reagan was running, Ford was calling him up and saying, “Hey, what can I do to help you?” Which tells you a great deal about the individual. I don’t think I would have it in my gut to do that.
Smith: Were you at the convention?

Raiman: Yes, I was in ’76.

Smith: That was pretty bitter, wasn’t it?

Raiman: Yes, it was tough. It was really kind of scary in some ways, because he had such opposition, there was so much internal…it was tough. It was difficult. In fact, that was my first convention that I had been to, so this was all a new thing for me.

Smith: Did you go out there still uncertain as to the ultimate outcome?

Raiman: Well, I always felt that Ford was going to win. When I got there, seeing some of Reagan’s supporters and the vehemence and everything, was a little scary to me, to be honest with you. I was like, “Holy cow.” The rhetoric and the extremism.

Smith: Did you have any contact with Vice President Rockefeller?

Raiman: Well, just being in the complex. He and Bob Hartmann were good friends, so he would call up periodically. What cracked me up is that I would pick up the phone, and answering the phone, and he says, “Hi, oh Gail, hi! This is Nelson.” And it took me a while to figure out this was the vice president of the United States, and he’s placing his own phone calls and identifying himself as Nelson. So he was a great guy, a very warm individual. I really, really enjoyed working with him in general.

Smith: Mrs. Ford thought at the time it was a mistake to dump him from the ticket. Were there other people who felt that way?

Raiman: Yes. There were.

Smith: You can understand the case.

Raiman: Yes. Because he was so liberal, and they thought they had to have a more conservative individual running.
Smith: But it’s hard to see it actually bought you a lot of delegates. The irony is that Rockefeller, being a good soldier, turned over New York and Pennsylvania, to give you the margin of victory in the end. He didn’t get it from the South, although Mississippi did come through.

Raiman: Yes.

Smith: Did you think at the end of the campaign that you’d win? You’d clearly caught up.

Raiman: I did. I was on the last trip, the campaign trip, which was to Grand Rapids, as a matter of fact. I went to Grand Rapids, with the President.

Smith: It was very emotional.

Raiman: It was very emotional and, of course, we were all just dead tired.

Smith: Had he lost his voice by then?

Raiman: Yes, he had, toward the end. He was an incredible campaigner. I was on the other trips with him, and he could take catnaps for fifteen minutes and wake up totally refreshed. I can’t. Here I am in my twenties, and after these trips he’s running around talking to everybody and it’s incredible – I am walking into walls.

Smith: It’s interesting you say. By all accounts, he had extraordinary stamina.

Raiman: Yes he did. And he could do his catnaps and just wake up totally refreshed. I’m sure there were other people who could do the same thing, but me and a whole host of other people – I was so much younger than he – but I couldn’t sleep, and it’s very stressful, and you’re traveling and you know how that is. You are jumping around meeting people, and you can’t relax a moment at all. It’s dangerous. But was incredible. Grand Rapids was so moving and emotional. I remember I really thought we were going to win. It was very close and I was hopeful and praying. It was devastating. I was so sad and I was so hurt.
I remember going into work the next day and going into Bob Hartmann’s office, and – I probably was crying. And Bob sat at his desk, he smiled at me, and looked at me and he said, “You know, Gail, the sun is going to shine tomorrow.” And it helped. Hartmann really did have an understanding of what happens in politics. Of course, if you are at the White House you are invited to all these parties and everything – and some people didn’t realize that it was because of the position they are in. They think everyone thinks they are wonderful. And there were a couple of individuals on the White House staff who really were enjoying the parties and all these wonderful invitations, and they stopped like that. And they were devastated. Hartmann was like, “Well, yeah, that’s the game. I got it.”

Smith: We’ve talked to a lot of people who said it took the President a while to bounce back. Did you see that at all?

Raiman: About what?

Smith: That it took the President a while to bounce back.

Raiman: Yes. It was a tough time.

Smith: But in some ways it was almost easier for her.

Raiman: Oh, I think so.

Smith: Because she was looking forward to their post-politics life, anyway.

Raiman: Yes.

Smith: This had all been a detour, and they were going out to California and start a new life.

Raiman: But he had been in that role, so he was always traveling, he was always on, he was making decisions for the country, and then, can you imagine, one day you are doing it and then you are not. That’s pretty tough. I think he handled it very well. He ran because he felt it was very important for the country, for
him to be president and continue to bring the country back. So he was personally engaged in this.

Smith: Did you have any contact with the kids?

Raiman: I did when I was at the White House, periodically. With Liberty, the dog, kids would come through the White House. I didn’t do anything with them socially, but I knew them because they would be walking through. When I had Liberty in my office, I’d be talking to someone on the phone and I’d say, “Do you want to talk to Liberty?” They’d freak out. I’d have the dog snort in my phone. They loved it.

Smith: When Mrs. Ford did her famous 60 Minutes interview, the sense one has is that people always fight the last wars, and the immediate reaction was, “Oh my God, what has she done?” But fairly soon some counterintuitive polling data and other responses came in, that suggested, wait a second, maybe there is another side to this, and that she was actually an asset. First of all, for a presidency that defined itself by honesty, secondly, the culture was changing. It was waiting for someone like her.

Raiman: Well, believe me, she was on the cutting edge, out in front, as you know.

Smith: I’m sure it didn’t help you with the Reagan people, but they weren’t going to vote for Ford, anyway. She really sort of came into her own.

Raiman: Well, remember, she was supporting the Equal Rights Amendment, and so did he. That was so far out there, and it was so wonderful. Who was out there first? Well, they were. And what’s interesting to me in terms of that culture, because I’m their kids’ age and that whole generation, before the pill - “What would you do with Susan and birth control?” I’m going to remind you, even before that, they were interviewing her about the living arrangements in the White House and what they were going to do. And you know, the Nixons had separate bedrooms. I think they barely even talked to each other. And she says, “Well, Jerry and I, we’ll move our double bed in there,” and the country and media were aghast, and I didn’t understand – shouldn’t you be sleeping
together if you’re married? It was like a shock, which I found, frankly, weird and funny. I mean, I just didn’t understand that.

Smith: It wasn’t Ozzie and Harriet.

Raiman: And she was very honest and he respected that and honored it and loved her, and what a wonderful symbol.

Smith: Did you have any contact with him afterwards?

Raiman: Yes, I saw him a couple of times, it was funny – well, certainly we had our White House reunions every year, so I’d see him periodically then and have a chance to talk. I saw him afterwards – there was some event like Tip O’Neill’s fiftieth anniversary, and Bob and I saw him there. My husband and I met working on his confirmation hearings for the vice presidency, so we really were brought together by Gerald Ford. And we teased him about it. .. At first he was like, “Oh…” And I said, “No, no, it’s a good thing.” We saw him periodically, had a chance to talk, when we’d be out at different places. We were in Hawaii once and he was out there playing golf and we were at the same resort. So we had a chance to chat.

And there was another situation where he was speaking somewhere in Virginia, and I heard about it and I thought – there was a woman who worked with me who just really loved Gerald Ford and had bought his book. So I called up, I think it was Pat Ford, who was the advance person, and said, “Hey, just wanted to let you know I’m planning on being there. If there is any opportunity where I could say hi, I have a book I’d like the President to sign for one of my friends. I’m not trying to horn in, but if there is any kind of opportunity.” So what happened – it was very funny – we were at the event and we were in the audience. I was told that it would be after the event, if there was an opportunity, when they would come and get me. So I was at the event with this woman in this big auditorium on a college campus, and I was sitting there and he was speaking, and he was going through the audience and he sees me, and he smiles and notes I’m there. It was really kind of cute and
my friend says, “Well, he sees you, Gail.” And he kept looking at me and I’d smile at him. And so after it was over, we went in and had a chance to talk. He was surprised to see me there and it was really wonderful.

Smith: Were you surprised, when he died, at the amount of public response that there was? He’d been out of the public eye for a while, and yet it seemed to build as the week went by. I think it was a time when the country really needed to feel good about itself, for one thing. And I think there was a whole generation that was being introduced to him.

Raiman: Yes.

Smith: And they were contrasting what they saw with the ugliness of contemporary politics.

Raiman: I think you are exactly right, but also, a couple of huge points were him receiving the Kennedy Prize. That was so huge and so important to me, and it was a real validation that the people who had been slamming him and being critical - it was recognition of, yes, you were right, we just didn’t get it at the time. And Bob Woodward, I was at an event which was very interesting at the National Press Club. Bob Woodward was talking about his conversations with President Ford, and what an incredible person he was, and how he had apologized to Ford by telling him he was entirely wrong in what he wrote and thought and said. Now, that wasn’t covered by the press in attendance, but I heard it and I wish I’d had my tape recorder. But, again, people who were really caught up in the moment, you couldn’t help but be in this country, and making judgments that weren’t necessarily thoughtful. I think over time, Richard, with more and more information coming out, and as you said, something other to posit against, it really had a very positive snowball effect. I thought it was wonderful. And so many people feel that way, and I think he’s gotten the recognition he’s due. I’d love to see him get even more, but I think now there is a real understanding and appreciation that he really saved the country.
Smith: Last question: how do you think he should be remembered?

Raiman: As an individual of the highest character, tremendous personal integrity, wonderful sense of humor, just really enjoyed people and lived his life to find the best way he could serve the country. He was a good friend and a stellar human being.

Smith: That’s perfect. Thank you.
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