

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Hal Bruno
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: Do you remember when your path first crossed with Gerald Ford?

Bruno: I first encountered President Ford when he was a congressman from Michigan. He was rising in the ranks of the Republican Party and he was always accessible to everybody, but especially to reporters. It wasn't a vanity thing; he wasn't seeking them out; but if a reporter wanted to talk to him he sat down and he talked with them. He was always very open, and he was a defender of the Republican Party line at the time, whatever it might have been. But we were accustomed to dealing with people like that.

Smith: Did that degree of openness sort of set him aside? Was he unusually accessible?

Bruno: You got a sense that he actually enjoyed the press; that he enjoyed the back and forth that went on, and he understood exactly what we were supposed to do. I think a lot of that came from his friendship with Pete Lisagor. Pete Lisagor was a brilliant journalist for the *Chicago Daily News*, and he became very close to Ford. Ford later told me that he often listened to Lisagor for advice and so on. His favorite expression was - and he borrowed this from Pete, "The role of the media is to walk down the middle of the street and break windows on both sides." There were many times I heard Jerry Ford say that to an audience. He just didn't fight with us.

Smith: It's interesting, when we were planning the funeral, he insisted on having a journalist as a eulogist. Originally it was going to be Huge Sidey, and then he passed away so Tom Brokaw performed that function. But it was clearly to send a message.

Bruno: That was very important, yeah. When he became president he still had that same attitude toward the media. One of my favorite stories and experiences was I was with *Newsweek* and we were trying to get a one on one interview

with President Ford. It came through that we could have it, but we would have make it a three on one, there was Tommy DeFrank, who was covering the White House, and Pete Goldman who was writing it, and me, as the chief political correspondent. So we went to the White House on our appointed day and we were ushered into the Oval Office, not to some outside place, and there was a round table there in front. We all sat down with the President and the President pulled out his pipe, and his tobacco pouch and loaded up. I was a pipe smoker then and he asked me would I like some? I said, "Yes, I would. Thank you." And I took his tobacco and we lit up and – I mean, he was the last president you could do that with. But he was perfectly at ease.

Smith: He seemed comfortable in the surroundings?

Bruno: Yeah, he was very comfortable with us. Then we got toward the end and I asked the real nasty questions and he kind of winced, and he said, "I knew you were going to ask that."

Smith: Do you remember what they might have been about?

Bruno: I forget now. But he expected it and he understood completely.

Smith: Clearly that attitude differed from his predecessor.

Bruno: Yeah, absolutely. The worst thing that could happen to a journalist back then was to be on Richard Nixon's good list; and guys were fighting to get onto the bad list.

Smith: Do you have a theory to explain Richard Nixon?

Bruno: Yes, [but] I don't know if it explains. I got somewhat close to him in the '60s because I was covering his comeback. There weren't very many of us covering it. Many times it was just Mr. Nixon, myself and Pat Buchanan as his aide in traveling around the country – long trips. I would sit with him on the plane and the only ground rules were, when we talked about other Republicans, he could not be quoted.

He had an amazing knowledge of politics in every region in the country. He was landing one time in Minot, North Dakota. Nixon had been given a card

by Rosemary, his secretary, as to who was going to be there greeting him at the airport. And as he went down he was ticking off what each one's interest was that he knew, and he knew all the power plays that were going on in that state. He just had a terrific sense of it.

Now, he misjudged the media. He had no understanding, really. It was appalling to see how little he and the people around him understood about the way things worked. The only one who understood was Herb Klein. For the most part they didn't, and Nixon said to me one time - I was going to leave him because my job then was going to be news editor and somebody else was coming on to cover him, several were coming on. And I told him the same ground rules and we'll always come to you with a story that we're going run if it's negative and give you a chance to respond. And he said, "Don't reporters write what their editors tell them to write?" And I said, "Not at a certain level, Mr. Nixon." And I explained to him that if the editors tried to tell us what he had to write, the guys would quit, and had quit when somebody tried that. He couldn't accept that because he thought that it was all done the way some of his friends did it in California, in San Diego.

Smith: The old *LA Times*?

Bruno: Yeah, the old *LA Times*, that they dictated what a reporter was going to report. But he had no grasp of that. He never was truly at ease with the media.

Smith: But was he at ease with people, generally?

Bruno: I was just going to say that he wasn't at ease very much with anyone. He always felt there was a plot around him. And sometimes he was right.

Smith: Did you see the obsession with the Kennedys?

Bruno: Yes, very much so, and with Lyndon Johnson, too.

Smith: Really? How so?

Bruno: I think he was scared of Lyndon Johnson, as many people were. And I think he felt that Lyndon Johnson was unpredictable. Whereas, Kennedy was pretty predictable.

Smith: The Nixon people believed that their campaign plane in '68 was bugged by the Johnson White House.

Bruno: I don't know that – I hadn't heard that.

Smith: To go back, you talked about Ford when he was rising in the House. We've all heard the Johnson jokes and the slurs on his intelligence and all of that – what were the qualities that allowed Ford to rise in the House?

Bruno: Ford, from the beginning, became a man of the House. He was proud to be there and his ambitions ended there. Here was a guy who had gone through the University of Michigan and Yale Law School, I mean, great institutions, great education, and he was very smart. We can talk about that later, but there was a great disservice done to him by his own staff, at any rate. And he was a good guy; he just was a nice guy and he made friends. He understood what other members had at stake. They would come to him with things as he rose step by step, and was sympathetic to what they faced because he, as a congressman, faced the same things, the same type of things. The people who get you elected expect to have access and things like that. It's not a sin, there's nothing wrong with it as long as it's open. And the other thing with Jerry Ford, he was a very open person, and he was comfortable about himself. I've heard that said many times, and I think it's true. He was.

Smith: In a way, by contrast, you wouldn't say that of Richard Nixon?

Bruno: No. I wouldn't say it about many people who would posture. But Jerry Ford never did any posturing. You asked a question, he gave the answer as best he could, and many times it was party line, but that's what you expected anyhow. He was not a rebel.

Smith: And yet, it's interesting because he went into politics as an insurgent, in effect, taking on this moss-backed isolationist. And then he was persuaded, at least to be rebel enough to take on Charlie Halleck.

Bruno: Yes.

Smith: Did you know Halleck?

Bruno: Yes, but not well.

Smith: Was that a generational thing more than anything else? Because post-Goldwater, clearly, there was a sense that we've got to do something. But races like that, what are they hinging on?

Bruno: The post-Goldwater era, that was really an upheaval in the Republican Party and the state chairs played a vital role in that. When their support dissolved with Nixon early into Watergate, and by the time it got to impeachment, you couldn't find a state chairman anywhere, hardly whose...

Smith: That's interesting because I don't think I've ever heard the role of the party organization in the field referred to as a factor in Nixon's survival.

Bruno: Yeah, there was a meeting – one day we discovered that all of the state chairmen from the Midwest were nowhere to be found. We found them at the O'Hare Inn, in Chicago. They had a room that they had rented for a secret meeting. This is where they decided that Ray Bliss was going to be the head of the state chairs now. Ray Bliss was heartbroken over what had happened and what Nixon had done because he had been a loyalist. But now he was going to do what was best for the party, and that's exactly what they did. And what was – Dean Birch was out...

Smith: That's right.

Bruno: And Ray Bliss was right in without any movement; once around the table. And it was all the Midwestern state chairs. Well, that was the heart and soul of the Republican Party at that time.

Smith: You've just put your finger on something. People talk about how different Congress is forty years later; think how different the Republican Party is forty years later. I mean, Gerald Ford was at the epicenter of the Republican Party in the mid 1960s – it really was a Midwestern party.

Bruno: And Jerry Ford was very much a Midwesterner. We don't have a distinctive accent like Southerners do, or even a culture that way. Yet the Midwest has a character of its own and it's to work hard, keep quiet...

Smith: He used to say, growing up, his parents, there were three rules: work hard, tell the truth, and come to dinner on time. Not a sophisticated philosophy, but it got him through life. I also wonder though, if then at least, Midwesterners didn't take a little bit of a hit. I've often thought that as someone who came from the Northeast, but who spent a lot of time in the Midwest, that there's a kind of cultural bias, almost a snobbery; a notion that because Midwesterners talk slow, they think slow. I wonder whether some of those quips about his intelligence were grounded in that style, that kind of stolid speaking style.

Bruno: Well, that whole thing – we can talk about that. First of all, Jerry Ford was probably the most graceful athlete who ever occupied the Oval Office. I mean, here's a guy who was a varsity football player for the University of Michigan and a skier and an athletic man. The myth began that he was a clumsy ox, and it was done as a gag, on *Saturday Night Live* and Chevy Chase – and instead of ignoring it, which they should have, the White House people, some of them, had fun with it.

Smith: Ron Nessen went on the show.

Bruno: Ron Nessen went on the show and that was a bad thing. That never should have happened. President Ford tripped coming down a ramp from a plane, and so what? Lots of people trip coming down a ramp, it's understandable. But it's the President of United States, so it has to be reported. But then they go on and on with it. And then there was the golf ball. What was it? It hit Spiro Agnew or something like that? I don't know.

Smith: It's the follow up that's so revealing, because, of course, the people around him, they all sort of got upset and targeted the photographers. And Ford's response was, "Of course, they took the picture. They would have lost their job if they didn't." - which gets back to your earlier point about him understanding the job of the press.

Bruno: Yeah, he really did. And then after he was president, we started skiing together out at Vail and Beaver Creek. They had these races, the Ford Cup, and each team was made up of a newsperson or some celebrity, and then an Olympic skier for the coach and a former great of skiing. The first year my

team won the championship, but I had to race President Ford in the very first heat of the very first race. We each had a handicap, but his was higher than mine so he got out of the gate two seconds ahead of me. I was ready to go and two seconds went by and my gate didn't open. So it was a few more seconds and finally my gate opened and Ford was way down the course and he beat me in that heat, and I was furious. Because everybody was kind of pretending to be laid back, that this isn't all that important, it's just good fun. But once he got into there, into the gates, everybody's juices started flowing, including the Olympic skiers.

And there were cameras, TV is covering it, printed press is covering, everybody is there, and I have to race against the President. So, somebody comes up and shoves a mic in my face and says, "Well, did you let him win in order to get an interview?" I said, "What? Are you crazy?" I said, "I didn't want to get beat." Everybody is laughing. So we won the championship and at the dinner someone got up and said, "I noticed one thing. People with foreign accents ski faster." Then he said, "And when you race the President of the United States, the President always wins." But he had great fun with that.

Smith: He was good company?

Bruno: Oh, yeah, and he was a pretty good skier, but he had gotten older and his knees were troubling him. But he was a respectable skier and graceful. So I felt they did a great disservice because the perception set in all around the country that Jerry Ford was a clumsy oaf. And it wasn't true and I think that cost him something.

Smith: Let me go back. Do you remember where you were when you first heard about "Watergate?"

Bruno: Yeah. It was during the primaries and I was in California covering McGovern. McGovern was making a huge sweep up and down California. It's in Los Angeles, they had stopped there overnight and I was filing a story. That was when I first heard about a break in at the Watergate Hotel; and I paid absolutely no attention to it.

Smith: One of the people we talked to was Jerry Jones, who at that point was reorganizing the personnel office for Haldeman. And, among other things, he told us that early in '73, this is well before the *Wall Street Journal* story broke about Agnew; several months – Haldeman was still there. He got a call one day from Haldeman who wanted to know how many jobs reported directly to the Vice President. He [Jones] figured about fifty. He [Haldeman] said, “Fine. I want undated letters of resignation from everyone.” Which raises two possibilities: one, that they had some inkling from sources in Maryland that there was an investigation underway; or two, that Agnew had done something and Nixon blew off the handle and said...Is either one possible or plausible?

Bruno: Agnew first surfaced before the first term nomination.

Smith: He'd been a Rockefeller supporter.

Bruno: Yes, and he was on his way to meet Rockefeller in New York, and Rockefeller had brushed him off or something.

Smith: Well, remember – Rockefeller was going to announce – it was the end of March – and he didn't tell Agnew that day he was not running.

Bruno: That's it – yeah.

Smith: And Agnew, who had invited the local press corps in, was humiliated because his friend and candidate hadn't bothered to tell him.

Bruno: That's right, that's what happened. And then he was coming up to New York and he called John Mitchell and told John Mitchell he was ready to endorse Nixon. At that time Agnew was held out as sort of the great White Hope because he had handled rioting in a reserved and sensible way. He had become kind of a darling of the Nixon campaign. I was meeting Mitchell for lunch and he was late for lunch, and he said, “Well, you won't guess who called me.” I said, “Who?” and he said, “Spiro Agnew, he wants to announce for Nixon.” Because he was so aggravated with Nelson Rockefeller leaving him holding the bag, which was not unusual.

Smith: Really?

- Bruno: Yeah, he had done things like that with several people around the country. Anyhow, that's how that came about.
- Smith: By the way, at that point where they – people forget they only won that nomination by twenty-five votes on the first ballot .
- Bruno: But they had it wired.
- Smith: My question is: if Reagan – because I was fourteen years old, I was on the floor of that convention during the Rockefeller demonstration – and I remember being pissed because Reagan wasn't holding his end of the bargain up. Now – people have said Strom Thurman saved their bacon in the South, New Jersey, critically, they broke open and got a significant number of votes, did that twenty-five vote margin understate their strength?
- Bruno: Yes, because they had more votes than that, and when they knew they had the magic number plus, they let others go to do what they had to do. They understood that some had local considerations and so on. I think one of the examples was Mississippi, where
- Smith: Clarke Reed.
- Bruno: Yes, I remember it very well.
- Smith: Clarke Reed is a legendary figure.
- Bruno: Clarke Reed disappeared from sight when all hell was breaking loose. And somebody at *Newsweek* was climbing up my back that, "We've got to find him. We've got to find him." And other people from the Mississippi delegation were missing, Pickering and Haley Barber, who I spoke with several times a day.
- Smith: Really?
- Bruno: And the *Newsweek* delegate count, which I was running, was the only one that showed that Reagan was beat. That he couldn't get the delegates.
- Smith: This was '76?
- Bruno: Yeah.

Smith: Because the story that we've been told is that Reed, who is a kind of slippery character to begin with, used – that may be a pejorative – but when Reagan announced Schweiker as his vice presidential choice, Reed was off the reservation.

Bruno: He didn't like that. But Reed was off because he felt that Reagan would be a loser. I think that was the most driving thing with Clarke. And Clarke was a guy who was always trying to bring the factions together in Mississippi, which wasn't easy. Clarke was a good guy; I liked him very much. He didn't tell me everything, but he never told me a lie. Clarke was concerned that the way the roll call would go, that Mississippi would be the state that would bring Reagan down, and that Mississippi would break unit rule. They had had unit rule. Thirty delegates and whoever had the most got all of them. Well, they were going to break it down so that each delegate was only half a vote so they could bring in more people for the reserves. And that the delegation would split and Reagan would get something, but not enough. His big question was what did our delegate count show? And in that thing, you were picking off delegates one at a time, that's how minute it got. There was a guy in South Carolina in the real estate business that had never been treated like that in his life. He gets a call, "Come up to the White House and see President Ford." And they bring him up and he goes in and has a Coke with President Ford.

Smith: We've been told, for example, the dinner for Queen Elizabeth was stuffed full of uncommitted Republican delegates and their families.

Bruno: Probably was.

Smith: That they used the Bicentennial events.

Bruno: It probably was; I didn't know that. Anyhow, he knew what Mississippi was going to do. Then just before the convention, Clarke disappeared because he didn't want to have to answer questions. He was at a motel outside of Jackson, I think, somewhere down in Mississippi. And then they came to Kansas City and there was one morning everybody was going berserk trying

to find the leaders of the Mississippi delegation, Clarke Reed, Billy Pickering, and so on. They were in my room.

Smith: Were you hiding them, sheltering them?

Bruno: Yes, and how I was. I told _____, and I had a little junior suite with a bar and everything. "Pour yourself and just stay here and work. Use the phone, do anything you want." There was a colleague at *Newsweek* who hated me and was trying to say that we were being scooped and so on, and I had filed the story on what Mississippi was going to do, what they were going to try to do. And he said, "Nobody else has anything like that." And I said, "Well, that's the way it is, you know."

When we got to the roll call, our delegate count was off maybe by one or two when we got to Texas. And I came up and Kay Graham was sitting in the box with the *Newsweek* brass and she and I had promised we were going to have a shoving story when we got to Kansas City in which we would stick it up the ass of everybody else. And she thought that was great, because they were very worried – the *Washington Post* delegate count was different from ours.

Smith: Really?

Bruno: Yeah. We were the only one that showed the weakness. And that's because we knew these people. They talked to us.

Smith: And they were leveling with you.

Bruno: Oh yeah.

Smith: Let me ask you, Stu Spencer said something very interesting. He thought Sears made a huge strategic blunder when they decided to put all their chips on that procedural issue regarding forcing Ford to name his vice president, as opposed to an emotional issue like foreign policy. And so then of course, the debate took place within the Ford camp: do we let, in effect, the Reagan, too, have the platform, or do we fight it? Tom Korologos is the original source for this, but other people have confirmed it. Kissinger was going to resign; he was going make it a personal test and so forth and so on. And Tom said, "Well, Henry, if you're going to do it, do it now because we need the votes." And the

decision was made - I think Spencer was part of this - let them have the plank and the platform, because what you don't want to do at this point you don't want to introduce the uncertainty of this highly emotional debate over détente, etc., etc. And that Sears had, in effect, shot his wad with the procedural vote the night before. Does that make sense to you?

Bruno: Yeah, John, who I knew well, was a good guy...

Smith: Is he still around, by the way?

Bruno: I don't know. I'm not still around.

Smith: Because he has been quoted in recent years as saying, and you can tell me much better than whether this is bull, that his candidate, rather than Schweiker, he would have gotten Nelson Rockefeller. That's what he says.

Bruno: No he wouldn't. No, I don't think that would have happened. The Reagan people couldn't stomach that. But John really spoofed me one day. We had this _____ breakfast in the morning, eight o'clock in the morning, which is barbaric. At any rate, it went on through the day and everybody is chasing delegates and I get home late and pour myself a couple of scotches and sit out in back, trying to simmer down, and I get a phone call from John saying that we've been friends a long time and he'd hate to see *Newsweek* go off the deep end with our delegate count because he had all these hidden delegates that nobody knew about. And I had just enough scotch to take him seriously and I did. I said, "Well, John, I appreciate the call. Let me think this thing through." I went out there and I walked around the garden and shook my head and all of a sudden I realized that he didn't have anything, he was spoofing me. And I later found out the next day that he had called a number of guys and told them the same story. And so that's when I knew that we were onto the right thing, that our delegate count was going in the right direction. They didn't have the strength.

Smith: Was the Ford White House too slow to awake, first of all, to the likelihood of a Reagan challenge, and secondly, to the strength that Reagan would bring to that?

Bruno: They vastly underrated Reagan and what he could do and what his appeal was. And they had him down. He was beaten until North Carolina, until the North Carolina primary when he came back, and they allowed that to happen because they should have won it and they didn't. Or they should have made a stronger showing; I forget now exactly what it was. But that was where Reagan was down and he got up.

Smith: It was the Panama Canal.

Bruno: He was down for the count going into North Carolina and they let him get up and that was the biggest mistake they made.

Smith: There is an argument; I guess you can go both ways, that the Reagan challenge paradoxically, made Ford a better candidate.

Bruno: I don't know about that. I asked him one time - when we were skiing, we never would talk about politics because it would be like taking advantage of a friendship - but occasionally it crept up. And he said to me one time that if he hadn't had to fight Reagan in the primaries all the way to the convention, he could have had a stronger campaign. He felt that that whole primary fight weakened his campaign. Did it make him a better campaigner? I'm not sure about that, I don't know. But he believed that his campaign was weakened because he had to fight Reagan all the way.

Smith: Do you think he held a grudge?

Bruno: Jerry Ford wasn't the kind of person that held a grudge in politics, but I think, yes, I think there was some bitterness there. And Reagan didn't do all he could have done or should have done in the general election campaign. And I think that President Ford, his attitude, I think, was well that's not the way I play the game.

Smith: Let me go back. Were you surprised by Ford's selection to be vice president?

Bruno: Yeah, I was, because he was such a middle of the road guy. And maybe that's the reason why it was a good selection because he was that. I remember when Nixon first got elected for the first term and they were hanging out at their headquarters with a hotel in New York.

Smith: The Pierre.

Bruno: Yeah, and I went over there to see John Mitchell and Mitchell said a curious thing to me, he said, “Well, when we get to Washington, there’s a lot of people who are going to have to learn what it means to have a Republican president in the White House.” And I said, “Who do you mean?” He said, “Jerry Ford, Everett Dirksen.” In other words, the leaders of the Republican Party. I thought, “Holy Mackerel.”

Smith: That’s fascinating because that raises a whole – Ford was very loathe to criticizing other people, but you could tell that his feelings, particularly towards Haldeman and Erlichman, were less than warm.

Bruno: Yeah, I never heard him criticize anyone, but I know that that was true.

Smith: And apparently, the irony is the one time apparently Erlichman deigned to go up to Capitol Hill he actually fell asleep in the meeting, which is eloquent in its own way. There was a story, and I think it’s true, that shortly after Ford was confirmed as vice president, Nixon had Rockefeller in the Oval Office and he said something to the effect of, “Can you imagine Jerry Ford sitting in that chair?” Now, he might have been flattering Nelson, he might have been who knows what else. But that suggests a personal attitude toward his vice president. Did you ever sense that? That the Nixon people regarded Ford...

Bruno: That is true, that some of the Nixon people that I encountered underestimated Jerry Ford, and they underestimated some of the people around Jerry Ford, too.

Smith: He was put in an almost impossible position as vice president, and to maintain his own integrity he got out of town.

Bruno: I was going to say, yeah, that one of the tip offs that the end was coming – up until that point, it was a month or so – Jerry Ford was a supporter of Nixon and would not say or do anything that in any way would hurt the President. Then he realized that Watergate was true, and that Nixon had played a lead role in the cover up. And he knew then what was going to happen and that’s

when he got out of town. He didn't want to be around when the shots were fired, which was smart.

Smith: Did he, if not then, then later, talk with you about his....

Bruno: No, we never talked about it.

Smith: Did he ever talk about his relationship with Nixon?

Bruno: No.

Smith: Can you remember a time – it had to have been unthinkable, at some point, that a President of the United States would be driven from office?

Bruno: It was. It was one of those stories that come along every so often in which you are working on and you say, "Am I really covering this? Is this really happening?" When Kennedy was assassinated you had that feeling, "Has this really happened?" And the same thing was true with Nixon facing impeachment. Is this really true? Is the President of the United States going to be forced out of office? And you had to cross a certain threshold in order to believe it.

You asked me when I first heard of Watergate, and [I said] it didn't mean anything to me; but then we went through the election and after the election I was asked to form, join a task force to work on Watergate. So I had to get filled in pretty fast on what it was. I asked the reporters who had been covering it and who were going to continue covering it, "Tell me about this. What's here?" They would tell me things and I would said, "Oh, no, they can't be that dumb. They couldn't have done things like that" - the Nixon people. They said, "No, that's what we've got."

Then one day, with the story breaking, I phoned around the country to various Republican leaders, and to even some at the White House. Then I talked to somebody at the White House who was in a real power position, and their interpretation of what had happened was pure fantasy. I realized for the first time that they didn't understand what was happening and that they were going to go down the drain because of it. And once you cross that threshold, where you could believe what you were hearing, you knew that he was finished.

Smith: Do you think John Mitchell took secrets with him to the grave?

Bruno: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

Smith: Do you have a theory about what Mitchell's role in all of this was?

Bruno: Well, he became the fall guy, and talked to me all the time because he was afraid that Haldeman and Erlichman were setting him up to be the bad guy. He didn't like the idea of going to prison and he didn't trust what he called "those characters in the Casablanca." When Mitchell referred to somebody as a character, that meant that they were really a bad person.

Smith: Was that in reference to Haldeman and Erlichman?

Bruno: Yes - the characters in the Casablanca. We would talk several times a week and he was pretty forthright with me, and he was trying to protect himself.

Smith: Was his relationship with the President deteriorating?

Bruno: I don't think so. I think even when he was out, he and the President and Bebe were a trio, and that there was a lot of money involved. We never could prove this, but they had bank accounts, where was it - in Aruba? I'm trying to remember - in Tricia Nixon's name.

Smith: Really?

Bruno: Yeah. But we never could do anything with it. We tiptoed around the edge of it, but we never had enough to really go solid. But I think there was a lot of money involved with those three. Haldeman and Erlichman were almost peasants compared to them. Yeah, I think Mitchell kept - and Mitchell was pretty forthright with me about a lot of things, but the one thing that he kept insisting on was that Nixon was not part of the cover up. And, of course, that was a lie. And he knew it.

Smith: The break in itself - do you have a theory as to who ordered the break in?

Bruno: Yeah. I think it was Colson and Liddy.

Smith: But now, whose permission would they have had to get?

Bruno: Colson didn't get anybody's permission for anything.

Smith: Was he a rogue?

Bruno: He was a loose cannon and unwise in the ways of Washington. He knew full speed ahead.

Smith: Well there is this school of thought that one of Haldeman's most important functions was to take the President's more off-the-wall pronouncements and let them simmer, that hopefully they go away or whatever. And that Colson or Liddy or someone, someday heard one of these and saluted and went off and did it. Do you think Nixon had any knowledge of the break in?

Bruno: Yes, I do. I think so.

Smith: And was it because of the Democratic National Committee chairman...anyway, but the Democratic National Committee chairman, was he the target of the break in?

Bruno: I think he was *a* target, but they had a kick going like military intelligence. They just wanted to know everything that was going on with anybody who was an opponent to them, or that they perceived as an opponent. And they would just gather information as much as they could and kept a nice little file on everybody. They had a Cold War mentality - let's put it that way - that they applied to politics.

Smith: Well put. Did you and Mitchell ever discuss that? Did you ever discuss with Mitchell who was responsible for the break in?

Bruno: I tried to, but he always slipped away from me and kept talking about those characters, and I think he meant Colson.

Smith: Okay.

Bruno: But at the point that he came to me, there was no love lost between him and Haldeman and Erlichman.

Smith: Watergate is so slippery. Just sitting here listening to you talk about it, it seems even larger and more sinister in retrospect than it did at the time.

Bruno: Yes, it was. John Mitchell was one tough guy; he didn't have an ounce of back-away in him. He tried to protect himself, of course, but then when he realized he had to go, he was going to go his way with some sense of dignity. And where he was going to go to prison; he had nothing but contempt for people who were crying about it.

Smith: People like Magruder?

Bruno: Yeah.

Smith: The only two people I ever heard Gerald Ford disparage – and the worst he could say was, “He’s a *bad* man,” – one was Gordon Liddy and the other was John Dean.

Bruno: That would be right because John Dean did something that to Jerry Ford was unacceptable, which was to betray your boss. That would be my guess.

Smith: To save his own skin?

Bruno: Yeah, betraying somebody else. That’s something that I would guess that Ford could not tolerate.

Smith: For people who weren't around then, what was the mood like in those last days? You had the smoking gun tape...

Bruno: It was like the fall of the Alamo, I guess.

Smith: By the way, Jerry Jones told us when the Supreme Court ruled that Nixon had to turn over the tapes - you may very know this - the initial response from San Clemente was, can we defy the court? Ron Zeigler was the President's messenger and that was the initial question back to Washington. And I assume Haig, among others, made it clear that that was not an option. But that's really the beginning of the end, isn't it - the unanimous Court decision?

Bruno: Oh, yes, sure it is. And also I would say the Saturday Night Massacre because of the impact it had on public opinion. That's where Nixon began to lose his core. Shortly after that I was in California giving a speech for *Newsweek* to airline and oil executives. These were really the business people who had always been staunch Nixon supporters. But I had to give a speech that was

telling them things I presume they did not want to hear. And I did. Then we got to the question period, and we went around the room. All of these presidents and CEOs were all standing up to denounce Nixon and I think to myself, “Holy Mackerel, the big business community in California is running away now.”

So as soon as the meeting was over, I ran into the men’s room, pulled out my notebook and started to write down everything I had heard. And then I called New York and got hold of the business editor, Clem _____, and I said, “Clem, there’s a story out here about business deserting Nixon and let’s get on to it.” And so we did, and the next week we wrote the story and it was right on the money and it was happening everywhere in the country; the business support was falling away. That was a pretty crucial thing.

Smith: That last week, can you describe what that was like? I assume it was unlike anything you’d ever experienced.

Bruno: Again, we resorted to the delegate count mode and we started counting Congress – how they would vote. Mitchell had told me that the White House had done the same thing. This was probably three weeks before. He said, “Those characters have finally learned how to count. All they’ve got to do is iron out the Jerry Ford deal and Nixon will resign.”

Smith: Really?

Bruno: And reported this with not saying who was telling me this, but I’ve never revealed that I was talking to Mitchell. That was one of the ground rules. And nobody wanted to believe me. But I said, “This is the end, he’s going to be out.”

Smith: Of course that opens the whole door to the controversy over the pardon, and I’ve often wondered whether we’ve not made a mistake all these years, understandably, in trying to track down who said what to whom at what time. And that the real story of the pardon is in what was *not* said. In the way that people communicate without communicating.

Bruno: I know exactly what you mean.

Smith: That Haig, from his perspective, could very well have reached the reluctant conclusion that in the interests of the country, Nixon had to go. And that his job was to make it happen with as much dignity as possible, and everything flows out of that. People don't have to have sinister motives or – I don't know – what's your take? But the fact that Mitchell would say to you at that point, "The Jerry Ford deal," that can only mean that someone, at least... who would Mitchell be talking to?

Bruno: Nixon. Yeah, Jim Cannon wrote about this in his book, I presume you interviewed Jim.

Smith: Yeah.

Bruno: I had forgotten the story. He looked at my files, my Watergate files, and sure enough, there was the thing I had filed, the story I had sent on Mitchell's view on what was going to happen next. I guess this was about three weeks before Nixon resigned and Ford was off somewhere hiding out, which was a smart thing to do. I couldn't convince – no, I'll put it this way – from about February onward of that year, it was like seeing a play or a movie which you had read the book on what was happening and everything was falling into place and that's when I began to realize that Nixon really was through – that he could not come back from this. And that everything was turning against him. It was hard to think that way because this hadn't happened in our lifetimes.

Smith: Plus, it's an eventful period in the country's history, quite apart from the scandal.

Bruno: Oh sure. With everything that's going internationally and again, you had to cross certain thresholds in order to cope with Watergate - the first one being that they could be as dumb as they were. And that's when I remembered the words of Menken, who was a brilliant writer; a terrible human being, but he wrote once, "Never underestimate the stupidity of men in high public office."

Smith: It's interesting, we talked to Haig, and the same weekend we talked to Mel Laird, and it is interesting how many roads led back to Fred Buzhardt. Fred Buzhardt had been Laird's counsel at the Pentagon. A month after Laird came

back to the Nixon White House to try to salvage things, he got a call from Buzhardt who basically warned him, because he, Buzhardt, had been listening to the tapes. And in effect, signaled to Laird to be careful what you say because Nixon is into it up to his neck. Haig told us, to my surprise – I always assumed that Haig had listened to the smoking gun tape – he claimed he never did. He said, “Fred Buzhardt gave me some very good advice, which was ‘Don’t ever be alone in a room with a tape,’” which presumably is a reference back to the eighteen and a half minutes. Do you have a theory about the eighteen and a half minutes?

Bruno: Yeah. When we learned about the tapes, I came home late one night and one of my sons was up studying – he’d had a tough football practice. Anyhow, I told him, “You won’t believe what’s going on here,” and I started to tell him. And he just said, ‘Well, they’ll burn the tapes.’” I thought to myself, “You know, he’s probably right,” they will destroy the tapes. No matter how incriminating that act may be, they could not allow anybody to hear what was on it, and I didn’t know what was on the tapes. But whatever it was, they couldn’t allow it to become public. And they did exactly that. I said, “They deliberately destroyed the part that was the most incriminating.”

Smith: They, being Rosemary Woods, the President?

Bruno: Rosemary Woods would do anything that the President told her to do. And I’m sure that somebody around him at the top level told her what to do. She never took orders from anybody else. Rosemary was a power in her own right and she was close to Pat Nixon. She had Pat Nixon’s support in everything. Pat Nixon was a truly remarkable woman, and a very fine person.

Smith: Tell us about that because I’ve always thought she’s never gotten her due.

Bruno: That’s right.

Smith: That she was very private and the whole notion of ‘Plastic Pat’ is so far from the reality.

Bruno: She was badly hurt going back to the Eisenhower years when she felt that Nixon was not appreciated and was treated badly, and she with him. She

wasn't much of a social climber or anything like that. She just wanted to do what was right. She learned what was right and she did things that were correct, and she was very considerate of other people. We were flying to some little town – Iron Mountain, or something like that. Anyhow, the photographer took a lot of pictures and sent them to me. I sent them to her and the next thing I get is a copy of a note she wrote to the photographer thanking him for sending the pictures. She was that kind of a person.

And then on Christmas time, Meg and I were invited to Nixon's New York apartment and we were the only outsiders, the rest were all relatives and campaign people. It was my first meeting with Haldeman. I could see him looking, "What's this person doing here, this insect?" And I could actually sense hatred on his part toward me – and I didn't even know him. But he knew I was the *Newsweek* political person. When we left and Mrs. Nixon was so gracious, as always, and when we left I said to Meg, "Well, how'd you feel?" And she said, "Out of place." That was true.

The next day Mitchell asked me would I be interested in being Nixon's press secretary? And I said, "Oh, no, not for me. I've got boys to raise," and so on. But the truth was, I never could get – as much as I had learned to respect Nixon – I could not see myself lasting five weeks in that spot. They actually wanted Mike Wallace and Mike Wallace had turned them down twice. And they were going to ask him a third time, and then if he did, I might be considered for it. I said, "Well, just don't let it get off the ground, I don't want any part of this."

Smith: When Jerry terHorst quit and cited the pardon, there are those who believe without disputing that story, that it wasn't the whole story – that terHorst, perhaps not surprisingly, found the job to be overwhelming.

Bruno: Oh, I don't think so, not Jerry. Not only that – I've never told anybody about this – when terHorst quit, Anne Armstrong and George Bush wanted me to be Ford's press secretary. And, again, they said they'd offered it to Nessen and he had turned them down once, and they were going to offer it a second time, and if he didn't take it then, would I be interested in doing it? Well, by now it was several years later, plus it was Jerry Ford instead of Richard Nixon, and I

said, “Yeah, I’d like to do it.” And so they said, “Well, what unique qualifications do you bring to this?” And I said, “Well, I can ski with him.” But anyhow, obviously they took Nessen.

Smith: Was that a mistake, in retrospect?

Bruno: It’s hard for me to say, because I wanted the job, too, at that point.

Smith: Okay, fair enough. But a television guy who was in the eyes of many, perhaps a bit of a show-off.

Bruno: I think it was a mistake because he was more interested in the limelight for himself than with Ford. And when he went along on *Saturday Night Live* with Chevy Chase and everything. I thought that that was totally, totally, improper and somebody at the White House should have grabbed him by the throat and said, “No, you can’t do that.”

Smith: Were you surprised by the pardon?

Bruno: No, not at all. I didn’t have any information, except what Mitchell had told me a few weeks before, that they had to carve some kind of a deal with Ford to protect Nixon.

Smith: By the way, just to get that on the record, the fact that Mitchell held that view, and indeed, quite possibly that the President held that view, does not lead to the assumption that Ford, at that point, held that view or that there had been any discussions with Ford.

Bruno: Yeah, I think that’s possible; I think that’s very possible, because by now all of the aides were taking over and they were talking to each other from one camp to the other. But it seemed to me as a reporter that there had to be a pardon; they could not bring the President of the United States up in a normal trial – that the country had gotten to the point now where they just wanted this thing to be over with. And Ford’s mistake, in my opinion, was that they put out the wrong signals, that there would be no pardon.

Smith: Now, that brings us to a real flashpoint. Ford has his first press conference, it’s the 28th of August. And there is this quality about Ford that – and I’d

obviously like to hear your reaction – for someone who had been in Washington for twenty-five years, he could be naïve. He believed that the Washington press corps at the end of August, 1974 would want to talk about Greece and Cyprus and inflation and all those things that he was trying to get his arms around. He was told in advance that they were all going to want to talk about Nixon. That press conference, which he by his own admission did not handle well, and which he left feeling angry, mostly at himself, I always believed was the tipping point that led to the final pardon.

Bruno: I do remember it now. But I think when Jerry Ford realized that Watergate was going to bring down Nixon and that the pardon was going to be the number one thing on his plate, I think that far back they realized that they would have to pardon him.

Smith: Really?

Bruno: And that they gave off misleading signals and in the case of Jerry terHorst, Jerry was sent out there and he had to lie to the press. He didn't know it was a lie and Jerry got angry and did what any self-respecting newsman would do, and said enough, I'm not going to do this sort of thing. I told them when they asked me, "Could you go along with a policy you didn't believe in?" I said, "Oh, sure. That doesn't bother me, but don't ever send me out there to lie. Because I would do the same thing that Jerry did. Excuse me, I've got to go because..."

Smith: You were not surprised when the pardon came.

Bruno: I wasn't surprised because, well I was surprised in the sense that he had mislead everybody. I found that hard to believe at the time. And of course within a few weeks he did what was inevitable. When you look back at it, how could there not be a pardon?

Smith: Mel Laird, who of course has a scheme for everything.

Bruno: Mel's a terrific guy.

Smith: Oh yeah, and a great friend of Ford's. He was angry because he had a plan. He thought he was going to bring a bipartisan delegation of Congress to the

White House to ask Ford to pardon Nixon. The problem with that is, every time you war game the decision, and the notion thirty-five years later that somehow you could have prepared the country for this, given the mood at the time - wouldn't the first trial balloon be shot down before it ever cleared the trees?

Bruno: I think so. And what made the pardon so right was that it happened fast. It could have even happened faster maybe. But the country, I think, was tired of Watergate and the whole thing. Nixon was out, now let's go on. But if you were going to have a trial or whatever you want to call it, it would have dragged on and on and on.

Smith: I don't know what you were hearing, but we've been told that Ford was being told through the backdoor from the courts, I guess from Judge Sirica, that it could be two years before Nixon would be in a Washington courtroom, assuming it was decided that he could get a fair trial.

Bruno: It makes sense.

Smith: Yeah. And that that was a factor – Ford's trying to master this job that he had never wanted – and the thought of spending the next two years talking about Richard Nixon...

Bruno: Very smart. They had to get Nixon out of the picture, off stage.

Smith: The fall of Saigon – how bleak was that?

Bruno: It was terrible. I think many people by that time had been prepared for nothing but bad news out of Vietnam. And for many people the fall of Saigon, I think, was kind of a relief. Now we're getting out, finally, and really getting out – maybe not gracefully, but getting out. And I think by that time all people cared about was getting out.

Smith: Laird is convinced, or he's convinced himself, much as he loves Ford, he blames Ford for not getting Congress to pony up additional money when South Vietnam was on the verge of collapsing. Is there anything an American president could have said at that point that would have persuaded Congress to fork over more money to prop up the South Vietnamese?

Bruno: I can't think of anything, other than we never lost a war.

Smith: Yeah.

Bruno: And unfortunately we did. No, I think by that time, if I recall correctly, public opinion had turned against the whole thing. And now you were having college boys and suburban boys being drafted. Up to a certain point, Vietnam had been a poor man's war, and the only people going there were the gas pumpers and so on; people with less education and means.

Smith: Talk about change of public opinion - what really angered Ford was, once Saigon fell Congress wanted to cut off any funds, for example, for resettling refugees. Basically, they wanted to pull the plug and walk away. And he put together this kind of crazy quilt coalition with George Meany and the American Jewish Congress and others. That was leadership.

Bruno: Yeah. And it was in some respects, it was the Navy way.

Smith: How so?

Bruno: You get a board of officers of high rank to sit down and work out the solution to a problem. The Army did the same thing. But the Navy had it almost institutionalized, that the way they would handle these things is a board of captains and admirals...

Smith: It's interesting you say that, because I wonder how Ford's naval service might have affected...

Bruno: I think it affected him quite bit. The same as World War II and Korea affected all of us, that it was turning points in our careers and in our thinking. When I came out of the Army I had changed my mind about almost everything, it seems. My experience had been enlightening, and I'm sure the same thing was true of millions of other guys.

Smith: When Rockefeller was selected to be vice president, we know that George Bush was another candidate and have reason to believe that Don Rumsfeld's name was also in the mix. Does that ring a bell with you?

Bruno: Yes.

- Smith: Is it safe to say that the Rumsfeld-Rockefeller rivalry was baked into the cake? Was it unavoidable?
- Bruno: Yes, it was unavoidable, but I don't think it meant that much. I think Rockefeller could crush Rumsfeld, and Rumsfeld at that time, was a very attractive guy. And it's funny; both of our careers took place at the same time. We came back from the service in Chicago and I was starting out as a police reporter, and he was starting out as the business guy and he made his first run for Congress and I guess he got beat. And then the second time around he won it. But he was a terrific guy, and I liked him very much. He was also very much at ease with us and seemed to understand. I don't know if that carried over.
- Smith: It's interesting, he said to us, and other people have confirmed, his advice to Ford was: clean house early. Which raises a large question, can you be too nice to be president?
- Bruno: Yeah, you can be too nice to be president if you don't take action where action is needed. I think that was one of George Bush, the first's problem. George Bush is basically a nice guy, a good human being. I always said he did in real life what Ronald Reagan did in movies. It probably wasn't fair. He's a really good guy. Yeah, you can be too nice. You get burned a few times and then you learn you can't be too nice.
- Smith: Of all the challenges confronting Ford, one was to try to take this White House, which, let's face it, was 98% Nixon people, and make it work for him. And obviously a lot of Nixon people were integrated into the new administration, but there also had to have been some real stresses.
- Bruno: I don't know because I wasn't covering it from the inside. Cannon, Jim Cannon would be a good source for that.
- Smith: Was Rockefeller unhappy from the beginning?
- Bruno: Oh, I think so, very much so. He wanted to be president and his party would never let him be president. And I think he was actually very bitter about that. He concealed it – kind of thinly at times, like when he gave _____ the finger.

Yeah, I think Rockefeller wanted it, it was clear that he couldn't get it and didn't understand why he couldn't get it. That was the most difficult thing. Because wherever you went with Rockefeller around the country, when he left New York and the East, the enthusiasm wasn't there. The only thing that got him through was he gave a lot of money away. He never had that Republican Party support.

Smith: Were you at the Cow Palace in 1964?

Bruno: Yes, I was.

Smith: Remember the night they tried to boo him off the stage?

Bruno: I remember it very well. Yeah.

Smith: A lot of people think it's his finest hour.

Bruno: I was with Bill Miller, my favorite candidate of all time. He was the congressman from upstate New York. And I discovered to my horror about six o'clock that night that I hadn't assigned anybody to cover Bill Miller, who was going to be the vice presidential choice. So I said, well, I can't get hold of anybody, so I'd better go up there and cover him myself. I go up to the penthouse or whatever it was on top of the Hilton, and there's a couple of guys at the bar having a drink and so I said I was from *Newsweek* and they said, "Have a drink." So I had a drink with them and just then on TV is Goldwater, the nominee saying that Miller was his choice for VP, and then out of the adjoining bedroom comes Miller and doesn't see me. And Miller is standing there watching this and he says, "Now, we're going to get the shit kicked out of us, but it's going to help my (bleeping) law practice."

Smith: Well, he was probably right on both counts.

Bruno: I said, "Relax, I'm not going to sandbag the guy." And then we became friendly from then on.

Smith: When Rockefeller was dumped, he must have been very...

Bruno: Oh, his pride, I think. I think he really was angry.

Smith: Did you see him around that time at all?

Bruno: No, I didn't cover him. I think Jim was covering him.

Smith: No, he was still in the White House because Jim was at the White House.

Bruno: That's right. I don't remember then who was covering.

Smith: At the Kansas City convention, the selection of Dole, did that come as a surprise?

Bruno: Yes. I thought Howard Baker had a better chance and I didn't think that Dole had the delegates, but Dole did.

Smith: The theory is, at that point the polls were so bad that the base was in trouble. And if you're not carrying Nebraska, the Dole selection was, in part, about shoring up the base. Does that make sense?

Bruno: Yeah, I think so. And Howard Baker couldn't take it because he was concerned about his wife, and that was a huge, huge, concern. I was told that he said, "Don't let it get off the ground. I don't want it. I can't take it."

Smith: Yeah.

Bruno: And so that's when they turned to Dole.

Smith: Over the years it's been said that Anne Armstrong's name was at least on a list. Does that ring a bell at all?

Bruno: Yes. She was on a list but we never felt that it was serious. We felt that it was just a listing, and nothing more than that.

Smith: By the way, did you ever have much contact with Mrs. Ford?

Bruno: No, unfortunately. I wish I had. We knew each other and said hello, but I never really...I had with Steve and with Jack.

Smith: Now Jack was a bit of a hell raiser.

Bruno: He was then. And Steve did pretty good, too.

Smith: But that stuff never got in the press.

Bruno: No, they didn't care. We were racing one year and it was the usual BS again, "You don't have to take this seriously," but everybody did. Jack Ford was one heat in front of me and he took off and blew right out of his bindings. Oh, what a terrible fall. His ski came up, down he goes, down this ramp that accelerates you and it was a miracle, we all thought, that he wasn't killed. A year or two later, I'm skiing in the race, and I'm on the team with Steve and we're standing up there at the starting place and kibitzing back and forth, and I said, "Boy, that was terrible that time when Jack blew out of his bindings," and Steve smiled and said, "Yeah, wasn't that awful." And all of a sudden I realized that Steve had rigged the bindings so that they would blow off. It was always fun being around the Ford boys.

Smith: When Mrs. Ford had her cancer surgery, again, it's hard for people today who take it for granted, but in those days people didn't talk about breast cancer.

Bruno: That's right. Betty Ford was a real dynamo. I didn't know her, but from what I understand, she was a tough person who had – I think Congress had prepared the Fords for what lay ahead, as much as it can be prepared for, the presidency. But they were people of Washington; they were not making war on Washington. And now we've had a string of candidates and presidents who were elected on the premise that they are going to pull down Washington. Well, that's crazy.

Smith: The night of the debate – because Ford clearly was catching up.

Bruno: Yes.

Smith: He won the campaign. I mean, if you stop and think where he was in the beginning and where it was at the end, but of course, the Polish gaffe came along. Did you know immediately that it was...

Bruno: I was so wrong on that. That was one of the biggest mistakes I've ever made as a journalist. And the reason for it was, in San Francisco, our old fiddle player from our bluegrass band had lined up a bunch of local musicians to go to this bar after the debate and Hank Truitt, who was on the panel, would play the banjo and I would play the guitar, and we'd have a great night of playing at playing bluegrass music together. And I was really anxious to get there. So

anyhow, before I could go, I've got to do a taping with NBC and they asked me about Ford's gaffe on Poland. I said, "Oh, I don't think that that's much of a problem. Everybody knew what he meant to say," because I knew what he meant to say. And of course, that was about the most stupid reply I could have given.

The next morning the phone rings and it's my father in Florida saying, "How can you be so dumb?" And then my sister calls me. I'm trying to make a plane out of San Francisco, and my sister calls me and she says that my hatred for Jimmy Carter is showing. So I fly back to Washington and I come into the bureau and it's silent. Nobody says good job or anything like that. So then I get a call from Robert Strauss and Bob says, "Bruno, you're really one goofy son of a bitch." I said, "Hey, Strauss, I don't need you to tell me that. My father and my sister have already done it."

I get home, and the boys come in from football practice and we're having dinner and one of them says, "So and so said his father thinks you're an asshole." And I said, "Well, boys, lots of guys have got fathers who go to a party and dance around with a lampshade over their head, and do something stupid. But I do it in front of millions of people." And my big son says, "Yeah, Dad, you're the biggest asshole we've ever known." So anyhow, that's my side of Eastern Europe.

Smith: That's interesting because Ford was stubborn. Ford let a week go by when he could have reversed the damage. Did you ever see that side of him – the stubbornness? Or did you ever see his temper?

Bruno: No, I never saw his temper. I saw him set his jaw to prevent losing his temper, but I never saw him lose it. No. Yeah, I mean, he held out on that.

Smith: And the momentum just absolutely came to a halt.

Bruno: It was really a serious blow. Even though, if you read the whole thing, later on, he cleared things up pretty good. But by that time, the damage is done.

Smith: And it's really almost the birth of the sound bite culture.

Bruno: And Max Frankel gave him three different chances to change it right then and there, and he didn't take it.

I'll tell you a funny one, though. It was about a week later that we had the vice presidential debate with Mondale and Dole, and it was the first time that there had ever been one and I was on the panel. We had worked out ahead of time what our questions were going to be together and planned who would go first, second, third, so there would be continuity to the debate, rather than just scattered all over the place. We all agreed that we would not ask follow up questions unless it was absolutely necessary, and we would signal behind the table like that. There was Marilyn Burger, Wally Mears, myself and a fourth person, I forget now.

Anyhow, that's when Bob Dole came out with Democrat Wars, which was really bad, and Dole, you could tell that Dole did not want to be there. He didn't like the idea of the debate, or anything about it. But he was being the good soldier, he had to be there. So afterwards Dole and I were alone in his dressing room and there's a call from Ford, and it's on an amplified phone and Ford has probably had a few martinis; his words are slurry, "Great job, Bob. You really did a great job." So, right we knew the martinis had set in.

Smith: By the way, is it safe to say in those days, everyone drank a lot more?

Bruno: Yeah, and how. Jack Germond said, "When we pulled into a hotel, the first thing we looked for was the bar. Nowadays, they look for the health club." Anyhow, Ford said, "Good job, good job, Bob." And Dole says, "Thank you, Mr. President." And the conversation ends and Dole turns to me and says, "I wonder what he was watching." Dole was just a great guy, a delight. They kicked me off the press bus because we had too much fun. In those days we didn't report what went on.

Smith: By Election Day the polls had shown basically it was pretty much a dead heat. Did you think that Ford had closed the gap?

Bruno: Yeah, I did. And also, I'd learned by then that what the polls show in mid to late October, early November, is that you have a closing in every presidential race, and it's reality setting in. Now people are really dead serious about how

they are going to vote, so the polls that are taken in the last week or so are the ones that really count because it's the next thing to the election itself. Yeah, I didn't know who was going to win at that point, but I just had a feeling that Ford had made up a lot of ground, but not enough.

Smith: There is a school of thought that says the pardon was in the end a bridge too far, I've always thought, you may not remember, but in the weekend before the election there were some economic numbers that were released that suggested - Greenspan called it a pause in the economic recovery - but they were not good numbers. And I've often wondered whether Ford had caught up, but then people at the very end were asking themselves, "Okay, do I want four more years of this, or am I willing to take a chance on something different?"

Bruno: Well, I never thought that the economic numbers really registered with most people; that what registers with people is their own security. Do I have a job? Do I keep my job? Do I have my medical insurance? And so on. Those are the things that people care about when they judge the economy. What the GNP is or anything like that, it goes over our heads, for the most part. So I don't think that that set of economic numbers really was all that decisive. I think that the Jerry Ford as a goofball, as a clumsy oaf, had really done a lot of damage.

Smith: I know exactly what you mean. He said, and it's really poignant, that what hurt so much was he felt that he had just mastered the job when he lost it. And you wonder what a full Ford term with the legitimacy of an election would have been.

Bruno: I think it would have been pretty good. I think it could have been pretty good. I think the country could have very easily, once they got to really know him, fallen in love with Jerry Ford.

Smith: I've often thought there's a Trumanesque – kind of a plainspoken, unflashy, Midwest authenticity about the guy.

Bruno: I think that's true. Truman and Ford would have gotten along good together.

Smith: Bess Truman voted for Ford in '76. She told them.

Two quick things at the end: one, were you surprised by the extent of the public reaction when he died? Because this is someone who had been out of the public eye for quite a while. I was with ABC for part of that week, and then I was with the family, and it seemed to surprise some journalists to see it build as the week went on. That I think in part people were contrasting what they were seeing in the old clips with the state of politics today.

Bruno: I think those of us who were old enough to have covered Ford were not surprised by the outpouring. I think the younger generation that's really coming in now, were very surprised - who was this guy? Unfortunately, many of the younger reporters have not done their homework and they are not very well versed on things that they should know as reporters, and they just didn't understand. They had no frame of reference for Jerry Ford, so they were surprised.

Smith: Well, plus - let's face it, Ronald Reagan owned the Republican Party at that point.

Bruno: That's true. But those of us who had covered, I don't know of anyone who didn't have respect for Ford.

Smith: Speaking of Reagan, in 1980 did that whole crazy vice presidential thing - was that serious? At any point was that real?

Bruno: I remember that so well. I was sitting in the room ready to go with Barbara Walters and I forget who else was there and my sources told me that that was not going to happen - that it could not happen - that the Republican Party did not want it to happen. And the Reagan people with a few exceptions, did not want it to happen. Oh, George Will was the other person. And my sources said it wasn't going to happen, it couldn't happen, it never was real. Cliff White told me that, a very good guy. Cliff told them that couldn't happen, that wasn't going to happen. He was involved. And so, no, I didn't think it could happen, either because I couldn't find anybody who wanted it to happen. How it got started, I've never known.

Smith: There is a wonderful story - you mentioned Barbara Walters - she literally was outside Walter Cronkite's anchor booth, banging on the door, because

Cronkite had Ford, and she wanted either to join the interview or make off with him.

Bruno: That's Barbara. She's fierce.

Smith: How do you think Ford should be remembered?

Bruno: Ford should be remembered as the man who led us out of Watergate. Unfortunately, the promised land only lasted a short time for him. Most of us couldn't even get into it. But I think he led the country out of Watergate. That was the most important thing. And that's the way he should be remembered.

Smith: Do you remember the last time you saw him?

Bruno: Yeah, about five or six years ago, when he came in for the luncheon to present the awards.

Smith: Right. The Press Club.

Bruno: Yeah. That was the last time I saw him and talked to him – only briefly.

Smith: Isn't that revealing, that his Foundation would have a press award. What does that tell you?

Bruno: It's unheard of. Only they could do it. It's a great tribute to him and to his mentor, Pete Lisagor I don't think people realize what an influence Pete had and how he used it properly. There's a terrific guy.

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