

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Henry Haller
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: First of all, thank you so much for doing this. Mrs. Ford's been told and is very appreciative of your willingness to talk to us.

Haller: A great lady. A great lady.

Smith: Why is she a great lady?

Haller: Because she respected everybody. For instance, for me, she let me do my thing. She knew I was a professional and as a matter of fact she is the only First Lady actually who gave me several recipes like the one for the rib roast the way she wanted it done. Things like that. And beef stew with walnuts. That I had to do, and that was her recipe. She was a great lady. I mean, I never hear her make any complaints. She might have made some suggestions about food, but that's it. The President, he was great. I mean, he had a great appetite.

Smith: Did he?

Haller: He'd swim every evening and he kept trim. He'd go outside and swim every night. He was a great guy. So were the kids. Michael, I didn't see him too often. I think he is a minister. And then there was Jack and then there was Steve. They were great people. One time, when they were there about a year, Jack told me, "Chef, you know, I'm here and I've never had a bad meal." I said, "You're never going to get one. It's not happening." I mean, I was at peace with these people.

Smith: That's interesting you say that, because of all the families that have lived in the White House, they're the ones who never expected, never aspired to live there. Did that make them in some ways different?

Haller: Oh, absolutely. They didn't have the pressure like other presidents had because a lot of presidents, when they have the election or before the election

have to make a lot of promises and they try to keep them and that puts a lot of pressure on them. So that was different. That was really different.

Smith: Let me go back a little bit. Tell us a little bit about yourself before the Fords entered your life. You obviously had been at the White House for some time.

Haller: Yeah, twenty-one years.

Smith: Twenty-one years. And how did that begin?

Haller: I emigrated from Switzerland. After World War II, the United States, the prestige they had in Europe was unbelievable. I mean, they got rid of Hitler. I was in the Swiss Army and didn't have to fight, fortunately. And then made an apprenticeship and I spent another six years in Switzerland to perfect my skills, all in 5-star hotels. And then, in Bern, the capitol of Switzerland, a hotel owner gave me a chance to go to Canada. I wanted to go to Canada and then the United States. So I went to Montreal and worked there for three years at the Ritz Carlton Hotel and then I came to the United States. And then I worked in some fine hotels like the Hotel Hampshire House in Central Park South and then again Park Avenue at the Sheraton East Hotel that was also a 5-star hotel. But at the Hotel Hampshire House, there were people like John Wayne, Bob Hope, and Lucille Ball. They all had apartments there. So that was a great job for a so-called Executive Chef.

Then I went over to Park Avenue, a bigger job. That was in the 60's, and I worked there for four years. And then I got a phone call. I had made myself a name in New York about being a good chef, so I got a phone call from Mrs. Johnson saying that they're looking for a chef and asking me if I'd be interested in the job. I said I would be because I thought the prestige and, hey, it's the tops. So January 1st or something like that, I went to Washington. I was interviewed by Mrs. Johnson. Very, very nice lady. I spent there at least an hour and she told me to please the president is not easy and I said I'd find that out later. And then there were ladies in the background, you know, sitting there and looking at me and probably after they were talking, "What do you think about him?"

Smith: Did she talk about their preferences in food?

Haller: Yes, she did talk about food and she wanted to know if I'd be flexible. Not only French cuisine. Whatever they wanted, that's what they're going to get.

Smith: Including barbecue?

Haller: Well, at that time, they used to have a Barbecue King, they called him. They brought him from Texas and he, the Barbecue King, I saw was excellent, absolutely excellent. Barbecued small ribs and he did absolutely a fine job, so I didn't have to do that. On top of it, President Johnson had the battle of the bulge and doctors told him he has to go on a diet. He had to watch his diet. That's what it was.

But one time, one evening, we had dinner and it was roast beef on a Sunday night and I had so-called pole beans from Florida and I saw there were too many strings on there, but I served them anyway. I couldn't do anything else. So, the butler came out and served the dinner and he said, "The President wants to see you." So I went in and I said, "This doesn't sound good." And he had the strings of the beans in his hand and he gave them to me and he said, "I give you the strings because I don't have time to take them off next time." I put them in my pocket. And the First Lady and Lucy were there and they were raving about the dinner. It was just before the wedding, before Lucy got married, so they didn't want the chef to leave without telling them. I wouldn't do things like that. I mean, the President was right, but he was very polite, he called me "Mr. Haller." He could've called me something else, you know.

Smith: He loved tapioca pudding, right?

Haller: You had to have it ready all the time. There was a guy that used to be a Navy chef. He was the breakfast and lunch cook and he always made the tapioca pudding because he knew how to do it right. We always had that. Absolutely. If he wanted tapioca pudding and there wasn't any tapioca pudding, he really would so-called raise hell, but it never happened. Never happened.

Smith: Now you had another wedding, of course, in the Nixon White House.

Haller: I had Lucy and then Linda. Two weddings. And then there was Patricia. That was during the Nixons, yeah, had another wedding. By the third one, I knew what I was doing. Always, every time, 600 people. And they used to call them hors d'oeuvre, in other words, like a meal from a buffet. And Johnson, for instance, I saw him inspect the buffet before the dinner. I said, "Wow, I hope everything is alright." But I saw that he already started to eat before everybody came in so I knew everything was okay.

Smith: I've often thought that Mrs. Nixon hasn't gotten in some ways, the recognition or the credit or the appreciation that maybe she deserves.

Haller: Yeah, she worked in the background.

Smith: Was she shy?

Haller: She was shy. No question about it. That's the word that just came out when you asked me. She was shy. She was. A few times she wrote out some menus for me of what they would like. She was very nice also. Every Monday, I sent the menu up to the First Lady for the whole week. And, believe me, when they had guests, then we had the first course, the main course, salad, and dessert. When they didn't have guests, we would serve a main course and salad and nothing else. No dessert. And that was for four different [presidents]. Even for President Ford. I started always out with the first course and they said cut it out. They didn't want it. They went on TV every day, you know.

Smith: Let me ask you. Before he became President of course, he was Vice President. Did you have any interaction with him before he was President?

Haller: No, none at all.

Smith: Okay. How difficult were those last months of the Nixon presidency?

Haller: We could feel it. It seemed when you work at the White House, you get attached to the First Family and the First Family gets attached to the people who work for them. And we could see that the President was under stress and the whole family. But he used to come into the kitchen and talk to me about food. So now I have to tell you about his last morning at the White House.

By law, the old president has to be out by 12 o'clock, noon. And the new president comes in after that. With President Nixon, 7:30 I was upstairs in the kitchen and was ready to make breakfast for him and there he was in pajamas and bare feet talking to the butler in the kitchen. And when he saw me, he walked over to me, by this time I was at the stove, he shook hands with me and he said, "Chef, I have eaten all over the world, but your food is the best." I remember that like it happened yesterday. So that was quite something I thought because he was leaving and all that stress, and I thought, he says that to the chef, and I thought that's pretty cool. I said that was great.

Smith: Were you in the East Room when he said his goodbye that last day?

Haller: I was in the East Room, yes.

Smith: That must've been very emotional.

Haller: Yes. And then we saw him leave the White House and go in the helicopter. We saw him when the helicopter was taking off to the Air Force airport, and then it was for the last time and he went to California to San Clemente. And that was it. And then the Fords came in and they fit in pretty good.

Smith: Let me ask you something. Mrs. Ford wrote in her memoir that once they moved into the house, actually it was about a week before they moved into the house, but once they moved in, she was walking down the second floor hallway and saw staff and said 'Good morning' and no one responded.

Haller: Nobody knew her.

Smith: And she went to the usher and said, "Is there something? Do they not like us?" And he explained, "No one thought that at all. It was different with the Nixons who were a little more formal, maybe, so the word went out, "Feel free to converse with the First Family." Was there that note of informality, I guess, is what I'm after?"

Haller: If the President came into the kitchen, all I said was, "Good evening, Mr. President." That's it. I didn't say, "Oh, Mr. President. How was dinner last night?" Nothing like that. They see so many people, they're sick of seeing so many people. You have to understand that. And when he was downstairs in

the corridor walking, when he came, I disappeared. I mean, he knew I was working there. That's what it was. They were afraid to talk to her.

Smith: Now, they got over that.

Haller: They got over that, sure.

Smith: Was that because of how the Fords were?

Haller: Yes, yes, absolutely.

Smith: How were things different?

Haller: Well, listen, every family is different. Every family is different, you know. And it's like what I said, he didn't have to run for president and he came in and the congress elected him, which was a great honor. And I thought that was a great selection. I thought that he deserved it and that he did an excellent job. I was surprised that he didn't make it for a full term of four years. I was really surprised about that.

Smith: Early on, Mrs. Ford talked to you about food.

Haller: Yes, in my book, in the kitchen, she talks to me about food. And sometimes she came downstairs in the ground floor kitchen. In the White House, they had three kitchens. The second floor kitchen is for the First Family. My kitchen at home is bigger. The ground floor kitchen is for banquets and then there is a kitchen for a sous below the ground floor. That's for the staff, the White House staff, which I had to take care of, too. Talking about the White House staff only I mean the staff in the residence which was about 85 people.

Smith: Now, it must've been that second floor kitchen, that small kitchen, the famous photo of him making his English muffins.

Haller: Oh, yeah, that's the only time he made the muffin, you know, at the White House.

Smith: Oh, really?

Haller: I remember, I even told the guy sometimes working upstairs making dinner, he was a sous chef, he made the dinner upstairs. I mean, I couldn't be there

for 16 hours a day. I told him, "Hans, tomorrow, don't stay there for dinner because everybody is to be out of the kitchen." And he didn't like that. He said, "Why?" I said, "Because the President's going to go making his English muffins."

Smith: Was that for the benefit of the press?

Haller: Yes, absolutely.

Smith: But as far as you know it's the only time he did it?

Haller: It's the only time.

Smith: Because I always thought it was because Mrs. Ford was not a morning person and I thought it was as easy for him to make his own breakfast as to wait for her.

Haller: I'm sure that he probably did, but at the White House, the butlers wouldn't like that.

Smith: Tell us. What is the function of the various staff?

Haller: The butler does serving. They're serving things and on state dinners. They also, I tell you, which was wonderful - they make sandwiches. I was not a sandwich guy. They always did on the first floor - they made sandwiches when they had parties. The butlers did that. And then they also took care of the silver and all the dishes. That was very important. If somebody broke a dish, fortunately for me, it never happened. It never happened that I cracked something. But then they wanted to make sure that they're going to tell them. Just don't put it in the garbage can. Now, think, this is in the inventory and take one plate off, you know. I mean, that can happen. Really, there's one incident when a very good guy, a window cleaner, he had to clean the windows on the outside. He was physically fit, I tell you. And he's hanging there, you know, he'd hook himself up and clean the windows outside the White House. When he was finished, he started again down at the bottom. You know, I don't know how many windows, 40 windows? And then also the chandeliers, he had to clean. And in the East Room, they had a chandelier and he had to turn it and clean it and turn it and turn it and all of a sudden,

bang, the chandelier came down and it crashed on the floor because he undid it in the ceiling, but that was never in the press.

Smith: Let me ask you, I'm sure it was that second floor dining room where Mrs. Kennedy had that gorgeous French wallpaper with scenes of the revolution – and Mrs. Ford had it covered over.

Haller: The family dining room? Okay, that was possible, because downstairs there are pictures in the so-called Diplomatic Room.

Smith: Yes. I think that's the same, but this was military scenes.

Haller: The military scenes.

Smith: Yes, military scenes. And the story was, someone asked Mrs. Ford why she had it covered over and she said she recognized it was beautiful and historic but it wasn't pleasant looking at scenes of battle while she was eating.

Haller: That's absolutely her prerogative if she wants to do that.

Smith: Did she make changes? Either physically to the White House, or were there things that changed because she wanted them to?

Haller: Not much. They went along with what the staff was doing. I mean, the staff is very good. They know what they're doing. Absolutely.

Smith: I'm told he's very friendly anyway and that for some members of the staff, it took a little bit of getting used to. Specifically, I've been told a story about one of the butlers. It was a weekend and the President was watching football and he insisted he come in and join him and watch the game. I think the butler didn't quite know how to respond.

Haller: Oh yeah, absolutely, he could do that. No question about it because if it was on a Sunday, he was alone there maybe, and he wanted to watch football. Some guys, they like somebody with you when they watch football. And I believe that he definitely would do that.

Smith: And I'm told with other butlers, he would talk sports. I mean, it was a relationship of equals.

- Haller: Yes, absolutely. And one night, the butler's telling me afterwards, they asked him because Jack is not here for dinner. Then the President was laughing, and said, "Yeah, maybe he doesn't like the food." You know he was talking with him. "Maybe he doesn't like the food." "Well, he's not here, don't worry about it." And Jack was probably somewhere else eating pizza.
- Smith: There's a wonderful story about Steve when they first moved in. He told his parents he was going to turn in early. In fact, I guess he'd invited some friends over and they had food from the kitchen. The next morning at breakfast, the President asked how his evening was and before Steve could answer, he pushed forward the bill - because the First Family pays for their own food.
- Haller: They pay for their own food, yes.
- Smith: So that's how he knew Steve was actually partying the night before rather than having turned in as he said he was going to. Did the kids have friends in?
- Haller: Yes.
- Smith: Much?
- Haller: Not very much, I don't think. I wouldn't recall that they had a lot of friends in. The only thing I know is that they came into the kitchen and they'd make their own sandwiches sometimes. And Steve for instance, I think he never went to college. When he was 16, he bought a Jeep and he had a Secret Service man with him and he worked on a range. He worked for a farmer. And then, afterwards, somehow he got very successful as an actor. Did you see the series there? I don't remember the name anymore, but that was running about for ten years. So, he did very well there.
- Smith: Now, Susan, famously, had her prom in the East Room of the White House, her senior prom. Do you remember that?
- Haller: Oh yes, I remember that.
- Smith: Did you have to cook for that?

Haller: Oh yes. And Susan is a very nice person also. Terrific. All the way terrific. And then if you go to 1976, it was the biggest year for me as a chef at the White House because it was the Bicentennial, the 200 year celebration of the United States. They built a tent in the Rose Garden for 250 people. 250 people! You know, I mean, the kitchen is small at the White House, the ground floor kitchen and it's not much bigger than this here. So I asked the chief usher, which is a stupid name – chief usher. I mean, he's the administrator of the White House. I said, "What are you building here?" He said, "Don't you know? There's going to be state dinners in there." I said, "Wow, 250 people." And then on top of it, the fiscal year changed. They cut the money again in the spring, in May, that's when they get you your allowance for the year. Now here they changed and wanted it to go to October, so we had to go for six months with the same money than what we had for one year, we had to go a year and a half. That was no good for me because I needed extra people working for me. And so I really worked hard.

Alright, 250 people. And so the main course we'd served right from the kitchen out there into the Rose Garden. 250. The first person who came was the Queen of England; served lobster as the first course. Cold lobster. You see, you want a cold dish for a first course because you can work on it ahead of time. That dish was ready. I don't know how I did it, 25 lobsters, four pounds each. That was just for decoration on a platter. We had like French service. People didn't have plate service. Now they have plate service, which I'm completely against. I can tell you why.

Smith: Yeah, why?

Haller: Because you have to cook much too early for that and you have to put it in the warmer and by the time the guests get it, it's warmed up. Especially with a small kitchen like that. 250 people in the White House using our plates takes a lot of space. You know, ten plates or platter. With the platter, you can also beautifully decorate it. You can do it very nice. And when I used to have first course, at first it's always a cold first course. Then when the first course went out, I start to cut the meat. Only then. With the plates, you have to cut it earlier.

Smith: Are you told in advance whether by Mrs. Ford or whoever, “The Queen likes this food”, “She doesn’t like this food.” What kind of input do you have?

Haller: For the foreign guests, the State Department always sent me a notice of what the foreign guests liked and did not like. So we work around it. That’s the way it was.

Smith: And would Mrs. Ford be involved in that process?

Haller: Making the menu? That’s where she comes in. She never changed a menu for me. Never. Fantastic. I mean, that was great for me, so I was relaxed. When she ever talked to me, she was wonderful.

Smith: Did you see her sense of humor?

Haller: Oh, yes, and so did he.

So the State Dinner, first there was the Queen of England. I have to tell you if you’re interested in the food. A big platter, and for the lobster, we had a 50 gallon steamer. You had to put that live lobster on a wooden board and tie it up so it was like this. Because when you cook a lobster, the tail comes in, you know, I mean. So I cooked the 25 lobsters. I mean, when you’re thinking back, it’s absolutely nuts. And then that was about two days before we served it.

Then the next day, we already started to take, and then the lobster had to have the medallions for the lobster on top. See, and then I had vegetables around the lobster. And then one pound lobsters for each person, a pound of lobster, but it was shelled, no more shell. And the guests, they helped themselves. That’s they way it was. They helped themselves to the food. Then for the main course, we had medallion veal with wild rice. And if wild rice is made right, it’s delicious, you know, with nuts and the walnuts, or maybe almonds, and with a very good sherry wine. And then for a vegetable, green beans with peeled cherry tomatoes. That gives it a little color. For the cheese course, port salut cheese. Port salut is excellent French cheese. And endive and water cress salad. For dessert, a raspberry mousse, a big mousse, and baked

cookies. I think you would've enjoyed that dinner. That was the very first state dinner and for the Queen of England.

Smith: And I assume she enjoyed it?

Haller: Oh, yes, yes. And then Giscard D'Estaing from France came, so I gave him a real French menu telling him that we also know how to cook French. And then Chancellor Schmidt of Germany came. They all came. Usually I had maybe one or two state dinners a month. Here I had three and four state dinners a week. A week! And then the Prime Minister of Australia, Prime Minister of New Zealand. All the kings from Europe, the King of Sweden, the King of Belgium, King Juan Carlos of Spain, and on and on, they came for dinner.

Smith: Were you at any point introduced?

Haller: No.

Smith: Never?

Haller: No, never. No, because it wouldn't be fair for the other guys. You know, I mean, you'd have to introduce everybody. Just don't introduce the chef. I'm glad they didn't. I was in the background, you see. And I mean, I got my accolades directly from the President and the First Lady.

Smith: What would they say to you?

Haller: They'd call up and say, "Chef, the dinner was absolutely marvelous last night." That's the way it went, you see. Going back in history here, during Nixon, Mrs. Eisenhower, they gave her a dinner because it was her birthday. And do you know what the grandson, he married—

Smith: David.

Haller: David married Julie. And fortunately, they had their marriage in New York in the Plaza Hotel before the one at the White House. So, I lost my thought. What did I say before?

Smith: The dinner for Mamie Eisenhower.

Haller: Oh, the dinner for Mrs. Eisenhower. So I had soufflé for dessert. Grand Marnier Soufflé. And it just happened to be a working breakfast for me. So I took her phone call for what she wanted for breakfast. And then she said, “Chef, how did the soufflé stay up? It didn’t fall in!” And I said, “Experience, Madame. Experience, that’s what it is. It is experience when you have to put it in the oven. The recipe I’ve done so many times. Experience. That’s what it is.” So the butler came out and he said to me, “You know, Mrs. Eisenhower said, ‘The chef here in the kitchen doesn’t want to tell me how he did the soufflé.’”

Smith: She was trying to get your recipe?

Did you ever have a disaster or were you threatened with disaster?

Haller: It just doesn’t happen. It cannot happen. You cannot embarrass the First Family. Maybe every time the most critical guy was me for a dinner. But the guests would not know that. But a disaster? No. It just can’t happen.

Smith: What are the things you worry about? When you say you’re critical, what are the things you think about?

Haller: A soufflé could be critical. I mean, that has to come out of the oven and then a very hot heater so the temperature stays the same in the heater from the oven so it doesn’t fall. And then the dinner is on the first floor. You had to bring the heating unit into the elevator and bring it to the first floor and then put it on platters and serve it and that soufflé stayed up. You know, I mean, things like that, we tried sometimes. That’s why I tried to have a first course and made always very nice decorations and I work ahead at that because if you work ahead of time then I can concentrate on the main course. You know, that’s the experience that comes in.

Smith: How large a staff did you have?

Haller: A staff of seven or eight people and then there were three kitchens. There was a kitchen for the staff, in which I had two people; one in the morning and one at night. And I’m talking staff, only the White House. The other staff, the President’s staff, they had their own cafeteria in the West Wing run by the

Navy. The Navy chefs were cooking for them. Simple, but good. No problem there. And then the ground floor kitchen and then the kitchen on the second floor.

Smith: When President Ford announced the pardon of Richard Nixon that was a hugely controversial thing.

Haller: Yes.

Smith: Does that penetrate the White House itself? I mean, can you sense the mood of the place or if it's a crisis atmosphere? The fall of Saigon, obviously, six months later was an incredibly difficult period.

Haller: It was unbelievably quiet about there. We never spoke politics.

Smith: Really?

Haller: No, no, no. You didn't speak politics. We just didn't do that. And you didn't ask why or whatever. Those moods, you know, like when Nixon had to leave, we were kind of stunned, but nobody expressed his opinion. You didn't do that. That's how it was there.

Smith: You're an escape from all of that in some ways. I mean, you provide a normal environment.

Haller: A normal environment to the last day. That was our job.

Smith: But could you see the impact of outside events on the First Family? You know, at the end of the Vietnam War, President Ford said that was the worst day of his presidency. Could you sense the impact on them just as human beings?

Haller: When the President from the office came over for dinner, he left it over in his office. That's the way it was. That's the way presidents did it.

Smith: This may be awkward, but you obviously had a lot of interaction with Mrs. Ford. We know later on because she's written about it, she had some problems. Did you see that then?

Haller: Never saw it. The only thing I saw was they would eat dinner very late at night. About 9:30. Not all the time, but most of the time. And that was kind of hard on us and there was a cocktail served before. If you're hungry and you don't have cocktails, you want to eat at 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock, not at 9:30 at night. And that's all I can say.

Smith: That's fine.

Why does every First Family seem to love the solarium? They all seem to gravitate towards that room?

Haller: Which one? Which room?

Smith: The solarium up on the third floor.

Haller: Oh.

Smith: Is it because it's informal.

Haller: Absolutely, yes.

Smith: You know, there are pictures of Ike up on the balcony grilling steaks up there. I don't know if any other presidents did that.

Haller: No. No. You know they had the kitchen up there, too. You know, we had lunch, never dinner, in the solarium and if I had a soufflé, I made it up in Ike's kitchen, which still had an old stove in there.

Smith: Really? Because he was a cook himself.

Haller: Yeah, he liked to cook. Yeah. That's what they told me, the porters.

Smith: Do they tell stories? Because obviously some of them have been there a very long time.

Haller: The butlers?

Smith: Yeah.

Haller: They're very, very discreet. There are some stories that I wouldn't repeat, but they know what they're doing. And if they said something to me, then it was

just me, all alone in the kitchen. There was nobody else. From one to the other, they'd say it because they knew I'd keep my mouth shut. That's the way it was.

Smith: Do you remember there were two assassination attempts on President Ford about three weeks apart out in California? Did that shake things up at all?

Haller: No. No. Nothing at all.

I was going to say something which I could come back to it. Well, one time, when I'm done, I took pictures when all the pine trees are all lit up. I was in uniform, you know. I went outside to take some pictures at night. And all of a sudden, I hear footsteps. Six policemen come running and they didn't know who it was and they said, "You're going to get shot if you do that again." And I have thousands of slides and I still have to work on them and look at them again. And the White House photographers gave me the film for free, meaning that they got the film for free from Kodak.

Smith: Really? Now, there's someone, David Kennerly, who was almost a member of the family.

Haller: Yes, and I know him. I know him.

Smith: He was a character?

Haller: He was a character. He was a terrific character. Terrific! Terrific.

Smith: You may or may not remember this, when we were talking to the social secretaries, one of the things they all ran into was sooner or later someone at a state dinner would try to switch nametags, would try to fool around with the seating arrangement at the President's table. Does any of that ring a bell?

Haller: That didn't trickle down to me. I was not involved.

Smith: And I assume 45 years ago that people smoked a lot more than they do now.

Haller: 45 years ago, they had cigarettes on the banquet tables. Absolutely ridiculous. That comes from the south, you know, the Senators from the south. You have to have cigarettes there. That was terrible. And then, talking about smoking,

the Navy chef smoked in my kitchen. I said nothing so he did it and he smoked upstairs with Johnson's friend there. I've forgotten his name.

Smith: Jack Valenti.

Haller: Yeah, he used to bring him cigars to the Navy chef! He smoked! He smoked! And then the pastry chef would smoke. And then the head butler, the maitre de, John Fickland, was always with a cigarette in his mouth. Nobody said anything. The usher in his office smoked. And I think Rex Scouten smoked in the beginning a little bit and then he cut it out. And this guy, John Fickland, because of cigarettes, he died. I mean, he got cancer or something. I mean, he died rather young, you know. That is absolutely amazing.

Smith: And I know when we've talked to people like Letitia Baldrige, people like Bess Abel, going back to the 60s—

Haller: Bess Abel I know well.

Smith: They would be the first to say the culture was different in terms of drinking. People just drank more.

Haller: Oh, yeah. Yeah, absolutely. No question about it.

Smith: Did it affect entertaining at the White House or what you served?

Haller: No, no, no. You wanted to serve good food and plenty of it if there was drinking. I mean, the biggest party always was the press. The press, the food and the free drinks, they go for that.

Smith: To the outsider the Christmas season is magical, but it must be an enormous amount of work.

Haller: Yeah, every day parties. Besides the party that all came as part of the months of July and August during 1976, Christmastime is unbelievable. Lots of work. Yeah, there is a tremendous amount of work.

Smith: And I'm told Mrs. Ford loved Christmas.

Haller: She loved Christmas. Yeah, they seemed to all love it. Yeah, well, we went over it. We made it. And that was it. Thousands of people coming, mostly

cookies, but still you have to make them and people think making cookies, eh it's very easy, but you've got to make cookies and you have to have a big cabinet and have cookies in there.

Smith: I've been told that President Johnson on occasion, not frequently, but it was not unheard of for him to show up with a lot more people to a meal than perhaps you expected.

Haller: I never knew how many he had for dinner, especially on the weekend. At 5 o'clock Sunday night, they started calling people up to come over for dinner and who would say no? You might have 12 or 13 people. It was kind of wasteful because you always had to be ready for a lot more for dinner.

Smith: And did the Fords do anything like that?

Haller: No, no, never, but the Johnsons did.

Smith: And were they at Camp David most weekends?

Haller: Who?

Smith: The Fords?

Haller: Oh, yes, they did. They'd go up to Camp David. Everybody likes to get away from the White House.

Smith: Now, does that give you the weekend off if they're in Camp David?

Haller: Yes. Yes, that was nice. But then there is always some like the one daughter of Nixon, Patricia, they begged her to go to Camp David and she didn't want to go. Then I had to go in and just cook for her. That happened. That's the way it is.

Smith: Tell me if you remember the foods the Fords particularly liked.

Haller: They liked red cabbage with pork chops. Did you ever eat red cabbage?

Smith: No.

Haller: Probably not. With my mother, I learned a lot. We had a big garden and actually my grandmother was French. My mother learned her cooking from

her mother, my grandmother. And we had a big garden, so I used to go and fetch the vegetable from my mother and see how she cooked it. So that's how it started that I really loved cooking. And that's the way it was.

Smith: The Ford had dogs, right?

Haller: Yeah. It always happened like this. There was always somebody on the groundskeepers' staff who selected himself to do the dogs. And, hey, Rex Scouten didn't object. "Do you want to do the dogs? Go ahead. Do the dogs." I had the other job. So that was no problem like that. We also sometimes had cats. You know, during the Carters, we had cats. You never asked me about the Carters. They were nice people. Sometimes he'd come into the kitchen and he'd say, "Chef, very good supper." They wanted to live like the average American, you know. They were very frugal. Very frugal. But one time his brother was coming. Billy with his Billy Beer, you know? And I said, "Mr. Carter would you like some lunch?" He says, "No, I'm on a liquid diet." That's exactly what he said. I said, "Well, that's easy for me."

Smith: You mentioned the Bicentennial July 4th, 1976.

Haller: The Fourth of July, I remember absolutely very well. The Truman balcony has a beautiful view of the Washington Monument. A beautiful view there, you know. And they had the buffet dinner out on the Truman balcony and they had guests invited. And if I would write something about that day and evening, I would say that's when everything stopped in Washington. And the next day it never was in the newspaper. Nothing. I had to wait until at least 11:00 or 11:30 until I could go home because all the streets were completely blocked. People standing on the roof of their cars and watching the fireworks. I mean, that's when the city stood still. This was absolutely amazing. That was a fantastic Fourth of July evening.

The Fords had a good time with their guests and on the Truman balcony. So around 11:00 o'clock, the traffic started to move a little bit and then I was able to go home. That was fantastic.

Smith: You said you were surprised when he was not elected. Do you remember? Were you there on election night?

Haller: Oh, yeah, I was there and one of the members of the White House working there in the office knew the Fords and she came in the kitchen during the election when the results started to come out and she said to me, "President Ford is not going to make it." That's what she told me. But there was quiet and no big deal.

Smith: There are some people who thought it took him a little bit of time to kind of bounce back from that. Did you notice any chance?

Haller: No, nothing. Nothing.

Smith: No.

Haller: No, no. Like I said, they definitely left the work at the office if possible. But, naturally, it's 24 hours a day, you know. I mean, a president never has a vacation. If he was going to Hawaii or whatever, it was not a vacation. They always have something to do. But they've got to get them away some time. Give them a break, you know.

Smith: That brings up something. Chevy Chase and *Saturday Night Live* and the comics made fun of him, but he actually was a very good athlete, wasn't he?

Haller: Oh, yes. Yes. Swim every day. Very good. He would swim outside.

Smith: Even in winter?

Haller: Oh, yeah, summer or winter, he would go outside, but that type of water was heated, too. Before, they had a pool inside for Roosevelt. And then the President made it bigger for the press because they used to call it the dog house. And then some people wrote letters, "What dog house costs \$500,000?"

Smith: Did you work with the social secretary?

Haller: Very much. Very much. Some were nice. Some were not so nice.

Smith: Now, we know Maria Downs is a friend, so you must have worked with Maria during the Ford period.

Haller: She came later. There were two secretaries.

Smith: That's right.

Haller: Do you know the first one?

Smith: Nancy Ruwe.

Haller: We called her the Screwy Ruwe. I mean, you'd better shut that out.

Smith: I'm not surprised.

Haller: Oh, please. Because she was! I hope I don't get in trouble by saying that.

Smith: No.

Haller: But Screwy Ruwe and she used to have a green dress on and we called her the Green Lizard. And she asked me once, "How many social secretaries have you went through?" Like I was responsible that day for their release. I mean, Screwy Ruwe, I'm telling you. One time, she wanted to serve soup at the end of a dinner or something or other because it was in a Wednesday paper in the *Washington Post*, serving soup on the end.

Smith: Do you have to, in the back of your mind, keep the press in mind? Because I'm sure the press is always looking for something.

Haller: Yeah, the press, I had to learn to keep my mouth shut. I mean, you had to watch it.

Smith: There was the famous incident when the Queen was there and the Marine band struck up *The Lady Is a Tramp*.

Haller: Meaning she was a tramp?

Smith: Yes, and they were dancing. The Fords and Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip and unknown to anyone the Marine band played *The Lady Is a Tramp*.

Haller: That was not a very good idea. Diplomacy in the United States is not always working out. *The Lady Is a Tramp*. It's ridiculous. You know what I mean?

Smith: I've been working for years on a biography of Nelson Rockefeller. You must have had some contact during the Ford years when he was vice president. Did you have any contact?

Haller: Terrific guy. Terrific guy. Would say, "How are you, Chef?" Things like that. Talking like everybody else. He wanted to be like everybody else. I mean, middle class. You know what I mean?. He was a great guy. Absolutely.

Smith: Of course, they were the first couple to live in the vice president's house. Did you have anything to do with that or was that normally separate?

Haller: Nothing to do with that. Nothing. The Navy took care of that.

Smith: That's right.

I know the social secretaries get together from time to time, but were there ever meetings of the chefs?

Haller: Yes, there are 25,000 members of the Culinary Federation of Chefs. And then we have the Club of Chefs'd'Chef. It's French. The French started that for the Chefs of Heads of State. And there is a French company that makes this jacket. This is a French jacket. And I'm an honorary member to that and we went all over the world for free, I did. I even was in Morocco in Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, France several times, Belgium, and in Hong Kong. We had a great time. When they came to Switzerland, that was boring, but the food, you know, that was fine. Everything was great. So, this lady, I'm not saying anything against her and absolutely she's got to be pretty smart. I talked to her, but talking about size, I was impressed how tall she is. The chef there is a Philippine. If she's five feet, that's it. I mean, as a chef, she has some tall guys working for her. I mean, it looked funny. It looked funny.

Smith: A couple of things and we'll let you go.

Do you remember at the end of the Ford presidency, I assume there comes a time, whether it's on inauguration day or whatever, when the staff is lined up and there's a goodbye - formal or informal? How is that handled?

Haller: It was very informal. It's always different. Every president has different things.

Smith: Really?

Haller: Yeah. It was informal. The President came into the kitchen and said, “Do you know I’m going to leave in a couple of days? It was nice. Thanks very much for what you did for us. We enjoyed it here.” And she was talking like that the same way.

Smith: Are people sad to see them go?

Haller: Oh, I was. I don’t ask. That’s another thing. You don’t ask another guy, “Are you sad?” because you don’t talk about it.

Smith: And obviously within a few hours, there’s another family that you’re serving.

Haller: Yeah, yeah. That’s how it goes. It’s amazing. But they need a lot of help from the staff. And then later on they start to get to know what they like.

Smith: After the Fords left the White House did you have any contact in the later years? Did your paths ever cross?

Haller: They always sent me Christmas cards and I sent them, but not really. No. Well, I sent them a book signed that’s probably there in the library.

Smith: What did you think when he passed away?

Haller: I thought that I felt bad in part. I mean, he was great. A great man. A great man. Absolutely.

Smith: Why do you say that?

Haller: Well, because he treated everybody like he liked to be treated. Like he liked to be treated, he treated everybody like that. And they respected your work, what you did, to a high degree. Absolutely. So did she, Mrs. Ford.

Smith: Did she enjoy being First Lady?

Haller: I think so. I think so, because of the way she acted and the way she presented herself and everything. I believe so. I believe very much.

Smith: For people who don’t know, who think it’s just all glamour - there’s a lot of work that goes into being First Lady, isn’t there?

- Haller: There is a lot of work, but they have people, high-class people working for them, very efficient people working for them.
- Smith: How do you think he should be remembered?
- Haller: He should be remembered as the president in a very, very serious time when President Nixon had to leave the White House which was a historic moment, it never happened before, I understand. He took over and he held the country together. He knew his way with the Congress and I think that they were happy to help him even to run the White House. It was very, very important for the country. He did a very, very good job.
- Smith: And, finally, how do you think she should be remembered?
- Haller: Well, she should be remembered - there's always a good woman in the back and that's the way she handled herself. She has so much respect for everybody who worked for her. She was very thankful. Very thankful. And absolutely a terrific lady and when I call her a lady, I mean a lady in the way a lady should behave. One time we were downstairs in the tent, there's a picture, I think, in the book, I was talking to her and it was just a pleasure to talk to her. And she used to give me some more spiritual help to get things done.
- Smith: How so?
- Haller: Well, because the way she was talking to me and when you get praised, it helps a lot. It's even better than money. Money is not everything. And that helped a lot because Rex Scouten - today thinking back, he should've paid me more. But when I go to Switzerland, I always say, "Listen guys, I don't make much money, but I live very good." That's it.
- Smith: One last thing that just occurs to me. Of course, she had her breast cancer surgery just after they moved in to the White House and in those days people didn't talk about breast cancer. I mean, that was an enormous change that she brought about. Did that change anything in the White House? And when she came back did it take awhile?

Haller: It changed in the country and she talked about things that happened every day...that was great help for people who had breast cancer or were going to have breast cancer.

Smith: And there's that wonderful picture. I think she was still in the hospital and Susan filled in one night - the first time she'd ever worn white gloves - but there was a reception or something at the White House, maybe it was a diplomatic reception, but Susan filled in for her mother and there's this wonderful picture. The President, I think, is in white tie and it was a state dinner and Susan is elegantly dressed and she probably would've preferred blue jeans.

Haller: Her mother was sick.

Smith: Yes, her mother was sick and she was filling in for her.

Were they very close, the family?

Haller: Yes, very close. You never heard them slamming doors or anything. French doors.

Smith: That's very revealing and a perfect note on which to end. Thank you.

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