

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Jan Hart
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: How does it feel to be in this room?

Hart: I've always loved to come in here. When you come in here, I miss him because whenever I came in here, generally he asked me to come in. And I think it's a very special room. I'm glad we still have it here. We're not ready to let it go.

Smith: We're hoping, down the road obviously, to recreate it at the museum in Grand Rapids.

Hart: And maybe even use some of these pieces.

Smith: Yeah.

Hart: Won't that be nice? Yeah.

Smith: When did your paths first cross?

Hart: I worked for a vascular surgeon for twenty years and then I went to the McCallum Theater to be the CEO and the production department artistic – director's executive secretary. So I was there and President Ford was on the board – board of trustees – and so I had known him and met him before, and then I saw him frequently when I was at the theater.

Smith: Let me just back up – why would he have been on the theater board?

Hart: When the McCallum Theater first opened here, he was very instrumental, along with the McCallum family, which is the Parma's – Mrs. Parma is a McCallum. And Bett Simon, Carol Props, a whole group of people – Bob Hope and his wife, Delores – they all got together and decided that there needed to be a performing arts center here in the valley. So they had the Fords come along and they all raised monies and they started a theater. So President

Ford was on the board of trustees for many years. I think he may have come off for a while and then came back on. And he enjoyed coming.

Smith: Really? So he was an active trustee?

Hart: He was active and he would always call me or say, "I'd like to have this," and, "Jan, when can I come?" So, I set up – it was kind of in a U shape – and I sat up near the very front of the table and he always sat right across from me so he could get my eye, or I could make sure he had what he needed. He was always very gracious, very nice. So what happened was, I had found out that they were looking for someone, had spoken with Penny, and I said, no, I had a job. I was used to being in jobs for a long period of time, and it just kind of happened that I ended up coming for an interview with Penny. I had a hard time coming over here, because it was hard for me to extricate myself. But, one day I just picked up my purse and walked out and no one said anything. And then I came back over and met with Mrs. Ford, and then we had a board meeting at the theater and President Ford, before we got started – no one knew – and, boy, he just spoke right up. He stood up and wanted to let everybody know that I was coming over to work in his office and I was going to work with Mrs. Ford and he went on and on. He was just really wonderful about it, but I was in shock. And then the whole room was abuzz, and that was an interesting meeting for me.

Smith: Did you interview with both the Fords?

Hart: Actually, President Ford had spoken to me before at the theater. When I came back over to interview with Mrs. Ford, she met me at the door, and I interviewed with her just strictly by myself. President Ford had already said it would be wonderful to have me.

Smith: How was the job described to you?

Hart: That I would be Mrs. Ford's personal assistant. That I would travel with them. That I would take care of all of her correspondence and I would attend functions. I would stay and get them ready, or her ready – whatever the case may be.

Smith: And get her there on time?

Hart: And always get her there – that was something that I really tried hard to do because that was something that was brought to my attention. I said, “Well, I can do that.” There were a few times that I wasn’t successful, but the majority of time...and then the rest I think you just had to learn on the job. I don’t think that when you initially take this job, you ever could really be told what you’d be doing, how much time it would take, where you’d be going, the people that you’d get to meet, the planes you’d get to fly on.

Smith: And you started when?

Hart: I started in ’02, in December of 2002.

Smith: They were still active?

Hart: They were actually pretty active, yes. Mrs. Ford still spoke. She spoke both at the Center every month and attended everything there. She went places and then she spoke, and she was quite active then. I think that that probably lasted for two years and then she started scaling back a little bit. Since Susan was on the board over at the Betty Ford Center, it was easy to start to transition, and there were some things that Mrs. Ford felt that Susan could do and that she didn’t need to do. Then this last year – a year and a half, really – I think, since President Ford’s passing, she’s decided that she really doesn’t have to do those things. She told me she’s retired, so when I ask her, she says, “I don’t have to do that anymore, Jan. I’m retired, did you forget?”

Smith: How much of that is grieving?

Hart: Mrs. Ford is still grieving. You know how they always say you can be lonely in a crowd? I think she still feels that way. She has staff, she certainly has us all around, but it’s not the same. So it’s nice to be able to just sit with her and let her talk and she can tell you how she really feels and you understand. I lost my father this year and I realize how difficult it is, in any circumstance, but to be married to someone so special for so long, and have such a wonderful bond, some people never get over it. She does pretty well, but she’s still grieving.

Smith: Was the first anniversary particularly difficult?

Hart: I think for her it was. As we got ready for the Christmas holiday, you know there is a lot going on. I found that I tried to do more to make it easier – whether it was getting the tree up, or helping decide on purchases, or whatever it was that she needed. It just made it simpler because she wanted everything to be the same, but she just didn't have it in her to do it herself. And this year, we're moving right along. Christmas season is upon us. It's similar, and she keeps reminding me that it's getting close. And I say, yes. And she often wonders why she's still here. And I say, "Well, God has a purpose for you. It's His time, not ours." And we're thankful that she's still here. I certainly am. I feel very blessed to be in this job and I know that I'm here and I took it for a reason, and I'm thankful for that. I remind myself of that often.

Smith: One senses that their faith was very important to the Fords.

Hart: It was.

Smith: It wasn't perhaps as publicly known or flaunted as some, but it was a very important part of their lives.

Hart: It was, I know, for both of them, Mrs. Ford especially. She spoke about that often, especially when she gave her talks over at the Betty Ford Center, or wherever she went. She always mentioned that because I think that was a real turning point for her to turn her, what they called, their higher power. But they loved their church and President Ford was very religious in that way. And it meant a lot to them. They went to St. Margaret's here, and they went as often as they could or were able, or when they weren't traveling. They considered that church their home church. It still means a lot to her.

Smith: I remember being amazed at the numbers – there were 57,000 people who went through – overnight – out at St. Margaret's.

Hart: That was really fascinating to see the outpouring of love. That's one thing that I didn't realize. You know, when you're in this job sometimes you are in a bit of a bubble and once you get over that whole excitement and awe about where

you're working, you're working. When you ever mention Mrs. Ford's name, people love her – love her. Speak so highly of her, always want to know how she's doing, or doesn't she just look beautiful? But people who got in line and took those buses up to the church, it was amazing to me because they've really touched everyone in some way in this valley - just like they did up in Vail. From the common person all the way up.

Smith: They were very visible.

Hart: And it showed. Very visible. They would go out. Mrs. Ford used to love to just sometimes stop by Long's Drugstore and shop for birthday cards, and the people's response, and she enjoyed that. They were, in some ways, very regular people on occasion.

Smith: They had favorite restaurants.

Hart: They always loved to go to Jillian's, and many of their friends did. Jillian's had special tables for them and they would do special little cards for the table and have flowers for them. But they loved several restaurants and they enjoyed going out with their friends. Very much so.

Smith: We were both extraordinarily moved yesterday by Lorraine's testament to her experience with the Fords.

Hart: Isn't she dear?

Smith: Which was just remarkable.

Hart: It was a perfect time and match, I think, with Lorraine. And President Ford loved her. So did Mrs. Ford, but he really looked out for her and took care of her. And I think that Lorraine reciprocated that – it meant a lot to her. Whenever I have questions, or if I needed someone to fill in as chef, I could always call Lorraine, and either get suggestions or say, "Please, please, could you come?" one night and she would be willing to.

Smith: Tell me about Mrs. Ford's sense of humor.

Hart: Oh, she does have a sense of humor. What wit! Sometimes she surprises me. She just comes up with things and I look at her in awe, and we just laugh. She

loves that and I think President Ford loved that, too. She really has that witty side, and she still does. She still does. She is fun to be with. I bet she was always great fun. Always up for it. I think that she still is. And she is very intuitive, she really does know what's going on, all the time. Every now and then, she'll say something that will catch us by surprise. I like that because it makes me realize she is there – she is still herself.

Smith: We heard stories earlier about how they were big movie buffs.

Hart: That would always be funny – she'd go, "Jan, I think that we'll get some movies." And I'll say, "Would you like me to run over and pick some out, or what would you like to go see?" And she would just get in the car with the agents and they would go to Blockbuster and she'd walk in and pick out a few, and they'd come back home and they'd watch them. Always watched movies. Sometimes Mrs. Annenberg gives her movies – sends them over. And Mrs. Ford will watch those and send them back. It's a nice evening. They used to spend the evening eating in the study, and then they might watch a movie together. She still does that.

Smith: And the kids – spent probably more time around her towards the end?

Hart: Definitely. For President Ford?

Smith: Yes.

Hart: Yes. Definitely, yeah. They always wanted to come out and visit. You never quite know, but you know that you're getting near the end, and they were all very good. Susan had been here for quite a while. They would come and go. And then all the boys were here and she happened to leave and then she came back. Mrs. Ford loves it when the kids come around, she really enjoys it. And they enjoy one another. The kids play with one another, they throw barbs and they really have a wonderful relationship and it's kind of fun to see.

Smith: And as grandparents – what were they like as grandparents?

Hart: They love their grandkids. They were fortunate they spent so much time with them. I look back at some of the pictures and the stories that they tell, or Mrs. Ford shared – all of those years in Beaver Creek – at the house and skiing and

all their little matching pajamas, and all coming down, and they had wonderful memories. They were very fortunate that way. And all the grandkids were there, and they had special little beds that they slept in and it was just really ideal. The kids still come to see her. She had grandkids come for Thanksgiving, and more coming this coming week, and they are constantly in and out. I think that that is really great for her – her family. Very family oriented.

Smith: She always loved clothes.

Hart: Well, I would say she still does.

Smith: It helps that she can wear them well.

Hart: That's right.

Smith: Not everyone can.

Hart: Isn't that the truth? There is one thing about Mrs. Ford, she always looks good, but when she gets dressed up to go out, she just hits that door and she's on, and she looks fabulous. She does. She still does. She just doesn't get dressed in ball gowns.

Smith: What was a typical day, if there is such a thing around here, for you?

Hart: Now?

Smith: Well, no, say when they were more active. What was it like?

Hart: Well, you'd come in in the morning and you'd do schedules for the week or month, and Mrs. Ford might have many things on the schedule and you'd stop in to see her first thing. You'd go over everything for the day, find out if there is anything that she needed of you, and she could do like four things in a day. Very busy. And then she always tried to be home - she and President Ford always like to have lunch together. So they would come home and have lunch together, and then we'd start again in the afternoon. Often times they'd have something in the evening then, so I would stay and get her ready. Every now and then President Ford would drag me in and say, "What do I wear?" or

“What tie should I wear?” And I’d say, “Why don’t we go ask your wife? Better she make that decision for you.”

Smith: Now there are stories - he very rarely threw away anything. And there are stories on occasions of him showing up in a particularly memorable suit, and her saying, “You’re not going to wear that.”

Hart: There were those times. There were times that he insisted, and that’s just the way it was going to be. And he would always be ready before she did. So he would go out and sit in the study and wait for her. And other times she’d say, “No, you have to change.” And then he would. I think he would do just about anything for her. But she would say, “No, that’s not it. That’s not it.” But, you know, it was really fun having those times and those moments where it was just them getting ready to go, or we’re all getting ready to go and they would leave in the motorcade, and I’d drive behind. Very special, close, times that people don’t often get a chance to be part of.

I remember the time we went to Bob Hope’s funeral, and we were staying in a hotel, and everything was over for the day and I’d stopped back by, and he said, “Come back in your pajamas, we’re getting in ours and we’re going to sit and play some cards and have some ice cream. I expect you back in ten minutes.” And that was great fun because they were wonderful together and they could make you feel very much at ease at those times.

Smith: You mentioned Bob Hope’s name. It has come up more than once this week. Seeing his last years and how he was, well...exhibited, in some ways...

Hart: Yes, exactly.

Smith: Must have been a sobering experience – for anyone. And I wonder whether...

Hart: I think sometimes, too, Mrs. Ford would look at that and always think, this is something that I don’t want, or I would hope that wouldn’t happen. But they were so close for so long, and Mrs. Hope right now is 99, and they still converse and send each other gifts. Everyone is aging. Mrs. Ford goes, “My, everyone – we’re all getting older.” And I said, “That’s what happens.” But

we were fortunate with President Ford in that that never took place. Mrs. Ford was always very careful, I think, with that.

Smith: I sensed that they both enjoyed, and almost actively pursued having younger people around them.

Hart: They did. I think that they had a lot to share and they enjoyed being around all types of people, all the time. It was just part of their life, but they did like to have younger people around. I just think of them up in Beaver Creek. They would get together with friends and laugh and just have the best time. It was wonderful to see – that was wonderful to see because that’s something - that everyone’s family is so different. My parents certainly never were in that kind of _____, but they were much quieter. This was great fun to see because there was always something to go do, or something to get dressed for, or had people over for drinks or hors d'oeuvres, or let’s meet before we do this. There were so many places that they went, that they enjoyed doing.

Smith: Did they have favorite television programs?

Hart: Mrs. Ford loves *Dancing with the Stars*, and they used to watch that. They watched a lot of things. They watched A&E, the Discovery Channel, they would watch old movies – the History Channel. He, especially, enjoyed those things and so they always did that. Would watch nightly news – every night, 5:30, they’d watch the news. And movies, they always enjoyed that as well.

Smith: And at least once a year they’d go to New York and do theater.

Hart: They did. Mrs. Ford – she loved that. That was really fun for her because New York is an exciting place to be. They haven’t done that, though – they didn’t do that, I should say, for probably a good six-seven years or so.

Smith: I remember hearing that they’d seen *The Producers*.

Hart: Yes.

Smith: That may have been the last trip they took to New York.

Hart: Yes. And they loved going to the McCallum. They would go there for a variety of events – there was the 9/11, a lot of things, and the Fords were

involved, or were guests of honor, or honorary chairs. But they loved to go to shows there and meet up with all of their friends in the Founders level, and go for dinner there. Afterwards, when they had certain shows or Broadways or singers, they always did that. And Mrs. Ford still supports that.

Smith: Did you go up to Vail?

Hart: I did. I was lucky enough to go up there in Beaver Creek, and I would stay probably about five or six minutes from the residence so I'd always be close.

Smith: And they obviously loved the place.

Hart: They did. That was a special house. It had space for everything. I loved that house. It was fun to be there. I'd never really been there before. I'd been to Vail and driven through or stayed, but it was a real delight to have the opportunity to be there. I didn't stay the entire summer, I would go up for weeks – like six weeks at a time and come back home for a week or two and then I would go back up. It was relaxed, and it was nice having the office just downstairs in the residence and I could pop up and down all the time.

Smith: Penny and I had joked that the office was referred to as the Black Hole of Calcutta.

Hart: It was. That was the tiniest little spot and cell phones wouldn't work in there, and everything was very close. It was one, two, three, as far as desks go. Agents had about this much space in front of us. But there is something fun about that when you look back at it because it was the summer, and what's not to like about summer up in Vail? So, we were very fortunate to be able to tag along with that.

Smith: What was a typical day like up there? I heard that he actually would go and get the mail.

Hart: He would. He would come down, or he would drive down the hill, and go to the post office, because they had post office boxes there, and Mrs. Ford would go outside. It was nice because they could just be themselves. And they knew almost everyone, of course, in the cul-de-sac, so many of them were friends. It was very relaxed. It was enjoyable. You could just go up and President Ford

would always be there. You could see him in his office as you came up the steps, and he would say hello, or ask you to come in. Or they would be sitting in the living room or having breakfast or tea. And they were very approachable then. It was a lovely, lovely place.

Smith: But he worked in the office.

Hart: He worked in the office. He'd go in there for the day, and he'd sit in there and read with that big bay window behind him, and he enjoyed it. He always wanted to come to the office and that was one nice thing he was always able to do, even here. He could always walk over and sit at the desk, whether he had a lot to do at the end or not. But it was nice to have him here. Felt normal.

Smith: And it probably felt abnormal when he stopped coming over.

Hart: Yeah. Even Mrs. Ford, she doesn't come over as often, and I miss that. So I try to tell her everything that goes on. And she knows that I'll do that, so it just keeps her abreast of what goes on over here since she's not over here as much. But she knows it's here and I think that sometimes that's all she needs – is to know that, if she wants to, the office is here, and it's the same. And she likes that – she likes knowing that.

Smith: Do you remember the events surrounding his 90th birthday? There was the tribute at the White House.

Hart: Yes. We stayed at the Willard – that was a very big thing. And it was exciting – it was an exciting time. I remember he was very excited about it, too. And all the kids were there and everyone looked so wonderful, and going to the White House was always a special treat. They treated us all well, and I say that because, I'm just Mrs. Ford's personal assistant, and they still were so kind to me and I really appreciated that. I remember the cake that had these little chocolate coins of President Ford with his face and they brushed them with gold. So I wrapped mine up and put it in my handbag, and I still have that in my freezer. He was thrilled with everything. He felt really wonderful, I think, and it was an exciting evening for him, and everything working up to that. So, it was a special time.

Smith: He had the big event in Grand Rapids.

Hart: Yes.

Smith: Which I think was the last time he was back in Grand Rapids.

Hart: That's right. Yes.

Smith: In one sense, it was right about that time that he really had to cut back on the travel.

Hart: He started to cut back more. Yeah. Like Mrs. Ford always said to me, "There's a time when you know you don't have to do everything anymore." And I think she is right. It's just knowing when that time is for you. But, for him, I think that he did start to slow down and, just like Mrs. Ford says, it's okay to be retired.

Smith: In one sense, he never really wanted to retire.

Hart: No, and he didn't. By coming to work and always being active or going into to the conference room, he'd come back after lunch and walk by and go, "Is there anything to sign?" And they'd go in to see if there was anything that he needed to do. And it was the sameness of the day that he had done for so many years, and that meant a lot to him because that's who he was. It's that work ethic, you know. So many holidays, and that's it. Because when you come to work, that's what you came for.

Smith: Well, we heard about the working Saturday.

Hart: Yes.

Smith: And then when we pointed out to him that the next day might be a holiday, he would say, "I didn't vote for it."

Hart: That's true. We gave up one holiday, and we took it as the day after Thanksgiving instead, so that we could have two days in a row. But President Ford would have worked every day, I think, if he had his own way.

Smith: Did he talk about his early days? Did he reminiscence much?

Hart: I think that, if I was with the Fords, or if we were traveling, or afterwards when we got to our destination, sometimes he would do that. Or he would mention certain things, “Well, you know what, Jan? We did this back when, and do you know who this is in that photo?” He was always really good about that because I didn’t know all of that. Then he and Mrs. Ford would then begin to chat. And that was really fun because I just felt like I was a fly on the wall.

Smith: The other side of that coin is, I only heard him disparage two people. And the worst that he could think to say about someone was, “He was a *bad* man.” That the worst. And one was Gordon Liddy.

Hart: Yes.

Smith: And the other was John Dean.

Hart: I heard that, too.

Smith: Did you hear any others?

Hart: No, I don’t think that I can think of anyone, really. Not to me, anyway.

Smith: And, of course he became really good friends with President Carter.

Hart: He did. They really did have a nice relationship from what I could tell. They were on Air Force One. They flew with us at the time of President Ford’s demise, and they were just wonderful, warm people. And Mrs. Ford always spoke highly of him and said how much President Ford and President Carter forged a wonderful relationship. And, of course, Rosalyn did with Mrs. Ford. In fact, they just had the parity bill pass and that was long in coming for mental health, and insurance rights, etc. So, they’ve worked long and hard on some things, and it’s nice to see them all work together.

Smith: I wasn’t aware of it at the time, because when you are doing something like that you’re in a fog, but I read afterwards, at the funeral in Grand Rapids, when I was doing the eulogy that Mrs. Carter was weeping in the pew.

Hart: Yeah.

Smith: Who would have imagined, thirty years earlier that that's how the story would end.

Hart: And Mrs. Ford always said to me, "Times have changed in the political arena some. Before you could be on differing sides all day long, but you always socialized together, and you put that aside, and you were just gentlemen and ladies." She says that has changed maybe a little bit and that was very true, I think, with the relationship with the Carters. Things change. Thank goodness time does change and soften. President Ford always said he had a great relationship with President Carter.

Smith: When did he stop coming into the office? Was it a matter of months?

Hart: Yes, I think that that's really about it. He would come over sometimes and he would sit there. He might come over and take a little short afternoon nap here, or watch sports on TV. And if Mrs. Ford was away, it was just really nice. To him this was just like a room in his home, and it was a space where he loved to be. And it was easy because the sidewalks that connect the two, and it was just so close. We always loved to see him come over.

Smith: And one sensed, from the conversations that took place, that Mrs. Ford was reluctant for a long time to have outside help.

Hart: You know, there is something in your mind that you think, oh, you mean I actually should consider this? I think anyone might be that way. But that was tough because it meant the beginning of a change. And I know that even after President Ford passed away, we were concerned about her being by herself in that big home. It's not a good time to be by yourself when you've just lost your husband and your children finally have to go home. She didn't need it, she didn't necessarily want it, but she finally realized when the kids said, but Mom, we want someone here with you. And it makes perfect sense. You can have Secret Service around you and you can have staff you can call night and day, but if no one is actually in the home, you wouldn't know if anything happened. So she slowly got used to that idea and found out it wasn't so bad, but that was an adjustment.

Smith: Well, and the Secret Service – they are not caregivers.

Hart: No, they are here for protection. I think that sometimes other people might forget that. That is just strictly their role. And so our role is very different with her and she has household staff, of course, and she has nurses there now. It's nice. It's different people to speak to during the day. And then I'm in and out constantly during the day. I see her when she gets up and at the breakfast table, and she'll call me over. I'm there at lunch and go and visit with her before I leave. Sometimes I don't get home until really late. But it's an important time and I think it is important for her to know that we're here. And I love it when she talks. She talks to all her friends or calls, sometimes has them over, because that's important, too. You have to remember who she is and respect that, and realize that we are just staff.

Smith: So she's not a recluse?

Hart: No. No, she's not. She'll have friends over for lunch. If she goes out and gets her hair done, she might come back and place a lot of calls and just chat with all of her friends. But she speaks to friends every week. All the time. I think it's easy to become, not necessarily a recluse, but to say, I feel comfortable here. When we were away for the summer, it's really nice to stay with her for those three month's time and it's hard to let go of that when I come back. But we have really great times together. It's nice to just to sit and talk and go over stories and remembrances, and have her speak to friends, or see friends when she's there. It is just a different time, now, for her.

Smith: Does she talk a lot about him?

Hart: She does. And I think that that's important, too. I think some people are very careful and other people bring it up all the time. I think that there is always timing, there's a time and a place, and when they want to talk, I think that they should. And I think it's good to talk about him, too. I have very fond memories of him. He was always so kind to me and very sweet. Mrs. Ford was in the hospital one time, I remember, up in Beaver Creek. She was getting tests and they decided to keep her overnight. He said, "Well, okay. Do you want to drive back with me?" And I said, "I have my car, sir." So I drove back and he called me and said, "Well, I'd like you to have dinner with me." I said, "I'd be happy to." So the chef would make dinner and those were very

unusual, very sweet times, I thought. Some I'll never, ever forget. And for that I am eternally grateful, because I never would have imagined that I'd be doing this.

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

Hart: Yes. I left – my family is Scandinavian and they always celebrate on the 24th, on Christmas Eve – so I generally would drive up on Christmas Eve with the family to see them. And I stopped by and said goodbye, and he'd always hold my hand real tight, always wanted me to assure him that I would take care of Mrs. Ford, and I wouldn't leave. And I promised him I wouldn't.

Smith: Was he in the study?

Hart: Yes.

Smith: I thought he was in a hospital bed, but it was in the study.

Hart: Yes, that's right. Because it was out where everyone was, and there was light and he could look out at the golf course, he could watch TV, they could sit and eat dinner together, so it was very nice. It kept him in the middle of things. And so, whenever I was there, which was often during the day, I always stopped by, or he always called me, and I went over. He would look at me and we'd chat, or he'd hold my hand and I would promise and he would close his eyes. So the last time I saw him was on the 24th. I said, "Merry Christmas," and that I would hope to see him when I returned and I would be back on the 27th or the 28th. So I got the call on the 26th.

Smith: But he was conscious when you chatted.

Hart: Yes. We didn't chat a lot, but he looked at me and squeezed my hand and then closed his eyes. Yeah.

Smith: Were you surprised by the overwhelming response?

Hart: Oh – the letters that we got afterwards – I think it took over a year for me to just get through everything – all the thank you letters, and all of the details that came in after the fact. It was astounding. We still receive mail for Mrs. Ford, or I should say, Mrs. Ford does. We still receive mail for President Ford

– which astounds me. When it comes from Boy Scouts or from military asking for commendations and things and I have to break the news to them that Mrs. Ford doesn't do that, President Ford is no longer here. But the outpouring came from everywhere. One of the most touching things for me was in Grand Rapids, driving in from the airport and having the streets and the freeways lined with people - from toddlers and little schools – all the way. I just never witnessed that before, never will again, and never imagined that two people could be loved so much. That was very touching. The Parmas were in the car with me and it was interesting because Mr. Parma looked at me and he said, "Jan, you need to start waving," and I said, "Oh, sir, they don't know who I am." And he said, "Oh, but you don't understand. They came out for this. The least you can do is just wave to them and acknowledge them being there. They're not certain who is in the motorcade. They just know you are." And it's something I've never thought of before. That was just...

Smith: Was she touched by the response?

Hart: Oh, she was. She was just flabbergasted, I think. She would say, "Well, you know, we're from here. This is home." But when you would go by the museum - just the people across the bridge, and up and down the river, it was just...

Smith: But even in D.C., I was working for ABC the first part of the week, and as I said, in the media, they were astonished at the reaction, and how it seemed to build as the week went on.

Hart: It did.

Smith: And I think a lot of it was, there was a whole generation that wasn't even alive when he was in the White House. And they were being introduced to him for the first time and they were comparing with the status quo and he looked awfully good. And one of the things that struck me in D.C. – first of all, remember, from the very outset of the funeral planning, he was adamant about one thing: there was not going to be a caisson through the streets of Washington.

Hart: Yes, that's right.

Smith: Adamant. And yet, I had to be up at the cathedral that morning for ABC, so I wasn't in the procession – but I was told there were people lining the streets all through Washington on your way up to the cathedral, as if there had been a caisson.

Hart: And they were, yes. I think that we had that everywhere. We even had that here in the desert, but Washington was fantastic, too. It was different because it was Washington, but you saw people everywhere. They would be in parking structures, you could see them at the windows of their offices, all up and down. I'll never forget going up to the Rotunda and seeing the winding roads of just streams of people.

Smith: Over New Year's weekend.

Hart: Yeah. Waiting to go. And you remember how cold it was. It was cold. They didn't care.

Smith: And remember, outside the White House? The staff?

Hart: Yes. That was special. I don't care who you are, that had to touch you because it just gave you goose bumps. Every part of that is ingrained in my mind. We all saw different parts of it because we were in different timing of the whole, but it was something spectacular for the entire nation. I think it meant a great deal to everyone. President Ford, even to this day, you hear so much about his integrity. I was just at an event at the McCallum for their 21st anniversary, and they had Dianna Ross the other night, and I was speaking to the doctor that I worked for for twenty years and he still had his Republican pin on, and I said, "Well, aren't you ever going to take that off?" and he goes, "No!" But they all still talk about him, and about how special he was. I think that's a true testament to his character and to who the Fords really are.

Smith: Well, and – just a couple of things and we'll let you go – but I'll never forget – we'd been told at ABC, right from St. Margaret's, don't be surprised if you see Mrs. Ford in a wheelchair. And of course, we didn't. And then, at the end, she got out of the wheelchair, walked all the way down – that's a long walk.

They had asked her after she got back here, why she did that. And almost matter of factly, she said, “Because that’s what my husband would have wanted.”

Hart: That’s right. That’s what he would expect of me. And whenever we’d talk about that, or what would you like to do, or how would you like to go? She goes, “No, Jan, I’m walking.” Whether it was from the museum out to burial site, it didn’t matter what the weather was like, or anything. She is such a lady that way, and she didn’t do it to put on the show, but she knew that this was what she expected of herself, and she did it. She did it.

Smith: And she wasn’t well at that point, was she?

Hart: She wasn’t. She wasn’t feeling that terrific then, but she decided that she would put all of that behind her and she’d get back to that later. She had something with her lungs.

Smith: I understand she is vulnerable to respiratory complaints, isn’t she? Lots of people are.

Hart: She is. That’s her Achilles heel. But she said, no, this is a different time. It’s almost as if it wasn’t about her then, it was about her dear husband, and she certainly lived up to anyone’s standards, I think, during that whole time. She did a fabulous job. I was really, not that I should be proud of her for that, but I was just really touched and very proud of the way she managed herself through that, and everything that she did because I didn’t think she would be able to do it. But she did. She surprised me.

Smith: And I’m sure that was commented on in the letters that came in afterwards.

Hart: Yes. She got everything from baby blankets that people made and sent, to enormous quilts where they went online and would get pictures of the Fords throughout their lifetime, and they would photocopy them and they would put them on paper, and then they would put them onto the fabric. And children in schools, it’s truly remarkable what people sent to her. And a lot of that we’ve sent on now to the library and the museum. Some things she still has here. She received prayer shawls, people were just really generous – and they still send

her things. Very generous, very generous minded people. People, I think, in the United States are very proud of who we are, and where we've come from and what we have and I think that presidents, past and present, and their families, are cherished. And it's nice to see that.

Smith: What would you tell someone who never met him – what should they know about Gerald Ford?

Hart: I thought that he was – at first, when I was just a little afraid of him – but he was always so kind and considerate, and he never looked down on you. But he was fun to be around, for me, in my job. And I just think that he was a true gentleman. He would always say hello, he would always say thank you for anything that you would do, or really appreciate your extra efforts or your staying longer. He was always very generous that way to thank you or congratulate you, or just to make you feel comfortable. That certainly was lovely for me. He was a wonderful man.

Smith: Thank you, that was great.

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