

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Jim Trimpe
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
January 30, 2008

Smith: First of all, tell me about the 30-30 Club.

Trimpe: Well, what would you like to know about it?

Smith: What is it? How did it come about?

Trimpe: How it came about was that we played on Thanksgiving in 1930. Then we won the championship and then we decided that because it was on Thanksgiving, we always played on the Thanksgiving day, we always said, "Let's do something." Then we said, "Let's meet every Thanksgiving" and that's how it got started.

Smith: Who did you play?

Trimpe: Union High School.

Smith: Okay. And you were playing for South High?

Trimpe: South High.

Smith: South High, I'm told, was different from the other schools. What was special about South High?

Trimpe: They were just a down-to-earth outfit. Do you know what I mean? You just wanted to go to school there because everything was top tradition and it was a good place to be.

Smith: And was it a very diverse student body? The old story was Central High was a little bit upper crust.

Trimpe: No, no we were down-to-earth. I know Central, yes. They were kind of the elite at that time. And that's where Ford's wife went, she went to Central.

Smith: Was Jerry Ford down-to-earth?

Trimpe: Oh man, he was an organizer and I knew sometime, some place, he'd be famous for something because he could get you going, especially if you was in a huddle or something, he could get you going.

Smith: How?

Trimpe: All he had to do – and he'd do it in a nice way – he'd say, "We're not doing too good. You gotta do this and this." He organized you right away. He was the center, he was the center of the team.

Smith: I take it he showed leadership qualities?

Trimpe: Oh, even in those days he did, yes. He took the bull by the horns. I just liked the guy from the day one. I still like him.

Smith: Did you know his mother and father?

Trimpe: No.

Smith: What about his brothers? Did you know his brothers?

Trimpe: No, didn't know his brothers either. All I knew was Jerry.

Smith: What was he like off the field? He loved sports...

Trimpe: Off the field, he was just like he was when we were playing. He was a down-to-earth guy, that's all I got to say.

Smith: Worker? Hard worker?

Trimpe: Oh, yeah. And he didn't have too much when he first started. He used to wash dishes in the eating place across the street from South High School just to get the money so he could keep going to school. He wasn't a rich man.

Smith: That's, I think, where he met his father, wasn't it? Remember the story about his birth father who one day walked in?

Trimpe: Right, right. Yeah.

Smith: Tell me about Grand Rapids then - in the 1920's. What did you do as a school kid? What'd you do for fun? Did you go to movies? Did you go

fishing? What did you do in Grand Rapids that you and the other guys, like a Jerry Ford, would do?

Trimpe: I lived on what they called the Black Hills. That was in the southern, south part of Grand Rapids. And it was during the Depression, I graduated in '32 and it was '31 and '30 that was the Depression. But there wasn't one kid that had to ask his parents for money. We always was out doing things. Even if you had to pick up junk. We never had to worry. My dad wasn't poor, but he was an engineer on the railroad, and he made pretty good money, but that didn't bother me any because I just figured I had to make it for myself anyway, regardless.

Smith: What was the Depression like here?

Trimpe: When it gets right down to it, you didn't really feel there was a Depression. We had enough money because my dad could take care of us, but we always played with kids that needed the money and you knew what they felt like too. They felt a lot different than what I did.

Smith: Where there other guys who were friends of Jerry Ford? Can you think of other classmates or teammates that were friends?

Trimpe: The only time that I knew Jerry was when I went to South High School and that's when I got familiar with him.

Smith: Were there particular teachers there who really stood out, maybe a football coach or other influences on you at South High?

Trimpe: They had a good bunch of teachers and you wanted to go to school there because you liked the people. That's the way the whole school was. You just wanted to be part of it.

Smith: Did he know then that he wanted to go to college?

Trimpe: I don't know whether he did or not. I don't know whether he did.

Smith: Tell me about the championship game.

Trimpe: That was something else. It snowed and there was probably 6 to 8 inches of snow on the field. So now they had to go down there and shovel some of it where the markers went, so they put salt down there to melt the snow so you knew where the yard lines were. And we couldn't wear cleats because they'd get all clogged up, so we called Goble & Brown [Goble & Brown was a sporting goods store in Grand Rapids] and they sent sneakers or gym shoes. They didn't have cleats on them, they just had rubber soles. And that's how you got around.

Smith: Is that the famous 0-0 game? Was that the game that ended 0-0?

Trimpe: Yes. I don't think we got down past the, maybe the 30 yard line, and from there on, there wasn't a footprint. And, I tell you, we almost made it. There was a guy named Louie Cooley that was on the team and he caught a pass and he was running and he slipped and fell and he would've made a touchdown. I'm sure he would. But, hey, that's past tense. That's just one of those things.

Smith: Who was your quarterback?

Trimpe: The quarterback then was Alan Elliott and he was a good one.

Smith: If the game ended 0-0, how did you win?

Trimpe: They had a fellow on the team of Union and he had signed up to play professional. And that took care of that. Actually, the game was forfeited because of that. He'd signed up already and he never should've done that. His name was Frank Cook. A big guy, too.

Smith: I take it they don't have a 30-30 Club, the Union side?

Trimpe: No, but we invited them a couple of times to be with us on Thanksgiving and they came, too. It was nice.

Smith: Was there a long rivalry between South and Union?

Trimpe: There always was. That was the team you had to beat. You didn't care about any of the rest of them, but you had to beat Union because they had a good team. They were in good shape.

Smith: How many games would you play in a season? 6? 7? 8? 9?

Trimpe: I don't know exactly, I'd say about 7 or 8 because you played Central and Christian and Ottawa Hills and...

Smith: What other sports did Ford play?

Trimpe: I don't recall. I went out for track, but I don't remember him doing anything else. But he might have.

Smith: You kept in touch with him over the years?

Trimpe: Oh yeah. Yeah. I've got a picture out there. I tell you, every Thanksgiving we always arranged it so he knew where we were and he could call us if he couldn't make it. He had a family and every Thanksgiving, it would be like us, you wanted to be with your family. So you can't blame the guy for not wanting to come clear from California over here just to be with us. But he always called. I got a picture out there when the *Grand Rapids Press* came down there and they got a picture of me talking to Ford.

Smith: Once you went to the White House, didn't you?

Trimpe: Oh, that was something else. I think that was one of the best things in my life was when he invited us to the White House. That was something else. He took us all around and if he didn't take us, he always had somebody and they showed us everything there was around there in Washington. We were only there a short time, only there two days, but it was nice.

Smith: Did you have Thanksgiving dinner at the White House?

Trimpe: Breakfast. Actually, it was like a brunch, they had the breakfast and lunch all in one.

Smith: And was Mrs. Ford there, too?

Trimpe: Oh, yes. Oh yes, yes.

Smith: We picked up today, talking to one of your teammates, word about a girlfriend that we didn't know existed of Jerry's. Mary was her first name? Does that ring a bell at all?

Trimpe: I don't recall that.

Smith: Do you remember his car? He drove an old Ford?

Trimpe: Oh yeah.

Smith: Tell us.

Trimpe: An old Ford. I don't know where he got it but it was an antique, even at that time. He always drove us to school in that old Ford.

Smith: Do you remember the last time you saw him or talked to him?

Trimpe: I can't remember exactly, but the last time I contacted him was when I wrote him a letter and asked him if it would be okay if we dismantled the 30-30 Club because there was only just a few of us left. And I said, "I wanted to get your opinion on it" because I didn't want to say we were going get rid of it without going – I sent one to Joslin, he's out in Seattle – I wanted to find out from him. He wrote me back. You've got a copy of that letter, haven't you?

Other: Yes, we have.

Trimpe: And it's signed by him, too.

Smith: And what did it say?

Trimpe: It said he thought it was a good idea because good things have to come to an end sometimes. So that was the 75th that we quit it, but that picture that I've got out there was from 1970.

Smith: Did you attend his funeral?

Trimpe: Oh man, yes. Yes, yes, yes. I got an invitation and the whole works. But, boy, you talk about security, we had to park at another church's lot and then we were bussed over. The reason why we were bussed over was because they had to check you legally so that you could go and be at the church that he was at. They were scrutinizing you, I'll tell you. The biggest thing was your driver's license because it had your picture on it. And every time you did something, you had to get that out and show it to them.

Smith: What do you remember about him most? How would you sum him up?

Trimpe: He was always congenial. He was always glad to see his friends. Always. Of course he had a lot of them, but he was a very nice guy.

Smith: Did he have any enemies?

Trimpe: I don't know. I never heard of anybody that didn't like him. Of course, I didn't know everybody, either.

Other: Were you in the same class as Jerry Ford?

Trimpe: No, he graduated in '31 and I graduated in '32. I always said he must've been a little bit smarter than me. But that makes a lot of difference when you start school to when you graduate. I think that's what threw it off.

Smith: Tell us about that restaurant where he worked across the street from the school. What was that? Was that just a hamburger place?

Trimpe: Yeah. A lot of the kids that was at South High School would go over there for lunch. Of course they had a cafeteria in the school, too, but they liked to get away from the school and get over there.

Other: Did you eat lunch there?

Trimpe: I ate there a few times, but a lot of the kids were poor and I would eat with them. When we'd bring our lunch, then we'd swap a sandwich or something. I might have a dill pickle in there or something that they liked, I'd give them a dill pickle.

Smith: Did you ever see him working at the restaurant?

Trimpe: Oh, yeah, sure. He was always busy. He was a busy guy. He was always busy. That was something else with him because he was always busy.

Other: Jerry Ford was in Boy Scouts. Were you in Boys Scouts as well?

Trimpe: Yes, I was too. I only got to first class, though.

Other: Was it the same troop that he was in?

Trimpe: No, no, no. I was in the south and he was in another section of town. My wife was with the Cub Scouts, she had a little troop of those.

Other: A den leader?

Trimpe: Yeah.

Smith: What's the biggest change in Grand Rapids in all those years when you think back? Obviously, the town looks different, but beyond just the way it looks, what's the biggest thing that's different about Grand Rapids?

Trimpe: It just got bigger. Let's put it that way. A lot of things fell by the wayside. A lot of the things that you did, you didn't do them anymore.

Smith: Was it very Dutch?

Trimpe: Quite a lot them, but there was a lot of Polish people, too. Quite a few.

Smith: Including at South?

Trimpe: The whole west side was where the Polish were and then the south part of town was where the Holland people were. I lived where the Holland people were. Of course, where I lived, a lot of the men that was there, they worked for the Pere Marquette Railroads. The reason why they were there was because it was easy to get to from where it was. You could walk from the Black Hills and get down there and get your trip to go out.

Smith: At South High, were there any black kids?

Trimpe: I can only remember two of them and one was Siki McGee, and of course he played football with us. And the other one, I used to see him around once in awhile. But we didn't think anything of it, they were just like you. There was nothing to say that they're dark. That didn't mean anything. You just said, "Hey, he's dark. I'm white. What's the difference? Nothing!"

Other: What about the make up of the football team, the different characters that played the different positions, do any of them stand out along side Jerry Ford?

Trimpe: We had some good people in there, but he was a – I don't know how you'd put it – he was always an organizer. You kind of looked up to him. He was

the captain anyways, but that didn't mean anything. We had quarterbacks that were, I don't say they were as good as he was, but I always thought they would be.

Other: Was he voted the captain of the team by the players?

Trimpe: Oh yeah, we voted him in. He was a pretty good sized guy, too. And, of course, he was center and that's quite an important part of being on the football team because you had a lot of stuff to do to keep the guys from coming in on the other side once you centered the ball.

Smith: Tell us about your coach. Who was your coach?

Trimpe: All the coaches that we ever had – he was Gettings, his name was Gettings – he was a young guy, he wasn't much older than what we were. When he graduated from college, he was a young guy. I liked him in a way, but in a way I thought he couldn't stand to lose. Or if we did lose or things were getting bad, then he'd want you to get in there and do some tackling and all that kind of stuff. One of the guys busted his collar bone just going in and hitting the other guy that hard. In a way, he was an organizer, too. Coach Gettings, he was a good man.

I had "Pop" Churm, he was the track coach. I want to tell you how I got to play football. I was running out for track and I'd done the 100, the 220 and the broad jump and the relay. Gettings was always after me down the hall because they wanted somebody in the backfield that could run and I was a pretty good runner. Anyway, I said to "Pop" Churm, "I think I'm going out for football" and he said, "You'd better think it over twice because if you get in there and bust a leg or something, you know what's happened to your track, don't you? Pssh, it's gone. You can't run the 100 and the 220 anymore."

I finally gave in in my junior year and I finally went out for football. I only played two years. But you got a guy here that says, "Don't go over" and the other guy that says, "I want ya." So anyway, that's how that happened.

That's how I got to play. The funny part of it was, when I got to play and I went out there for the first time, they'd already started to play already, er, just to practice. So I came out there and I had a new pair of pants and a new

jacket and everything and now I'm walking in there like that and, here, right out of the clear sky, you walk in there with all them duds on and these guys are in the old torn up ones and they'd think, "What the heck has he got? How come he's getting all that junk?" I said, "I don't know. That's what they handed to me, so I took it." That's it.

Smith: That's good! That's exactly what we were looking for.

(to other) Anything else?

Other: In high school, did you help Jerry run for class president?

Trimpe: Oh sure, we was all for that, you know. Got to get him in there.

Smith: And he lost by two votes.

Trimpe: I know it. And the guy that done it, he was a smart cookie. Not that Jerry wasn't, but he was an all 'A' student.

Other: Did anyone from the 30-30 Club help him campaign for congress?

Trimpe: I don't remember exactly, but I used to see him all the time downtown there. And when you'd see him, he was going like a house on fire from one place to another. There wasn't no grass growing under his feet. You knew he really knew he wanted to get there.

Smith: I get the picture. Thank you, thank you.

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