

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
John Purcell
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
June 23, 2010

Smith: You started the golf tournament here. How did that come about?

Purcell: I had a tournament before that called the Eagle County Scholarship Fund Tournament and I had met the President on the first tee probably in the early 70's, '71 or '72, at the Vail course. And he filled in with us.

Smith: This was before he was president?

Purcell: Yes, before. I remember asking him what he did because he filled in our usual foursome when one didn't show. He said, "I'm a congressman." And I said, "Oh are you? Where?" "Michigan." And I said, "That's great. Come on, we've got a game here." And then he started coming to my restaurant.

Smith: What's the name of that?

Purcell: Purcell's. Its Montauk's now, but was Purcell's.

Smith: And this is in Vail?

Purcell: Well, actually, it's in Lion's Head. But anyways, when he was president, he called me. I was running this tournament and he called and asked if he could come and bring somebody. I said, "Sure!" It was Lee Elder, the golf pro, and the African-American who became a friend of mine. And he came out and played. So, we're sitting around, having a cocktail then and I came up with the idea that, "Next year, why don't we call it the Gerald Ford?" "Go ahead, John. Do what you like." And we did and the tournament it went through the roof. I've played in the Bob Hope. I've played in the Bing Crosby and all those tournaments and we had as many celebrities here in those days. So, that's how we all got started and that's how I met him.

Smith: What'd he talk about on the golf course?

Purcell: Oh, we didn't talk too much about anything. Winning and gambling. It was *golf*, golf.

Smith: I guess golf is an opportunity to clear your head of all that other stuff.

Purcell: I think that's a good way to put it. So, I've had some great times with the man and a lot of people don't know that.

Smith: Well, we've been told from very good authority: a) he thought the world of you, and b) most of the time he really appreciated your sense of humor. That's an important thing in getting a sense of anyone - what they will or won't laugh at. Tell me about his sense of humor and how you took advantage of it.

Purcell: I think you know more than you're coming off with here. Well, I'll back up, if I may.

Smith: Absolutely.

Purcell: A few months before he passed on, he wanted to see me, so I flew down to Palm Springs. I was supposed to have fifteen minutes with him according to Penny Circle, just because he's not feeling well and everything. So, I went in there.

Smith: Was this at the home?

Purcell: At the home. And, actually, it was at his home office.

Smith: The study in the house.

Purcell: Yeah. And I walked in and saluted him and he always kidded me about that. He said, "It was about time you saluted me. I was the Commander-in-Chief." And then it started. We sat down and I kept an eye on my watch and all he wanted to talk about was the old times and things that I did to him or pulled on him as a joke. The fifteen minutes cut off and I got up and said, "Well, Mr. President, I guess I've got to leave. It was nice to—" "Where are you going?" "Well, you've got things to do." "No, I don't. Sit down. We've got to talk." So, an hour and a half later, I'm still there with him laughing at me about some of the jokes I pulled and what happened. And, if I may, my favorite - and this one's hard to believe - but fortunately I have a witness to the fact that this happened. Have you run into Major Bob Barrett?

Smith: Oh, I've known Bob for years. We did great of interview with Bob.

Purcell: He lives near me in Jupiter, Florida. In fact, I just talked to him last week. He was a Major then, a Major in the Army, and he was President Ford's military aide. So, President Ford asked if I wanted to fly with him around. He was going to campaign at that time. And so I thought, "Wow, that'd be great." So he picked me up in Air Force One somewhere. I think I met him somewhere in Chicago or something like that. Then we flew to Portland and we had some laughs there. And then, flying out of Portland, we went to Medford, Oregon. And then out of Medford, Oregon, we were going to fly to El Toro Marine Base.

I was sitting up with the pilots in the jump seat and the co-pilot got up to do something. The head guy, the pilot, said, "John, sit down," so I sat down. I'm a private pilot, not with many hours, but I have my own little plane. He asked me if I wanted to fly it and I said, "Yeah, that'd be great." That isn't to say he was asleep. He had his hand on the controls and I was making turns and changed altitude. Then we got close to San Diego and he wrote down on papers and handed me these papers.

At that time, I was calling the approach control and Bob Barrett came into the cockpit. He looked, he was standing there and I'm like that and he leaves. Then he goes back in and tells the President, "You know, Purcell's flying the plane." "Okay." So, I get out of the seat and the co-pilot gets in. We land and the co-pilot gets out and opens the door and I sit back in his seat. I'm sitting here like this and I put the Colonel's hat on. I've got a pink and white golf shirt on and I've got this big helmet, a Colonel hat on. And I'm sitting and he's shutting her down and all of a sudden, the cockpit door opens and it's President Ford. He walks in and then looks at me and says, "John, great landing." And the Colonel, the pilot, I look over at him and he goes like this, like 'Oh, my God, what's this guy know?'

So, he laughed about that one. Of course, people, when I tell this story, say, "Come on, you weren't." "I was, but if you don't believe this, ask Bob Barrett." But those things and other things the President let me get away with because I did a lot of stupid things and he laughed at them.

Again, if I can continue, fast forward. He ended up calling me one time when they came into Vail. I was down at my restaurant and he said, "John, how about dinner tonight? Betty is at a social event, so why don't you and I have dinner?" "Oh, okay, I'll pick you up at 6:30" or something. "Alright." And so, I hung up and then I did my usual 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, - ring. It's the Secret Service. "John." "Yeah." I don't think it was Larry Buendorf, but it could've been Larry and those guys because he was there on his detail. He said, "Where are you taking him?" So, I thought a minute and I said, "Well, first of all, I think I'll take him to Donovan's Copper Bar," which was not a bar. And he said, "You're not going to take the President there." "Oh, he'll love it." The President comes down and picks me up and we go right across from the Red Lion - a friend of mine owned it.

We walk in and it's packed. It's in the summer time where the good old boys with the cigarettes rolled up in their sleeves and the hard hats. He strolls up to the bar and he looks at the bartender and everything quiets down and it's packed. And he goes, "Bartender, buy the house a round." I'm behind him and right at the barstool, he's wedged in between two guys. One of the guys right to his right keeps looking up at him, keeps looking at him, and I watch him. He's going to, you know, and pretty soon, he's wearing a yellow hard hat on his head and he touches the President and the President says, "Yes, can I help you, son?" "Would you sign my hard hat?" And he signed the hard hat and I would suggest today that hard hat is hanging somewhere. But it was funny the way he just went in there.

Smith: I tell you, it's a real counter to his reputation as someone who was fiscally conservative.

Purcell: Yes.

Smith: Not a big tipper as a rule.

Purcell: Yeah, but he was a lot of laughs and we had a lot of fun together and it was just amazing. My biggest thrill, when we were there, was not the "I'm-with-the-President" type of attitude, but it was people that never had an opportunity, and I'd say, "You got a minute?" And, "Joe here's Mr. President

Ford.” “Really?!” And so that’s the thing I got out of it, but there was some others. He came to me one time and said, “John, it’s come to my attention that my daughter Susan has been drinking in your bar.” Well, I kind of knew it. She was 16 then and a friend would buy a margarita and then she’d take a drink. Well, the Secret Service were there and they probably said, “Well, hey, look.” And, I’ll never forget it. I was there and I was trying to keep from laughing, but I said, “You know, Mr. President, I’m going to check into that. I don’t know!” But I knew and then I go and said, “Susan, you’re getting my butt reamed.” And pretty soon, we stopped that.

I remember on my 45th birthday, he was involved in a surprise birthday party and it was at the Marriott and a friend of mine owned that, Kaiser Morcus. A friend was at my bar and said, “Gee, nobody’s here. Let’s go and have a drink at the Marriott.” And as I was walking down the corridor, there he was standing out in front. I go, “Hi, Mr. President. How are you doing?” “I’m doing okay. What are you doing?” “I’m over here with Dick.” “Well, you can’t come in here. This is a private party.” I go, “No, I’m not trying to do that.” He really got me because I was really taken. Then he looked at me and got me in a hold around the neck. He yanks me into the room and there’s 50, 60 people singing happy birthday. But he pulled it off. It was something stupid I would do, but he got me up on that one.

Smith: I also understand that you and Bob Barrett have experience in domestic service.

Purcell: Domestic service? Uh oh.

Smith: Dressing up, perhaps, as maids?

Purcell: Oh, God. Yes. I don’t really remember that too much. But yeah.

Smith: Was this at the White House?

Purcell: Uhm, yeah, we did that at the White House. We did some funny things at the White House. I tell you what was in my memory. I was in the Oval Office, sitting there. There was a coffee table and a big sofa and then his desk was up there. I remember being there and he was on the phone with Brent Scowcroft,

General Scowcroft, and Kissinger and, oh, I've forgotten the other name. In fact, he's been in the news the last couple of years.

Smith: Rumsfeld?

Purcell: Rumsfeld, or as the President would call him, Rummy. And this is what was going down. I remember sitting there listening to him. He was saying about the *Mayaguez* incident, when the Cambodians captured the ship. He's on the phone, they had a conference call, and I'm sitting there listening to it and he goes, "I want those B-52s in the air. And I ain't coming back empty-handed, Rummy. And you guys-" He's just really on them and he's saying "I'm going in there and getting them." I'm looking down on the coffee table now and I'm doing this trying not to look. It said 'Top Secret.' I'm going "Whoops", so I was getting up and thinking, "I'd better get out of here." And he took a break and said, "John, sit down." So, I'm sitting down like this and the joke was "I got to get out to the press room." "Okay, guys, give me a little dough and I'll tell you what's going on." But it was exciting to be there. Just by accident, I'm sitting in the Oval Office and I remember being in there with my feet up on the desk and had a cigar. I don't smoke. And to have my feet up in the Oval Office and sitting back and he came in.

But, you know, he let me get away with all that and most of it is somewhat unbelievable, I guess. Some people might say, "Come on." There was one little episode that we had in Sun Valley. We played in a tournament there, I forget the name of it, but a baseball player, Ralph Harding, I think. No, Ralph Harding was a congressman. I was there with Tip O'Neill and Bob Barrett, President Ford. So, we're sitting in the carts, our cart and the President with Tip O'Neill. And Tip O'Neill is from Boston. I've got to watch myself - I'm starting to talk like this is about me, but it just shows some of the funny things that he let me get away with. And I sat there and I was looking. I looked down in the golf cart - where they put these drinks was five or six cigars. I'm sitting there and I say, "Mr. President" and he said, "Oh, those are Tip's." "Oh, okay." So, anyway, Tip is out there and Ford gets up to do it and I grab the cigars and take the cigars. We get further on the second hole and he's talking to President Ford and he says, "God dang it, Jerry. God. I left my

cigars in the room. Aw damn.” I come in and I go, “Oh, Mr. Speaker, have one of mine.” Well, I did that for about three holes and Barrett tipped him off. And, on the last cigar, Tip O’Neill was telling about how great guys we are from Boston, Irish and everything. “Oh, yeah.” “Yeah, we stick together, kid.” And I look over and President Ford’s got his hand on his face and he’s shaking his head and he brought that up on my last meeting about that. The cigar trick, you know. “Oh, have one of mine,” and I’d stolen them.

Smith: He and Tip were clearly very close.

Purcell: Oh, as a matter of fact, Tip was sitting there talking like that and he was saying what kind of good friends they were and he said, “But, you know, when I get down in Congress, I’ll kick his ass just like anybody else. But he’s a good pal of mine, John.” And they were. It was a great relationship that they had.

Smith: Clearly, a relationship built on trust.

Purcell: Yeah.

Smith: Which is seemingly missing today. It’s not so much ideological differences as people just don’t trust each other.

Purcell: I know it. It seems that way, doesn’t it?

Smith: Let me ask you one thing because one of the banes of his existence - and I’m sure it’s true for any celebrity, certainly for former Presidents - was autograph seekers.

Purcell: Yes.

Smith: And my sense was he was very good about it most of the time, except when he saw the professionals, the collectors. And he could spot those, how did he handle his celebrity?

Purcell: Well, you know, I’m trying to think of any type of incident that happened when I was with him and the Secret Service were standing off. If I’d seen it and my relation grew to a point where I felt that I had the right to do it, “Excuse me, sir. Not now. He’s playing golf.” Or “No, sir, he’s having a

drink or having dinner.” He’d be in my restaurant and I made sure no one bothered him, but he was really a generous guy on that. I mean, I don’t see any incident that he sloughed people off.

Smith: We talked to people who said one of the wonderful things about Vail – generally, this area - was that the locals tended to leave him alone.

Purcell: That’s a true story. That is true. They did. But, you know, I’ll sit there trying to think of some of the other funny things that he did and I’m drawing a blank.

Smith: Over those years, among other things, you saw he became friends with Jimmy Carter. That was something that no one could’ve predicted in ’76. There’s the famous incident when Bill Clinton came out and golfed here. Did he talk about Richard Nixon?

Purcell: You know, I guess I’ve got to be careful here, but I would tell you this and everybody would say remember, “Oh God, he pardoned Richard Nixon. God, that was awful.” And his whole philosophy was it was good for the whole country. My opinion - I don’t think he liked Richard Nixon. That’s the way I perceived it. So, when people would start bad rapping him for it, he didn’t like Richard Nixon, so that was no sweetheart deal.

Smith: You’re not the first person to say that. I’m wondering, because President Ford has reputed to have said in later years that Richard Nixon never thanked him for the pardon. That’s a revealing comment and Ford was such an honest guy, he was genuinely shocked that Nixon lied to him.

Purcell: Yeah. I couldn’t comment on whether he said that, but I think you’re right on some of the part there.

Smith: I’ve often thought whether in a curious sort of way, maybe one of the things that brought him and Jimmy Carter together was they’d both run against Ronald Reagan.

Purcell: Yeah.

Smith: They had that in common.

Purcell: He had a nephew that used to come out and had some liaison between him named Hugh Carter. And I got to know him a little bit. You know, it was an interesting relationship because at the funeral, Jimmy Carter was there and he spoke. And I sat there and it was quite nice what he said, you know. I mean, to take the time, because a lot of other people didn't show up, but he did. That was interesting.

Smith: I can't let you go without at least asking about the maids story.

Purcell: I don't recall too much about that.

Smith: Okay.

Purcell: I don't.

Smith: Does Barrett have these brainstorm or was it mutual spontaneous combustion?

Purcell: Yes! It was Barrett's fault! Yes, I think that occurred at Bass House. I don't remember. Oh, God. But, if I could stray just a second, again, I want to apologize for talking about myself and Barrett, but just to show you how ridiculous some of the stuff was. Bill Gulley, did that name ever come up to you?

Smith: Yes.

Purcell: He was the head of all the Air Force One and he was a Sergeant Marine and had his office at the White House. So, Barrett and I were always kind of playing funny jokes on him and Ford was always laughing, you know, are we going to get Gulley? I said, "Yeah." So, we went in. Now, people you didn't want, we found a ladder and we got up into the ceiling of the White House. It was this big and they had a little ramp down there, a walkway, so we walked down and figured out where Gulley was sitting back with his feet up on the desk watching a Notre Dame game. So, the ceiling was about, I'm going to guess, twelve feet and we found where his office was and pulled out the tile. Bob had me by the feet and I was hanging down through. Now, President Ford's version of this is a little different. So, I'm hanging down and I go, "What's the score?" Gulley looks around like this, "Notre Dame's getting

killed!” Looks up and goes, “Jesus! What are you doing?” And we pulled back.

Smith: Hi jinks.

Purcell: I mean, we acted like teenagers. You know, we’d just run around the place and then Ford invited me to a state dinner. Now, that’s the joke, you know. I mean, me at a state dinner? I remember him calling me and saying, “You want to come back for the Prime Minister of Ireland?” “Me? Okay!” So, I go back and I stayed with them, but the table he put me at - I’m sitting with the Kennedys.

Smith: Really?

Purcell: Yeah, I go, “How’d I get in here?” But, he took care of me like that. With Teddy and Caroline and a couple other guys, but it was a big thrill to say, “Well, I’ve been to a state dinner.” But it was only because of Ford. Why would he go out of his way to do it? But he was always trying to pull the wool over my eyes, too.

Smith: Really?

Purcell: Well, yeah, in a lot of things. I mean, it’s been so long that I forget some of them.

Smith: I guess, a better idea of his sense of humor, because his reputation was of someone who wasn’t a natural joke teller. But he would laugh at someone else’s joke.

Purcell: Yeah. Yeah, he would. It was just fun, the things we did. And we raised a lot of money for all those charities that we had and everything.

Smith: And then he decided after, I guess, twenty years to end it.

Purcell: Yes, I left after twelve and Bob Barrett took it over and he ran it. You know, it ran its course. It’s just a great time. I took a lot of my time and traveled talking to the pros and stuff. Jack Nicklaus was a big help to me.

Smith: They were really friends, weren’t they?

Purcell: Yeah, they became friends through the Ford tournament. Jack and I still play a little golf. He lives near me. In fact, I'm going July 24th to his 50th anniversary. Have you talked to Nicklaus?

Smith: We have not, no. That's someone we should talk to.

Purcell: You should, because every time I call him, well, he moved here because of it. He had a home right here, a big log home. And I could call him on President Ford and he'd say, "Oh, yeah, I'm there." In fact, to show you what kind of a good friend he is, he called, and with Ford, I had, I guess, the privilege of him calling me when I was going to the funeral and he said, "If you want, you can ride up with me." I was making my reservations to fly up to the funeral and I rode up in Jack's Gulfstream, which was nice. And he was a pall bearer. But he's got some stories and I know if you'd call him, he'd be an interesting guy to talk to. If you have any trouble, I'll talk to him. And if you have the time, he's in Palm Beach, but he's a very accommodating person.

Smith: That's great.

Purcell: And it'd be some nice stuff to come out of there, I think.

Smith: Now, tell me, you must've gotten to know Mrs. Ford during this period as well.

Purcell: Oh, yeah.

Smith: Was there anything about her that surprised you as you first made her acquaintance?

Purcell: No, the great picture I sent back and the Secret Service went bonkers over it. She came down to the restaurant and I had a little motorcycle. I said, "Do you want to go ride the motorcycle?" She got on the back and I'm driving around on the motorcycle where they're in the Secret Service. And she did that. But the one great statement that came out of Betty Ford was because of the Betty Ford Center and her knowing me, "You know, John, there'll always be a bed for you at the Betty Ford Center." So, I never took her up on it.

Smith: She had a great sense of humor.

- Purcell: Oh, yeah. I mean, to hop on and she's got a dress on and she's riding on the back of my motorcycle and I'm going through Lion's Head.
- Smith: It's funny because it's a classic opposites attract. I mean, he was such a punctual guy, a stickler for it. And, of course, she was exactly the opposite.
- Purcell: Yeah, I would say that seems to be a good analogy of them. I had some great times and, you know, when I come back to Vail now and naturally nothing ever stays the same. It's got big buildings, big traffic problems. Then it was just a frontier town when we were here and we just did everything.
- Smith: My sense is that they were very visible, very active, very much participants in the community.
- Purcell: Oh yeah, there was never anything that "I can't go there." It was "We're going to go to Pepe's and sit on the porch and have a couple of drinks." It was "Alright. I'll meet you there." And, a matter of fact, during the Ford tournament, I asked them if we could have one of the parties at his house, at the Bass House. "Sure!" So, we had 200 players. Here we go. And everybody's at the Bass House and he's hosting the thing. So, you know, it was just a great thrill.
- Smith: Tell me about the house that they built, because we haven't been there.
- Purcell: Mitch Hoyt was the contractor. He built four homes there. Leonard Firestone's, President Ford's, Dee Keaton, and Kaiser Morcus, who I talked to last week. He lives in Palm Springs now.
- Smith: Yes, we've talked to Kaiser.
- Purcell: Did you? Yes, he's a character and Ford had a lot of fun making fun of him. We put a little name on him. He's about 5'4" and looks like Tattoo from Fantasy Island. You know, "The plane! The plane!" And even Ford was doing that to him, which was funny. But those four houses were built by Mitch Hoyt and they were big homes. They're right here, as you know. It was neat to go there.
- Smith: Did they do a lot of entertaining?

- Purcell: You know, I can't recall if they did.
- Smith: For example, the World Forum, when that took place here, presumably there would be entertaining. And that's another thing. You talk about opposites. I mean, politically, Jim Callaghan, who's an old line from the Socialist Labor Party; Giscard, who's kind of lofty and aristocratic and French; Helmut Schmidt who's certainly far to the left of Ford politically and yet, they seemed to absolutely bond.
- Purcell: You know, I couldn't comment on that because, you know, I stayed away at certain events like that. That's not me. "I'll see you on the golf course." I didn't do that.
- Smith: Was he sensitive to the whole caricature, the Chevy Chase thing? I mean, a guy who was such a natural athlete - did it bother him?
- Purcell: I don't think it did. You know, who was the Texan that was the vice president?
- Smith: LBJ was the vice president under Kennedy.
- Purcell: That's right. He took a shot at him, too. I'll never forget that, but here's the fact of what kind of athlete he was. You couldn't touch him off the tee when he was hitting it. It was always like as they kid 'long and wrong', but he could smack it. I mean, I got people that are good players that were going, "Sheesh." His putter was his weak point.
- Smith: Did he ever get a hole in one?
- Purcell: I was with him when he did. He made a hole in one and I can't recall, it might've been in Palm Springs. I can't recall where it was, but it went left and hit a branch and kicked it right and it went in the hole. Needless to say, being the jerk I am, he had to buy the drinks. We didn't let him off.
- Smith: What was his reaction?
- Purcell: Oh, God. At first he was kind of in shock. And then he started laughing. I go, "Thank God for that tree!" But I was with him. That was a lot of fun.

Smith: Did you see him around his kids?

Purcell: Yeah, he was a good dad. Susan and I became very good friends. In fact, I've seen her not too long ago and we talked. She moved from Albuquerque and now she's living in, seems like, not Kentucky, but—

Smith: Oklahoma.

Purcell: Oklahoma. That's right. And we talked about that, she had some health issues that were scary. But she was a lot of fun, too. I knew Mike and Jack, but Steve and I played a little golf. I remember we were down in Florida at Jupiter. And Barrett's with me and Steve's there and we're in some bar right on the ocean and we decide to call his mother. And he calls and he says, "Mom, guess who I'm with?" and he hands me the phone. She says, "Oh, my God, my son's with you and Barrett's there?" "Yep." "Oh, my God, not you two again!" That was one of the last things.

Smith: Have you had any contact with her since the President died?

Purcell: Nope.

Smith: Have you talked with her at all?

Purcell: I did at the funeral, but I was very standoffish. I came up and did my thing and backed off. I was more depressed than anybody at the thing. I just couldn't handle it. I couldn't handle it.

Smith: Were you surprised by the amount of public reaction that there was? You know, he'd been out of the public eye for awhile and yet, it almost seemed to build as the week went on.

Purcell: You know, I don't know. I have to say because I was prejudiced and I'd expect that.

Smith: But it must've been nice to hear all the nice things that were said.

Purcell: Yes. You know, there was one thing I forgot to tell you about Jack Nicklaus on Gerald Ford. When Gerald Ford lost, you know, he'd lost Ohio by that much. And I'd seen Jack and he was visibly upset and he's mad. And he

said, "John, all I had to do was throw those golf clubs aside for thirty days and we would've won Ohio." He was upset about not doing that. That really caught me because you don't see Jack mad too much and he was mad.

Smith: That's a great story. That last meeting you had with him, did you know that was going to be your last meeting?

Purcell: I walked out the door and I started thinking and I think I stood there and my wife was with me and I was upset. I was upset and she drove. I couldn't drive. So, it looked not good to me. I kept saying, "You know, you always look back at things and say, 'This will be the last time I'll ever see this place' or 'This is the last time I'll see them.'" You know, when you walk out of, like, Dee Keaton, you never heard of him, but I'll tell you this and I would challenge anybody that would say it. Dee Keaton was President Ford's hero and mine. This guy was one of the four, but he ran the Ford tournament and there was a lot about this man that was unbelievable.

Smith: Tell us about him.

Purcell: He's passed on.

Smith: Yeah. Who was he and why was he significant?

Purcell: He was a guy that Ford got to know and he helped President Ford on many things. Politically, I don't know, but I know that Dee Keaton knew Richard Nixon and helped him on his campaign. He wasn't a political guy, but he was a very close friend to Leonard Firestone. And then he was an oil guy, became an oil guy, and he won the AT&T, the Bing Crosby in 1974 with Hale Irwin and he was a golfer and everything. But he was one of the most influential guys of my life and I think I can say that about the President what he thought about him. If it's a problem "Let's call Dee." "Let Dee do that." "Call Dee" on anything and Dee was there.

Smith: That's interesting. Who were his friends?

Purcell: Uhm, who was his friends? Gosh, I can just say Dee and Leonard Firestone. He liked Kaiser and, of course, Bob worked for him. God, I'm trying to think. The Bass boys, he knew them. He had a couple in town like the

Gramschammers, he liked Pepe and Shieka and Bill Hanlon and he just knew those guys.

Smith: Did you ever hear him disparage anyone? Obviously, he had contact with an awful lot of people, political folks and others. Were there people he really—

Purcell: He never talked to me about them. I mean, I might have heard a God damn, but, you know, I never talked like that.

Smith: He was basically a very positive person, wasn't he?

Purcell: Yeah, he was. And, you know, what can I say? Look at me, I always say "Where did you live in Massachusetts?" when people ask me. And I said, "Well, my address was 101 Tobacco Road" because we were Tobacco Roaders and now very poor people. One other thing, he and Betty invited my mom to the White House. She came down and went through and everything. It was the biggest thrill of her life. She'd never been out of Boston and then to get what this guy did for me, I mean, I'm in Air Force One. I'm at the White House. I mean, "Excuse me. What are you doing here?" You know, it was just wild. Great experience. And, so, I walked down three or four days ago and I walked by and I know where his house at the lodge was and then, you know, where he stayed. It was just yesterday, I walked down the street and it was just memories. I don't know a lot. I know the Gramshammers. I know a lot of people, but you think, "Oh God, remember what...?" And it was funny how it comes and gets me. Walk by the Bass House and I'd sit there and I'd think, "God dang it" and now everything's gone. But nothing's forever.

Smith: But think of the memories you have. That's pretty precious.

Purcell: Oh, boy, you know, it's that famous song by Tommy Edwards "It's only the good times we remember."

Smith: How do you think he should be remembered?

Purcell: Oh, God, I mean, I'd have to say as a man that brought a lot of laughs, a lot of enjoyment to a lot of people. And he was not a cheapskate. He wouldn't be running around. I can say and I worked for Clint Eastwood for twelve years,

he was a friend of mine, and there's very few Hollywood guys that I haven't met and politicians and athletes because of my Carmel connections and everything, I know them all, and here's my one thing. If you like them on the screen, don't meet them. But, with Gerald Ford, there was a guy that "John, you're not picking up this tab. Step aside. I got the tab." Where, the Hollywoodies in most cases, you pick up the tab for the right to hang out with me. And I learned that. So, him, no. And if he'd seen me doing something, he'd get a little testy with me if he thought I was spending money that I shouldn't have been on him.

Smith: And how do you think she should be remembered?

Purcell: You know, I just think of her at the Betty Ford Center and how kind and sincere. She was sincere. It wasn't, you know, like celebrities can get, "Hi, how you doing?" No, she would focus on people and "Now, what happened?" you know. And that's what she was. And, to me, she always said, "Hi, John!" And she sent a great picture to my mom with her and Betty and my mother's name was Betty. And she just was always concerned. "How's your mom?" You know, so it wasn't, "Me, me, me". It was, "John,..." I've seen it with other people. "How's she?" and in town and everything. So, she was and is a nice lady now and long in her years and everything and stuff. I see one thing where I missed the boat. I was down at his house when I was down there and he asked me because he was a swimmer and I'm a swimmer, he said, "John, do you have—" and I had to go. And I said I should have stayed. "John, The doctors said I can't swim without somebody. Would you swim with me?" And I was the last one to swim with him. He did the laps on the pool. I missed the boat.

Smith: This is perfect. Thank you so much.

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