

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Leon Parma
1st Interview by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: Well, first of all, thank you for doing this. Tell us how your paths originally crossed with Gerald and Betty Ford.

Parma: In 1958 a very dear friend of mine, Bob Wilson, having been elected when Eisenhower was elected in '52, as a member of Congress from San Diego, asked me if I would come back and be his chief of staff. I was on a fast track in management with a significant company in San Diego. I said, Bob, that's going to take me off this track. Ed Terrar been with him for five years and wanted to come home. Earlier Bob had actually hired me out of San Diego State to be the executive manager of the San Diego Junior Chamber of Commerce, of which he was president. We established a nice relationship during that time. I eventually said, Bob, I'll go back for a year. And he said, fine. He said, I just think you ought to have this exposure – it's a terrific experience. I ended up staying five years. It was so interesting. I would get on the red-eye right now and fly back do it again in a whisper. It was the most enjoyable five years I've ever spent. It affected my whole life in many ways.

Significantly, during that time, Bob Wilson became part of the leadership. He was chairman of the Republican National Congressional Committee, which was the elective side of the House –to elect members of Congress. Being in leadership, my path crossed with other leaders. The '58 Congressional elections were a debacle for us. We lost a lot of seats. The Young Turks, Bob Wilson, Mel Laird, were members of a little group called SOS. Every class that goes into Washington, 10-15 members of each party may meet once a week, and they select from different committees and get a briefing on thousands of bills that are in, and try to find out what is happening on legislation. That's the way they keep in touch. This was a responsible group of men and they got together. I'm just reading Mel Laird's book *With Honor* now, and Mel spends considerable time on this, on how they had to change leadership.

In 1958, Joe Martin, the former speaker, the minority leader. Sam Rayburn and Joe had dinner together every night at the Occidental Hotel. You could always tell what they had for dinner because Joe had it on his tie. He always wore the same tie and it

was thick. Sam pretty well got what he wanted from Joe. The Republican members were concerned that they were being led around, and obviously, they weren't winning back the House. So Bob Wilson had a meeting in our office, of probably five or six members. This was November, after the election. A lot of members had not returned to the capital. Everyone was deeply concerned so they said, let's meet tomorrow and get more members in. They got more members in, and Bob said, better get over to the Congressional Hotel and get a room over there. The end result was that they settled on, first, that Jerry Ford should be the replacement for Joe Martin. And so there was a meeting in Jerry Ford's office and he said I'm not going to seek the office, I'll take it, if you offer it. If it's available, but I'm not going to...

Smith: Let me interrupt you because I'm confused, because I know Charley Halleck...

Parma: That was later.

Smith: Okay.

Parma: What happened was that they went to Ford. He'd shown his skills. He was not quite the old-timer guy, and he was a little older than these Young Turks. He'd come in 1948. So at that meeting he said I'm not going to fight for it, I'll take it if it is available. Les Arends and those fellows found out about it. So the old foxes got together, they controlled the committee placements, and they started to point out realities to these Young Turks. If you guys lose, hope you enjoy being on the district committee. And things like that. The result is that they switched from Ford, obviously they didn't have the votes, and Halleck got the job. Then there was another revolution later. Halleck was replaced somebody else. But at any rate, in the course of that, I met Jerry Ford.

Our paths would cross the five years that we were there. As Bob's leadership stature grew, so did the chief of staff's. Being close friends, he took me to a lot of meetings that normally a staff guy wouldn't be in. As an example, the first day on the job, he did two things. Number one, he had *The New York Times*, *The Post*, *LA Times*, and the San Diego paper, and he said, "Look at the bylines on all of these." Washington, Washington, New York, something else, Washington. Washington dominated on almost every newspaper. He said, this is where it is happening. I said, yeah, okay, I follow you. And the other thing he did was to say I need to go down and see Jerry

Persons at the White House. I said, you want me to call General Jerry Persons, chief of staff to Dwight D. Eisenhower? And he says, yes, just call him up. He's a nice guy.

So I called down there. "I'd like to speak to General Persons, please." I identified myself as being with Bob. Persons got on the phone and said, "Hi, Leon. How are you? This is Jerry Persons. What can I do for you?"

"My boss wants to come down and see you."

He said, "Fine, what time is convenient for you? You tell me when the Congressman wants to come down and I'll be available." And I said, "Okay," and we agreed on a time. "You coming down, too?" and I said, no, I don't think I'll be down.

"Well, you ought to come down with him. Be nice to meet you."

I didn't go, but the end result was, no matter who the man was, you could talk to him. It held good throughout the time. But it was an interesting little byplay that Bob had. I often accused him of setting it up with Persons. No, I didn't set it up, but he actually played the role very well.

Smith: Why do you think Ford didn't go in '58?

Parma: I think he saw that these fellows had the capability of organizing themselves and winning. And I don't think he wanted to be a loser. He became the winner. He replaced Halleck, that's how it happened.

Smith: Tell me about that combat, because there is some uncertainty as to how eager he was to jump into that fray.

Parma: I think that he wasn't dragged kicking and screaming into it, but Charlie's effectiveness waned, primarily because he was a heavy drinker, I think. There used to be Charlie's Seminar's – a meeting that he would have every day in the late afternoon. They would sit in there and he would bring young guys in and have a tutorial.

Smith: Was the alcohol more a part of the lifestyle then than in later years?

- Parma: I would say that there was a lot of drinking. Every meeting he ever had, particularly in the evening. I didn't see a lot of it at noon time, but if you went downtown, it was a martini, or two martini deal.
- Smith: People tend to romanticize, Rayburn, the board of education and all that. From the days of Harry Truman on. You wonder if there is a little more to it.
- Parma: They had a poker club. I'm using up my own time here, but I went with the President one time on a trip, I was never a part of anything, I was on the transition committee. Phil Buchen told me that Ford wanted me to be on the transition committee. So I was on that and I'd come back...
- Smith: This was after he became president, or before he became president?
- Parma: After he became president. I got the call a day before Nixon resigned. Bob Hartmann called me and he said, "The boss said you ought to get on an airplane and get back here, things are going to happen." A sidebar to that, the vice president had been in San Diego to make a speech early August, first or second, a few days before all of this happened. We were in a Town and Country hotel, I'd gone down, that's near my home. Whenever he was in town, we'd go down and get together. I was up in the suite with him and he said, I need to take a shower, so he went in the shower. The phone rang. It was Al Haig. He asked if the vice president was there and I said yes he is, he's taking a shower. "I need to talk to him." I said, "You want me to get him out of the shower?" He said, "No, when he gets out, please have him call me right away." Ford got out of the shower and I told him Al had called and he said, okay, get him on the phone. So I picked up red phone and said, "Get Al Haig on the phone." Al came on and I said, "Just a minute," and I put Ford on. They talked briefly and all I heard was Ford's side. "Well now," he said, "I'm going back as soon as I finish this speech – I'm getting on the airplane and going back. I'll be in my office at eight o'clock tomorrow." He hung up and Ford looked at me and said, "I think this is it." And it was. It was when the smoking gun story was told to him the next day, I think.
- Smith: Was he surprised?
- Parma: No.
- Smith: Do he come to expect it?

Parma: Yes. There was no question in his mind that it probably would happen. There's too much pressure going on. Barry Goldwater taking a group down to the White House. You need to resign – you can't go through this. We don't want you to go through it. We want you out of here, in effect.

Smith: Clearly from the day he became vice president there were people in this town who thought that that was the inevitable sequel. Tom DeFrank in his book makes a big deal out of this alleged slip of the tongue. Did you ever hear anything like that?

Parma: No. Not really. We would talk. I tried to be the non-political, non-government friend. We'd talk football. Not too many years ago we played golf and were sitting down talking afterwards and he said, "You know, we've played a lot of golf together." I said, "Yes, we have." He said, "How many rounds do you think we played?" So we went back and started pulling together something between 250-300 rounds of golf.

I started to tell you, he'd come out to San Diego to make this speech for Clare Borgener Afterwards we went over to the desert. Red Blake, the old Army coach, had asked him to come over and play golf. So Ford invited me to come over and play golf. My wife has deep roots in Palm Springs. Her great grandfather was, in effect, the first white man in Palm Springs. He later became the Indian agent. So we spent part of our lives down there. My dad had worked down there in the Thirties as a deputy sheriff, so I lived there for two years in the Thirties year 'round. It was hotter than hell. Anyway, we went down and we played golf. Red's regular golf partner was Frank Capra, the old movie director. The four of us played golf practically every day for a week. Ford said, "This was really fun. We ought to do this next year." I said, "Fine, we'd love to do that." He always called me around Christmas-New Year's. "Do you have things set up on the desert?" he'd call. "Yeah, I'll get a place for us to live." And he said, "And we'll pay half of it!" I said, "Okay, I'll send you half the bill." I went out and rented a house – we played at Eldorado, and I rented one of the bungalows. Betty and he would come out, and Barbara and I would share our house. That was around '63-'64. We did it every spring. It was during the spring recess. He'd come out and we'd play golf for a week. Our partners were Frank and Red Blake. Bob Hope found out we were down there. And Ford being on the appropriations committee, Bob was always tuned into making sure that he got the

military planes and all for his trips. He needed friends like Ford on appropriations who wouldn't complain about the money it was costing to send him out to these trips. Bob made it a business. He'd come back and he'd have a show of "My Visit to Wherever." So, Bob started playing with us.

Smith: What was the chemistry between the two of them?

Parma: Very good. Absolutely perfect.

Smith: Was Hope funny?

Parma: Always. His mannerisms, his language, he played a good game of golf. He'd hum going up to hit the ball. But his relationship with Ford was extraordinary. All through the whole time they knew each other and Ford was his foil. He had a hundred stories. Ford used to collect the stories he'd tell on him, and he'd always open his speech with one or two of the Hope stories.

Smith: Similar to the role he played with Ev Dirksen, on the Ev and Jerry Show.

Parma: It had been the Charlie and Ev Show. And then Ford replaced him.

Smith: How did Dirksen feel about losing Halleck and having this new guy?

Parma: I don't know, personally. But it seemed the transition was very good. Two guys from the Midwest and Charlie Halleck being from Indiana – there wasn't much change.

Smith: Seemingly opposites. Dirksen was the most theatrical, satirizing ham.

Parma: Beautiful voice. But Ford credited us for being the reason he was on the desert.

Smith: What is your sense of Mrs. Ford at that time?

Parma: My responsibility when we came out was to fix up the rack on the bed. She would sleep in this collar that went back to this rack and had a weight on it. When she went to bed at night, she had this collar on, with this thing stretching her out because *she had a terrible back pain*. Now how the heck do you do this, Betty? Isn't there some way to get around having to use this? She was obviously taking some medication to ease the pain. She had this back problem and actually slept with tension on her neck (pinches nerve in neck).

We always would have a martini or two before we'd go to dinner. She never schmoozed during the day, to my knowledge. Barbara didn't drink at all.

Ford and I would leave in the morning and come back after we played eighteen, sometimes thirty-six holes. Barb and Betty would lay out by the pool, go shopping, do the girl things that they would find time to do. It wasn't very noticeable to me. It became more so later, where she had difficulty getting to places on time. Early on there was not a lot of evidence of it.

They had a wonderful relationship. When they left White House and came out, he built a house on the thirteenth hole of Thunderbird. He kept telling me, you need to get a house down there. I said, I don't need a house. When we come down, we can stay with Barbara's Aunt Pearl. We don't have a problem, we have a house. One day he called up and said, "I'm looking at the house you've got to buy." And I said, "I don't want to buy a house down there." He said, "I'm looking at it right now, it's over about the hundred and fifty yard mark of the 12th hole. I can see it. Think about it, if you are there I can call out and say, look, I've got an hour and a half, why don't you come over and I'll meet you at the thirteenth tee, we'll play the backside."

So I finally sent a guy over and told him to buy the house. It was in an estate sale in court.

Smith: Was there ever any doubt about where they would go after leaving the White House?

Parma: I think there was a lot of discussion that they should go back to Grand Rapids. They loved the desert and they were immediately accepted, obviously, within the desert community – what we call Down Desert. We were ten or fifteen miles away from Palm Springs, in the area recently developed – recent being the last thirty-forty years. Away from Palm Springs proper.

Smith: Which had its share of celebrities.

Parma: Oh, yeah. On Thunderbird Bing Crosby was member, Bob Hope, Randy Scott, Hogie Carmichael, Phil Harris, Desi Arnaz - some of them were members. He never interfaced with them. I remember we had a 90th birthday party for Phil Harris. It was the only golf course in town, early on, built in the early Fifties.

Smith: There are those who thought, when he lost the 1976 election, that it took a while for him to bounce back.

Parma: He came so close. He asked me to take care of California. He kept calling me, he'd say, "Are we all right?" I'd say, "You're going to win California, don't worry about it." Not in the primary, but in the general election. In the primary we knew Reagan would take it, but we put an energized effort on just to keep Reagan coming back to California to make sure he wasn't losing. I was able to get a couple of people out of his so-called kitchen cabinet, Henry Salvatori, principally, to come over for Ford. But, Reagan was strong in California. We weren't going to beat the former governor of California. But we carried it in the general.

A couple of things that hurt him: the pardon was the key factor. People couldn't forget and they couldn't believe that there was no deal or something else. And obviously the opposition played on that. Another one was the debate in San Francisco. Which, I understood what he said, and it didn't offend me. I think Henry understood, because Henry called him. There was a partner in a principle law firm in San Francisco, and we'd gone over there after the debate. Henry got him there and told him what a great debate it was and how well he'd done. The Polish reference, that they were not under the domination of the Soviets, he'd been there. From Helsinki he had gone over and they were a million people lined up throwing flowers and the rest of it. What he was saying was, "There might be there, but not up in their heads and hearts." And I don't know why they couldn't get that message back to the press.

Smith: If only he'd said that. I went back and checked. In fact, on that trip he had visited Poland, he had visited Romania, and one other Communist bloc country. I think he mentioned all three in his response, but he just left out the key words, "I've been there, I've seen it myself."

Parma: That's right. "I had million people lining the streets watching me."

Smith: That's when he got stubborn.

Parma: We went down to USC from San Francisco. We flew down on Air Force One, to USC where he made a speech. The press was all over him. The first question was, "How can you say this?" And then he got really stubborn. I've never gone back to

see the transcripts of it, but he stiffened up good. He was not going to yield on it. They even had the head of the Polish Federation in America come out and visit him. Then later at Glendale or someplace, I remember he was standing in a parking lot doing a press conference and he kind of put it to bed then, I think. I've never seen that transcript.

Smith: I have. I think it was Stu Spencer or someone else, got to him.

Parma: Stu was beside himself, because they knew the impact of this thing. Carter was making a fool out of him with this statement. It was a terrible thing.

Smith: What about that stubbornness?

Parma: That was it.

Smith: That was part of his character:

Parma: I would see him on the golf course. He wouldn't yield on something. "Don't hit the wood. Maybe you ought to hit the wedge or something to get out of this thing." No he'd go for the fairway wood. He did have a stubborn streak. I don't know what caused it.

Smith: Was he able to move beyond that loss? Particularly in the first few months?

Parma: He did not dwell on it. I knew that he was hurt. Give me nine thousand votes election night and he's president. That's how close it was. Just selectively. And the other part of it was that, had Reagan helped him – Reagan refused to help – Reagan never mentioned the President by name, nor did he mention the President, per se, in any speech in 1976. Lyn Nofziger was a good friend of mine, we'd come to Washington on the same day and ended up at the same banquet – the California Society banquet with Bob Wilson. Lyn covered our office for the *San Diego Evening Tribune*. After the election, I told them, if you guys had worked a little bit, done a little bit for us in Louisiana and couple of other states, we would have won this thing. "Oh, I don't know that you would have, that's the luck." I said, "I'll give you a thousand bucks for anytime, over three times, including the third one, that Reagan mentioned Ford, if you'll give me a thousand dollars for the first two that he did mention him." He wouldn't take the bet. But he never mentioned him by name. I could have said, with any time beginning with first two. He might have mentioned him once some place.

- Smith: Do you think that led to a coolness in later years between the two?
- Parma: It was. The convention in Kansas City was very contentious. It was very close, right down to Wyoming, just a couple of states before. Reagan was so disappointed, that he never got over losing that. During that convention William French Smith came to me and said, "The Governor would like to have an access to the President, other than through Sears or anybody else who is working on this campaign. Do you think President Ford would do that?" I said, "Well, I'll ask him." So I asked Ford, I said, "Reagan wants to have some way of contacting you, kind of through the back door, and I think Bill Smith will probably be his guy. What are you thinking?" He said, "I don't know why we need that." I said, "Well, I don't either, but that's what he's asking. So tell me yes or no." He said, "Okay, well, we'll do it. You tell Smith to contact you." So Smith and I would meet practically every day.
- Smith: This is during the convention?
- Parma: During the convention. I asked Evelle Younger, who was the attorney general of California, to join me in those meetings because I wanted to make sure that I wasn't hoodwinked on some deal, and Evelle was an old political guy, so he sat in on the meetings. We'd generally meet in my room – sit on the bed and talk. Nothing substantive came from it until the last day when Bill said, "The Governor wants to be sure that the President doesn't ask him to be the vice president." He was very adamant about it. "He doesn't want to say no to the President. And he'd rather not have that question posed to him." At the same time Sears was telling that to Cheney, that when he comes over, we don't ask him that question. So I relayed that to the President, and he said, "Tell him not to worry." I said, okay. So I told Smith later in the day, the question won't be asked. He said, well, that's fine, he'll probably go ahead with it.
- Smith: Ironic, isn't it, because in later years there was at least a kind of a wink and nod in an attempt to suggest that, 'oh, well, if Ford had asked, Reagan wouldn't have had any choice but to say yes.'
- Parma: Absolutely. There are two instances that occurred. The President was making a speech in Sacramento. It was before the one that Squeaky Fromme tried to get him. Justin Dart was waiting for us to come in. Outside this hall in Sacramento he nailed

me. He said, "I need to talk to you," and he pulled this letter out of his pocket and said, "I sent this letter to the President and I told him to ask Ronnie to be the vice president." I said, "I never saw the letter, that was contrary to everything that we were told." He said, "Well, I felt we had him primed to take it," and I said, "Well, who was going to take care of Nancy?" Because she was very dominant, I think, in that decision. He said, "We were going to take care of Nancy." I said, "Is she was going to be out of the room? Is that it? What were you going to do?" He said, "Well, that's it – it's all over now of course, but I had to just make my point that the President should have asked him."

During the campaign we had a meeting at one of the hotels near LAX on Century Blvd going down to the airport. We were waiting for Dole to come in. Ford wasn't there. I was sitting with Holmes Tuttle and all of his entourage that were part of the Reagan cabinet. Margaret Brock was there and I forget who else. I was sitting next to Holmes Tuttle, who was Reagan's key guy, supporter. Holmes said, "You guys really screwed it up when he didn't ask Reagan to be the vice president." I said, "Holmes, we were told, in no uncertain terms, that he was not to be the vice president." And he said, "The other thing was, you didn't make the call." I said, "What call?" Holmes said, "Well, after the election, Ford never called Ronnie."

Smith: After the nomination?

Parma: After the nomination leading up to the election. I said, "We were specifically told," and this was another thing that Smith came to me and said, "You cannot let the President call Reagan, because he won't take the call." I said, "You've got to be kidding me. If the President calls Reagan, he won't take the call?" "No," he said, "I've never seen anybody so hurt in all my life as Reagan and Nancy, the disappointment that he lost this election in the convention. But, you absolutely can't let him make the call."

I said, "Do you know how extraordinary it is to say that?" He said, "Well, he's not going to take the call." I went to Ford and told him that, and he said, "Well, if that's what he wants, that's what he wants," not thinking much about what's to follow. I have notes on this. In fact, I asked Bill Smith if he would serve on this little select committee that we had with Rogers, Morton, Rockefeller's guy, and couple of other people. We had about five or six guys. I asked Ford, "Just until we have some

continuity with Reagan, so he knows what we're doing, let's put Bill Smith on this group." So he said fine. We'd meet at the Mayflower and Smith would come in, and each time he came in, I'd say, "Time to call him?" Smith would say, "No." I was telling Holmes Tuttle this at that hotel near the airport, and Holmes says, "That didn't happen. You weren't told that." He actually said it was a lie. I said, "Don't tell me I'm telling you a lie, Holmes. This is what happened." About that time Bill Smith walked in the room. So I said, "Bill, come over here," and I grabbed Holmes by the arm and I said, "Now Holmes, don't say a word. I'm just going to ask him one question and you listen." Margaret Brock and these other people were all listening to this. Bill walked over and I said, "Bill, will you tell me, right now, will you tell Holmes, what you told me with respect to Ford calling Ronald Reagan after the convention." Smith said, "Oh, yeah. He said not to call him, that he wouldn't take the call." Holmes Tuttle jumped up, grabbed him by the arm and took him over in the corner and was just lambasting him. We could all hear it. "Don't you ever say that again!" But Bill Smith confirmed that this was the word.

Finally, we're at a meeting at the Mayflower and I said, "You know this has gone on too far." Smith said, "Well, maybe now's the time." I said, "Okay." I called Cheney up and I said, "We need to come over and see the President. I've got Bill Smith and this is in respect to Ford calling Reagan." Cheney said, "Okay. He's at a reception over in the residence. Come on over and I'll clear you into the party, and then when it's over, the President will probably have you come up to the residence."

So we went over, waited around until the party was over. Ford gave us a sign and we went up to the residence. Bill Smith said, "I think it's time to call the Governor." Ford said, "Fine, I'll give him a call tomorrow." And that's how it developed. But this whole time, I don't know if Reagan was sitting pouting, or what he was doing, but it was a serious element in the whole effort.

Smith: And I assume the story behind the story as well, is that the families were involved. In particular, the wives were not hastening a reproach more.

Parma: Nancy, in particular. I don't know that Betty...things kind of rolled off of Betty a little bit. I don't know how much emphasis she put on it. He called me around Christmas time, and he said, "Do you have a place for us for next spring?" I said, "Mr. President I didn't know you'd be coming out here." This was in 1975. I said I'll

find a place for us. So I ended up getting Fred Wilson's house, which is above Thunderbird, a big house, and Fred had a big suite in his bedroom. I asked Fred, he said, "Fine, yeah, have him come." It was over Easter. "Have him come and he can have that bedroom suite right next to me." I said, "No, Fred. I'm doing this as a courtesy because you're going to get him." (Fred was the kind of guy that would say, "why didn't you ask me.") I said, "I'm just doing this as a courtesy so you won't nail me later, 'Why didn't I ask you about it.'" I said, "You're going to have to move out."

"Oh, god, it's over Easter," he said. And I said, "I know that, but as I said, I'm doing you a favor, just let you know about it so you can't nail me later that you would have done it." He said, "Oh, I can't do that." Well Fred thought about it over night. Fred was an insurance salesman extraordinaire and had all the big clients, Teamsters, Kerkorian was his closest friend. Fred called me the next day and he said, "I've made arrangements with Vonnie (his wife). We'll take another house and you and the President can stay in my house." Barbara and I took a back bedroom in his guest quarters, and we set up the bedroom he wanted to assign him as his office. At that time word came through that Reagan wanted to meet with Ford. Ford, as he always does, said, "What do you think?" I said, "Well, he wants to try you on. I don't think he wants to do anymore than find out what you're made of," because they hadn't ever spent a whole lot of time together. So Reagan came over and Ford invited Rummy, and I think Joyce came too, for the reception. He said, you guys disappear and just Betty and I will have dinner with him and Nancy.

So during cocktails the men stood and made small talk, Ford, Reagan, Rumsfeld, and Parma, the girls were in the living room and the four men were standing up. I've got a great picture of this thing, Kennerly must have been there taking pictures. We were talking generally about things. Pretty soon Ford said, "Well, I guess it is time to sit down for dinner." So we excused ourselves. Secret Service let Rummy know when the party was over, so Barbara and I went back up to the house. So I walked in and he was still up. I said, "Well, how did it go?" "Fine, we had a very nice dinner." "Well, what did you talk about?" "Oh, a lot of football," he said. I asked, "Didn't you talk about any issues or anything?" He said, "No, no. He didn't bring anything up. No, he wanted the meeting. It was his agenda, so I was waiting for him to bring something up, and he didn't do it. We just had a small talk all through dinner, and that was it." It

was a size up. I think Reagan went away from there saying, well, you know this is a big old guy from the Midwest, we can push him over, or something. I don't know. But he became a candidate later. But it was an interesting little byplay.

Parma: I have something – I put down kind of memorable times.

Smith: Perfect. We'll do it first to make sure we've got it.

Parma: There were some special times that occurred after we had these sojourns during spring break from the Congress. When he lost the election he came out and stayed in Leonard Firestone's house, which was right next door to where he eventually built. Ginger Rogers' house became the Secret Service command post and the office. Leonard owned the lot next to that. Leonard, somehow, was able to get Ginger into an escrow. I guess she had indicated she wanted to sell. So they bought the house, Leonard did. I think he gifted it to USC. So USC really owns that house and they've set up a contract, long term, obviously, with the government for it. Ford didn't have anything to do with that because that the government doing it. But, then Ford subsequently had Ginger come to the party in Leonard's house after the election, after Leonard had consummated the deal. To kind of atone for it all. At that dinner was Ginger and Cary Grant, which was interesting. Cary brought his little girl who was about twelve or thirteen years old. But it was an interesting byplay.

The point I was going to say is that we stopped going to the desert, we were already there. And so a year or so later he said, "You know, I miss the trips, we don't have a trip." I said, well, why don't we go abroad? So we made three or four trips where we took cruises. There were a couple of instances that were memorable.

One time we were in Athens. We had just arrived, and the director of the government historic sites was escorting him around. We went to the Acropolis and we started walking up the broken cement and stone, and as we started into the area where the palace was that has the maidens on it, to the left, you could hear just a little clap. Not much. And as he ascended up to the Parthenon, it grew. In fact, my wife grabbed me by the arm and she said, "Do you hear that?" This small clapping was getting louder and louder. When we got up to the top all these hundreds of people were clapping that he had come up. It was a beautiful, beautiful thing. And he felt so good about that. He mentioned it later. "Can you believe all those people doing that?"

He always was humbled that people would recognize him and do things like that. That was a very touching thing. I think on that same trip, prior to that, we'd gone into a little town, or island, called Hvar, above Dubrowik. They had been taken up to see a church. When we went back to the motor launch that had taken us off the boat, to the shore, a lot of people gathered around. What happened was that some guy in shorts, probably sixty or seventy years old, started yelling at Ford, "You did this to me!" He was all scarred up. Later, I found out from the agents that he had been wounded by American bombs or something, and he was German, I believe. He was accusing us of his problem. I remember the President, later on, when the agents told us about it, said, "I wonder if he ever heard of Hitler. He started this thing, not us." That was an insightful thing.

Smith: He loved to travel.

Parma: Oh, he did.

Smith: His health was so robust up until he was about ninety, I often thought that he only really began to age when it dawned on him that he really couldn't travel the way he had. Did he talk about getting old?

Parma: Not really. I got a couple of other little vignettes. On another trip we were in Paris and he had gone in a day earlier so he could get together with Giscard d'Estaing. They had become fast friends. He'd come out to Vail.

Smith: Which is another case of opposites attract.

Parma: That's all so true. So he had lunch with Betty and the President. Prior to going over, in trying to decide where to go, one of the options was to go to Normandy, or go to Rambouillet, where they'd had the group of six meeting. He said, "I've had enough war, I'd like to go to Rambouillet and renew that experience." We went to Rambouillet, which was maybe twenty or thirty miles out of Paris and it was a tremendous experience for him and Betty. We went from room to room and he'd say, this happened here. His room was in a turret and it had a bed that was about the size large twin bed. It wasn't as big as a double bed. Betty says, "My, that's a small bed." And he said, "My dear, there was only one of us sleeping in it." She said, "I hope so!" It was a grand experience for him. He relived that time and it was so much better for him than going to Normandy. He was revitalized when he went through that.

We had another trip. We went to Rome. Peter Secchia was the ambassador then. Peter set a meeting up with the Pope.

Smith: This would be John Paul II?

Parma: John Paul II. When we got into the Vatican, they asked Ford to go in first. He went in and had a meeting with John Paul II. Then he came out and got us. Two things happened that were of interest. From the time that we all went in to see the Pope, Betty and Barbara and myself, and we had Patty and Frank Lynch with us, I saw two photographers taking pictures. We walked into the door to the Pope's office, the reception area. Ford introduced each of us to the Pope as we walked in. Larry Buendorf was the lead agent, and he had told the two women agents, you're the only Catholics, you go in, but leave your arms with us. So they took their guns out and left them in the car or something and they slipped into the door. The Pope saw it out of the corner of his eyes, "and them?" He hadn't been introduced to them. And Ford said, "Yes, your Holiness, they're my security." "Security? Women?" and he's shuffling along and with his white sweat socks on, and he says, "Women, security?" And Ford says, "Yes, your Holiness. They're very, very good." And the Pope said, "Women. Security." He kept looking back at them. All of this we have on a tape. After the small talk and all, he poses for a picture. The waiter brings out medallions for the men and special rosaries for the women, and he sends the guy away and he comes back with a tray and he goes over to the two women and gives them both a rosary. It was a priceless thing when you see it on the tape. I gave a copy to Ford.

We later met with the leader of Italy. The guy sitting across from me was an Archbishop of some sort. His name was Foley. I said, "Where you from, Philly or Boston?" He said, "I'm from Philly." I said, "There was one thing that happened in there, I saw a third guy doing something. I didn't have any impression other than, I knew there was a third man in the room with the photographers. He might have been filming this in some way." He said, "That could have been. They do that a lot." I said, "If you can, can you get it for me?" Long story short, I ended up with this film of our whole meeting with the Pope. The sequence about the girls was significant.

Smith: That's wonderful. I want to ask you, do you remember the last time you saw him?

Parma: Yeah. After Thanksgiving, during a Michigan-Ohio State game, I went over to the house and sat with him and Jim, an old friend of theirs that lives on the desert, and Betty. He was in the hospital bed in the den watching the game. We watched the game and he critiqued the game. He was obviously not well. A lot of coughing, calling for the nurse to come help him. But he did very well. But he was tired, you would tell. It was really sad for me, frankly. I felt it wasn't going to be long. And he died a month later.

Smith: That trip to the Mayo Clinic which the public never knew about, didn't turn out the way it was supposed to. He told someone before going that he didn't want to die, but he didn't want to live the way he was living. My sense was the Mayo Clinic led him to believe, I'm not saying they led him on, but they led him to believe that, notwithstanding his age, there were these new surgical techniques that made him a very good candidate. I think he went believing that he was going to get a new lease on life. It didn't happen.

Parma: I think the operation would have been worse than not doing it. He was not much interested in doing it. I think what you said, he said to me in a way. If I can't enjoy my life, it's difficult. He never said he wanted to die.

Smith: It's funny, something Peter said earlier today, that he really was the ultimate optimist.

Parma: Absolutely. He was very confident in himself and his ability. I never really experienced doubts about things. He was decisive, positive, he was always going to make the good shot. He was going to take the good shot, every time.

Smith: And Mrs. Ford? Obviously it's been a tough period.

Parma: She's had a time. She caught this cold, or whatever it was, at the funeral. Barbara did, too. Barbara got over it in four or five weeks. Never has left Betty. Right now she has a bronchial condition I think going back to that time. She just never has been able to lose it and she's not strong right now.

Smith: If you were talking to young people who didn't know him at all, or worse, only knew him through a textbook or whatever. Tell them something that would be surprising about Gerald Ford.

- Parma: Probably the most enlightening thing would be that he was the same man the day he died that he was the day I met him. He was unaffected by the fact that he had gained high office, or operated as a leader of the world. He never changed his demeanor or the way he talked with you. He never lorded it. He was in the best sense, a common man who was humbled and straightforward and compassionate. I think that could be a lesson in life for all of us. Never over think how good you are, or how big you are. If you can stay on a level plane as he did, you'll have a fulfilled life.
- Smith: It is interesting that you used the word compassionate. The party moved so far to the right, particularly on social issues, and I don't believe that he moved to the left, or whether he stayed where he was.
- Parma: He stayed in place.
- Smith: Obviously, he and Mrs. Ford were very outspokenly pro-choice, but beyond that, he's the only president in the history of the United States to put his name on a petition for gay rights. That is not what you expect from a former Republican president. Was that always there?
- Parma: We never talked about those issues. I think he just had a lot of compassion for people. He understood, to the depths of the complexity of the issue, that some people were different. As I say, we didn't talk about it, but I know that his thought processes were to even things out. He didn't categorize and departmentalize people.
- Smith: Also, I think he is of a generation, particularly Midwestern conservative, who first of all, define their conservatism in economic terms, who had a very healthy skepticism about what the government could accomplish, particularly when it set to worry about Utopia, and who consistently wanted the government out of the boardroom, out of the classroom, out of the bedroom. There were a whole range of issues that were so intimate, so personal, you didn't discuss them. It wasn't the stuff of public policy. It was a decent reticence.
- Parma: Real quick example: first time that I came back when he was President, he wanted to play golf at Burning Tree. I met him out there. We played, and then we were in the locker room getting ready to leave and he said, "How you getting home?" And I said, "I'm getting a cab to take me home." He said, "Well, I'll take you home," and he said

to Dick Kaiser, who was his lead agent, "Any problem taking Leon home?" "No, Mr. President."

We got in the limousine, I put the clubs in back of the car and I closed it up. We got in the car and drove into the Madison Hotel where I was staying. I got out of the car and went around and opened the trunk, I got my clubs out, went over and stood on the curb and said (we were playing the next day), "I'll see you tomorrow," and with that twenty cars drive by. He took the whole motorcade into the Madison Hotel, looped into town, and went back to the White House. The next day, the *Washington Post* has a little story. "President delivers golf partner (didn't name me) to the hotel." He called me up that night and said, "Tomorrow come over to the White House, we'll go from here." Obviously, he had sensed what he had done too late and Kaiser, god bless him, should have said, "you know we have the whole motorcade, Mr. President." If he had said that, he would said, "Oh no, we can't do that, I'll see you in the morning. I'll meet you out here."

Smith: But to him it was the most natural thing in the world.

Parma: Yeah, "I'll take you back." That was it.

Smith: This is wonderful. The problem is, it whets your appetite. Where are you based now?

Parma: I'm in San Diego.

Smith: I suspect either sometime this summer or certainly this fall, we're going to be scheduling a trip there because we know there's a number of folks in the area. Thank you very much. This is great. And I suspect there is a lot more where this came from.

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Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Leon Parma
2nd Interview by
Richard Norton Smith
December 1, 2008

Smith: There are a couple of years I'd like to go back because, specifically, we were talking about your early days with Congressman Wilson. And earlier than I've know, or most people have known, the desire on at least part of his colleagues to get Ford to run against Joe Martin for the Minority Leadership, which he didn't do.

It wasn't clear to me, did you stay in Washington?

Parma: Right. I went to Washington in 1958 with Congressman Bob Wilson – in January of '58, and stayed five years. That year, that fall, the Republicans were handed the empty plate. They really took it bad. And so we were in Washington. Bob Wilson and I returned to Washington right after the November 1958 election. A day or so later, Bob said, "See if you can find Mel Laird and others in the SOS group" they belonged to. All SOS members were elected in '52 with Eisenhower. As you probably know, every freshman class forms little clubs or groups in order to educate themselves, actually, with their respective committee assignments. They select members who are on key committees and that's how they keep abreast of legislation. They meet once a week.

So Bob said, "See how many SOS members are here." I called Laird and Lipscomb, and a few others and we got five into the office. They met in Bob's office, they said, "We must do something. We can't continue this way without better leadership from our side. Sam Rayburn is handing Joe Martin his lunch every day." Martin and Rayburn were having breakfast together and they were having dinner together. They both lived at the Occidental Hotel in separate suites. Sam used him; Sam Rayburn just plain old used Joe Martin.

Smith: Tell us about it, because I know Rayburn is a legendary figure. Why? Tell us about Rayburn and what would someone like Ford watching someone like Rayburn learn?

Parma: I don't know if he learned any of Sam's devious habits, but Sam Rayburn ran that House with an iron hand. What he asked for, he got.

Smith: What allowed him to do that?

Parma: Well, he had a majority, which was primary. But he was a strong leader, and he was an effective leader. They rallied around him. He stayed there, they named a building after him, and the rest of it.

Smith: I assume the rules must have been different in those days that concentrated more power in the hands of the Speaker.

Parma: Oh, I think the Speaker had a lot of power then; much more than now, probably. Ford was on the periphery, having been elected in '48. He was watching all this; he'd been there for ten years. Sam Rayburn was very effectively using Joe Martin to get people to support the issues he wanted to support. These were the days when I was there that Eisenhower was there, and I remember the Federal Aid to Education, the Common Situs picketing, all of these different things that the liberal element of the Democratic party wanted. Sam Rayburn, being from Texas, was willing to help them. I guess you could say he was one of them. I guess he fell into the program.

Smith: Was Joe Martin past his prime? Was that part of the problem?

Parma: Joe had become old. I want to be fair to him, he was older and obviously Sam Rayburn had great influence over Joe Martin. But the Young Turks – the class elected in '52 wanted to do something about it. At the first meeting and on everybody was unanimous. "We must do something about the Minority Leader, let's meet tomorrow. See who else is in town."

Then at the next meeting we had about thirteen or fourteen in Bob's office. So they said, "Okay, this is moving." Then Bob said, "Get a room over in the Congressional Hotel and we'll meet there tomorrow." So they met the next

day and there were more in town. Everybody saying, we have to do something. Everybody wanted to protect Joe Martin. So they finally decided they should ask Joe to step aside and let new leadership come in. And so they talked to Joe and said, "You can keep your office, keep the limousine, hold all the emoluments of office, and the rest of it." And he said, "No."

So their first choice was Jerry Ford to be the new leader. And they went to Ford and he said, "I'll take the job if it is there to be had, but I'm not going to campaign for it. I'll accept the job, but I'm not going to campaign to throw Joe Martin out."

Smith: That must have been frustrating.

Parma: Yeah, it was. Jerry Ford was right in between. He'd been there in the Congress four years before they arrived, and they said, "Well, let's see what we can do." They were rallying behind Ford and the hope was that they would come up with enough votes that it would be *fait d'accompli*. Les Arends found out about the meetings. Les Arends was the Whip, and he said, "You young whippersnappers, I'm going to take you apart." And so they started rallying their side, the older group of members, and they came up with Charlie Halleck. So, they went to Ford and said, "We think we have the votes," and the rest of it – and Ford said, "Well, I'm not asking for the job. If it is offered to me and if it's there, I'll take it." That's my recollection of it. I was fairly close and I was in some of the meetings.

Smith: Let me understand, though. You mentioned Arends' name. So there seems to be a consensus that Martin needs to be replaced. It's just a question of whether it's one of his generation, or the older guard versus the Young Turks.

Parma: The older guard saw there was a revolution in play, absolute revolution. So their thought processes were, let's get our guy in there. And Charlie was their guy. So, they came down on Charlie and it was no contest. Ford didn't want his name put in, as I recall, and Charlie was elected the leader. I guess Joe – I don't know if he kept his office and limousine and all that. But they took care

of Joe. He'd been there a long time, been out of Massachusetts, and he was replaced. And Charlie came in, and there was born the *Ev and Charlie Show*.

Smith: Is that when it started? There hadn't been an *Ev and Joe Show*?

Parma: No, *Ev and Charlie* began when Halleck was the Minority Leader of the House and Dirksen was Minority Leader of the Senate. I thought, at the time, the press treated their press conference as a joke, thus the title *Ev and Charlie Show*.

Smith: And was that part of this feeling that we needed to do more in terms of projecting our message, post '58?

Parma: And '60 was right on top of them. Obviously, Nixon was going to run, and Kennedy was coming along with Johnson and other people. But '60 was their year to try to do something.

Smith: You stop and think, it's not that long ago, until you stop and think about the nature of the Republican Party in the late '50s – pre-Civil Rights Act '64, there's really no Southern party. It's still a Northeastern/Midwestern party. Today people wouldn't understand it. It's almost the reverse of what we have today. Describe what kind of party it was in those days and where Ford fit into the spectrum.

Parma: My boss, Bob Wilson, about that time became the chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee - the committee that is supposed to go out and elect Republicans to the House. It was a constant battle. They had us outnumbered; they were able to get their legislation through and the rest of it. There was a lot of futility, they just were unhappy. This had built up, I guess, when Eisenhower went in and we had a Republican Congress. I think we lost it in '54 - '56. Eisenhower didn't resolve a war, didn't have a war, the economy was perking along pretty good, it was a very passive, non-exciting eight years, but went very well. When history is recorded it will show that those were eight great years as far as the United States was concerned. And then Nixon was probably going to be the next president. Everybody was

feeling good about Nixon. Kennedy came in and they did a good job. That was an interesting play, as well.

Smith: It was the “conservative party” but it seems not the conservative party in the sense that we would use the term today. In large part, because there really was not a Southern contingent. It was sort of economically conservative, but it was still Northeastern and Midwestern – obviously, you had strength in the West. It was a much more pragmatic – was that a fair word to use?

Parma: They wanted government out of their lives, at least federal government, to keep everything under control at the state level and rule accordingly.

Smith: And Ford fit very much within that context.

Parma: Yes, he was very comfortable with that.

Smith: And, needless to say, he was a real fiscal conservative.

Parma: Absolutely. No question about that.

Smith: Then along comes the Civil Rights revolution. And one senses he, at least, made peace with that. He was, again, what we used to say, of the fiscally conservative and socially liberal formula.

Parma: Yeah.

Smith: Which is, again, something that I don't a lot of folks today recognize or appreciate.

Parma: He was a liberal when it came to social policy like that. I think even as president, he was criticized by Reagan as being too liberal. But, relative to black v white, he had a teammate who was black.

Smith: Willis Ward.

Parma: And he would always cite his teammate, what a great person he was and all that. These people were wrong that had these bad feelings down south. It bothered him. His teammate kept coming up a lot. Even when he became the Minority Leader, the teammate would come up.

Smith: So it was very personalized – the issue. But at the same time you also had – by the early Sixties and certainly with Goldwater – you’ve got this, almost overnight, this infusion of Southerners. Many of them frankly racist, into the party calling themselves conservative. How did you handle that?

Parma: Well, they were conservative on economic issues, [that] would be the rationale. When I worked in the Congress, the relationship we had with the other side of the aisle was non-adversarial. It was a very cooperative thing. We interfaced with the other side of the aisle.

Smith: What’s the difference between Joe Martin being snookered, and your non-adversarial relationship? Where do you draw the line? How do you define contention where necessary, unavoidable?

Parma: I found it just in the demeanor of people. Those were nice days; people were nice to each other. The press people that would come in to visit us, and we used to have Bob in and the leadership like it was, we’d see a lot of the press. They were there, helping you to write the story. Our local representative, Lyn Nofziger, in particular, and fellow by the name of Frank McCumber, we’d plot legislation. We’d say, “Okay, we’re going to introduce the bill today, Bob will give a speech tomorrow, he’ll talk to the chairman. Two weeks from now get it up – we planned the program on a key piece of legislation effecting dredging the harbor in San Diego, or something like that. Very friendly attitude.

If I had an issue – and when I was there the chairman was always a Democrat – I’d go to my friend who worked for the chairman on an issue that involved San Diego, and nine times out of ten, they would say, “Yeah, we can help you on that.” If they had an armed services issue and came to us, and generally those issues were non-partisan, we’d help them. And that was the way it was on the floor and the rest of it. The member interfaced with the others and it wasn’t like today where I see hate when I look at the floor of the House and the Senate. And the talk – Harry Reid says things that no one would have said in those days. Lyndon Johnson wouldn’t have said it. He might have said it in his office, but he didn’t say it in public.

- Smith: Is it true that after six o'clock, basically, people called a truce and went out and had a drink together?
- Parma: Oh yeah, everybody. It was a common story that Gerald Ford and Tip O'Neill would finish fighting like cats and dogs on the floor on some issue, and they'd adjourn the House, and they'd go arm in arm and have a drink someplace or go have dinner. It was common.
- Smith: Now, what that raises is fascinating. I'm wondering how much of that really is less ideological and more generational. Because it seems to be, after a while, the next generation is always pointing a finger at those in power and saying, "You're not confrontational enough." You could almost trace this. And subsequently – Gingrich's criticism of Bob Michel, was, "You're rolling over. We need to be more confrontational." And presumably, that went back to the Ford era; that you've accepted minority status. How do you deal with that? Presumably he had not accepted minority status.
- Parma: No, they didn't accept it and they were out fighting tooth and nail to raise money and organize districts that were vulnerable to Republican winning. I know Bob Wilson worked very hard, and I think he had that job for eight or ten years. He was there a long time, and put a lot of time into it. And Jerry Ford – I remember one year he said he traveled 267 days, or something like that. I would tell him, "I don't know if you can keep this up." This is after I'd come home and we'd play golf, and he was just so relaxed playing golf, and said, "Oh, I wish I could do this more often and be able to relax like this. I've got to go out there and win those seats so I can be the Speaker." He was determined he was going to be the Speaker.
- Smith: You also wonder what the consequences of that were at home.
- Parma: Tough. Every morning he would make a call home and every evening would make a call home. "Mother, how's everything? How are the kids doing?" And then he'd talk to the kids. I cannot remember a time that we were together that he didn't place a call in the morning and the evening. That was as president,

vice president, Minority Leader, and before he became the Minority Leader. It was interesting.

Smith: How long were you in Washington?

Parma: I was there five years.

Smith: Until?

Parma: I came in January of '58 and left the end of December '62. The last three years of Eisenhower and just two years in the Kennedy administration. We had a little group we called the Inner Circle composed of 15 or so assistants to key Republicans on the Hill, House and Senate. Most of our members were in the leadership as well as VP Nixon's assistant. A colleague by the name of Jack Caukins was our leader, you may have met him along the line. We would meet once a week, just like our members would, and discuss legislative matters. We always had a guest we'd bring up from downtown. Due to the stature of our bosses, we were able to get members of Ike's Cabinet, Secretaries from the Cabinet to come up and visit with us. When Kennedy was elected in 1960, we said, "Well, what are we going to do now?" Well, Caukins said, "Well, let's get Bobby. If we can get Bobby Kennedy, the attorney general, we can get them all." And so we said, "Okay, Jack, that's your job. Go get him."

And I'll be darned, he called there and he said, "We'd like to have the General." He described our group and who our bosses were. "We'd really love to have the General come up and visit with us." And his Chief of Staff said, "Well, we can probably arrange that. Let me talk to him." He called back within a day and he said, "Yeah, we'll do that." Picked a date, and we set it up, and the day it was going to happen, the day before, I guess, the assistant to the AG calls up and tells Jack, "We want to meet down here in our office." Jack says, "Oh, we can't do that, we have drinks, bring food in." He said, "We can handle that down here. Don't worry about that. We'll meet in the General's office."

So we went down and met with Bobby Kennedy. He was sitting at his desk, a big desk like this, and of course, they have those huge offices. That was the period of time when they were writing stories about Bobby having pictures his kids had painted or drawn in crayon and a football sitting on the mantel. He's sitting back of this big desk with his sleeves rolled up and tie askance, and his feet up on the chair and holding his knees like this. And we went - for two hours we talked to him. He said, "You guys will never get into office. You'll never get there again." And we said, "Why?" And he said, "We're going to organize this thing and you won't be able to do it. What do you think the Peace Corps is for and all these other things? We're just bringing them back..."

I mean, he was that frank and that cocky. He was absolutely positive that they were going to be so structured, so organized that we'd never get back into office. It was a wonderful talk - I'd loved to have taped it. You would have loved it, as a historian. And we asked him questions like, "Why did you put Ted Kennedy out to run California? And so and so to run in Illinois?" They digressed from the normal plan of getting the Republican leader or the Democratic leader of the state to be the chairman of the state. They put high powered guys in representing Kennedy. Ted Kennedy out in California. And he said, "We avoided a lot of fights. We put our guy in there and the others reported to him." It was a wonderful strategy, and it paid off.

Smith: Do you remember - would Ford have been in on this meeting?

Parma: No, those meetings were of our staff members. Ford didn't have a staff man in the group. Frank, I think was busy. He had a fellow named Frank - I can't think of him now. But Mildred Leonard was a key player in his office.

Smith: Let me ask you, because much would later be made of the notion that he tried to reproduce the Congressional mindset, whatever that is, organizational structure - simply move it from Capitol Hill to the White House. And then it didn't work, it couldn't work. There are all sorts of things. What are the strengths and what are the weaknesses of the Congressional structure, if you will, or outlook - transplanted to an executive position?

Parma: Well, I guess primarily, when you get into the executive position, you have one man calling the shots. In the House, in particular, it's like herding cats. You get all of these different views and different sectors of the country responding to leadership, but no dictatorial leadership, per se. I felt, looking back right now, that certainly on great issues they get together. They lose people along the way sometimes through pressures from home, labor unions, and other people that put pressure on our numbers. Members who are in marginal districts are always protecting themselves, trying to protect themselves.

Barry Goldwater made a profound statement one time. At the time that Bob was the chairman, Barry was also the chairman of the Senatorial Campaign Committee. We'd go over and sit down with Barry. Barry happened to be a fraternity brother of mine from Arizona. We were years apart in age, but we always passed the grip and called each other brother and things like that. I asked him one day, there was one seat where a Republican was running, and he was obviously a very liberal Republican, and I asked him, "Barry how can you support that man and put all this money into that race?" He said, "Leon, all I want is one vote. When we organize the Senate, that's when I want his vote. I'll worry about the rest of it later. Let's organize the Senate and control the Senate. We'll have the chairman and we'll take care of his liberal bent as we come along."

I'll never forget that - that one vote was critical. No one appreciates it, even today, when they criticize a candidate for being a liberal or too conservative. One vote controls the Senate. He could have controlled the Senate with just one vote.

Smith: It's interesting, and I ask, parenthetically, your opinion; as someone who was there then, of course the whole Kennedy aura – post-assassination – presumably is very different from while the president was alive.

Parma: Yeah. I think if Kennedy had gone on, that the '64 election would have been then, a very interesting election. Because there were a lot of things that occurred that rankled the masses – the Bay of Pigs. I recall Admiral Burke,

Chief of Naval Operations. But when he retired, he paid his respects to Bob Wilson. Bob asked him (my office was actually situated in Bob Wilson's office. He put a partition up and I was on the other side of that with a little desk. He and I had been friends for years. So he was very comfortable having an atypical office set up. So he invited me to sit down with them. Bob asked him, "Admiral, what happened at the Bay of Pigs?" And he said, "Well, I'll tell you, those young men down there had never had to make a decision to commit another man's life. And that was necessary. We had our ships offshore and we were all ready to do things, they did not commit because some Americans might get killed, and they went down." Somebody wrote, a fine newspaperman wrote it, wrote a long essay in *Fortune* magazine that really documented all of it. The Bay of Pigs was a military fiasco. But there were issues like that, that would come to the fore.

Smith: You assume Goldwater would have been the nominee?

Parma: I don't know. Rockefeller took a good run at him. And the conservative movement was coming up and it was all happening, a lot of it, because of the Kennedys. They were iron-handed. They were dictatorial downtown. They were tough.

Smith: But if you factor in the Civil Rights bill, and let's face it, most of Goldwater's support, certainly in the South, the old, solid South, was based on race. Almost overnight the Republican Party is redefining itself in ways that must have made some people uncomfortable.

Parma: Yeah. It did. Goldwater understood, and the Republicans, generally, had a good position, I thought.

Smith: Let me ask you one thing about staff, because I heard President Ford talk about – being the fiscal conservative that he was – he thought that it was really unfortunate, for a lot of reasons, that Congressional staffs had gotten as large as they had. Characteristically, a congressman like him, what would his staff have numbered in those days?

Parma: Minimal, actually, compared to today. He walked in his office and he had a lot of secretary-types who were doing all the casework. They still involved themselves – the leadership was involved in servicing his district. And this was their bent. Bob Hartmann was kind of the outside guy.

Smith: Where did he come from?

Parma: Bob came out of Los Angeles. He had been with the LA Times. Then they made him the Washington rep for the *Los Angeles Times*. I remember my first or second night in Washington going to a California State Society meeting. Bob and Jeannie Wilson picked Barb and me up and we went together to this dinner. And Hartmann came up and was lobbying Bob about the next chairman of the California State Society. I said, “You guys can’t get away from this stuff, can you?” But that’s the first time I met Bob Hartmann.

Smith: Hartmann was clearly a kind of lightning rod within the Ford office.

Parma: Yeah.

Smith: And at first blush, he seems like an unusual guy for Ford to repose so much trust in.

Parma: Bob Hartmann was just totally loyal to Ford. He had one interest, and that interest was what’s good for Jerry Ford. And he was that way right through the White House. His biggest concern in the White House, and I guess I was one of the few guys that we’d come into Washington, we’d have lunch together. And he let it all come out – these guys are leaking stuff and doing stuff – things they shouldn’t do. He was a strong advocate, in my mind, of cleaning out the Nixon people.

Smith: And that raises a question. Ford, everyone agrees that he was a nice guy; perhaps in some ways, too nice a guy. And I would imagine someone like Hartmann would take heat, out of his loyalty, for in a way compensating for Ford’s being so trusting and so reluctant to clean house.

Parma: Yeah. Bob would see things happening, and he would, as subtle as he could, try to explain to the President, “This guy is not doing what he should be

doing.” The good thing about Bob Hartmann, he told him just exactly what he felt. Ford would kind of shoo him off sometimes, and other times he’d listen to him.

Smith: Well, that’s got to be an invaluable trait, because presidents are surrounded by people who don’t do that.

Parma: I think he kept him on track and would get him off of things. There is more than one issue that Bob would say, “Maybe we’d better do it this way.” They criticized his speechwriting, but he had things that he put in there that was a Fordism – that became a Fordism-type of thing. But I was always pleased that Bob was there. There was a little power play initially – the little office that adjoins the Oval Office – Bob wanted to be in that office. And the President said, “Historically that office has been a kind of hideaway office.” - which Bill Clinton used effectively. And so Hartmann ended up in Henry’s office. He had the big office. Rummy had the corner office, which was traditionally the chief of staff’s.

Smith: And how did Rumsfeld’s appointment come about?

Parma: It just happened, I think. An interesting byplay here was that I received a call from Hartmann a day or two before the President became president. He said, “Your friend wants you and Barbara to be back here. That’s all I can say. Get here as fast as you can.” And we took the earliest plane out the next morning.

Smith: And I assume you interpreted that as...

Parma: Yeah – I’ll tell you what happened once, gave substance to it. The Vice President, at the time, was in San Diego. He was going to make a speech that night, and I forget where he’d been, but they’d flown in and I was up in the suite visiting with him. He said, “I’ve got to take a shower.” I said, “Okay.” He said, “Wait there and we’ll go down together.” And he goes in and takes a shower. The phone rings – the red phone. So I picked it up and it’s Al Haig. He said, “Where’s the Vice President - is he there?” And I said, “Yeah, Al, he is. He’s taking a shower.” He says, “I’ve got to talk to him.” I said, “You want

me to get him out of the shower?” He says, “No, don’t do that. But as soon as he gets out, have him call me.”

He came out of the shower within a couple of minutes and I said, “Al Haig just called.” He kind of looked at me and he said, “Okay, get him on the phone.” So I picked it up and said, “Get Haig on the phone.” He came right on and I said, “Just a minute,” and I handed it to him, and he says, “Yeah, I’m making a speech. I’m leaving as soon as I make the speech. We’re going to the airplane, I’m flying back. I’ll be in my office at eight o’clock. I’ll see you at eight o’clock. Thank you, Al.” That was it. And he looked at me and he said, “It’s getting close. Something is happening.” That was the first part of August and then it started rolling.

Smith: So you get the call, “Come to DC.”

Parma: Then I get the call to go to DC. I like to stay at the Hay-Adams, so I told them I want the suite that looks at the White House. Barb and I sat in that suite looking at the White House and the television was just to the right of the window when Nixon gave his speech that he was going to resign. Then I received a call from Hartmann. He said, “Be here at eleven o’clock tomorrow.” Eleven o’clock came and Barb and I took a cab over to the South Entrance, and walked in and there was Senator Bob Griffin and Marg, and Congressman John Rhodes and Elizabeth. And so we three couples went up the stairs and walked into the East Room. It was packed, absolutely packed.

What had happened was all the Nixon people who’d been there for the farewell speech for Nixon, appreciating that they were going to be, could be a part of history, when they said, “Clear out,” they didn’t clear out. So when the Ford entourage got there, there were no seats. Griffin was the Minority Leader of the Senate, and here was Johnny Rhodes who succeeded Ford as the Minority Leader. Jack Ford happened to turn around and he looked back and saw us. So he gets up and he’s telling his sister and brothers to get up. I said, “No, no, no.” Finally an usher comes up and I said, “Don’t bother about me, but these two are the leaders of the House and Senate Republicans. Find them a place to sit up front.” Well, he left and came back and he said, “I can’t find

anything, but I've got six seats right over in front of the cameras." So they put us over there.

Smith: This is fascinating because in so many ways it seems emblematic of the problems that would recur -the Nixon people refusing to leave.

Parma: Well, actually, following his being sworn in as president, a little reception line formed and he and Betty were in the line, I don't know if anybody else was there. But I know the two of them were there. And then we passed over into the State Dining Room where they had a little hors d'oeuvre table set up, and most of the Nixon people just left. It was another aspect because there were very few of us in the State Dining Room; enough that we were comfortable, and didn't have a lot of people pushing around. The whole East Room was full, if you think about it. All the Nixon people left, and just the Ford people went through the receiving line.

The leadership of the House and the Senate, Ford had asked them to come up, and they met in the Red or Blue Room, one of those rooms, and then the rest of us were over in the State Dining Room. Pretty soon Susan came in and said, "Mother wants you." So we walked with her over to the first room, the Blue Room, right after the State Dining Room, and there's Betty. Betty said, "Just wait a minute. He's going to be out here in a minute." We didn't know why we were there. So we waited and pretty soon he comes out and he says, "Let's go." And so we went to the elevator and got on the elevator and went down and walked across and walked him into the Oval Office. Betty and the President walked in and Barb and I were right in back of them. First time he'd been President. I should have that picture on the wall here – the President and Betty with the Bible sitting on the table.

And so we went over and stood by the fireplace and they were taking pictures of Betty and the President and the kids and all that. He says, "Don't you want to get in the picture?" And I said, "Of course. We'd love to." So Barb and I went over and stood with Betty and the President and had a great picture taken of us. Then we visited a little bit and then I said, "Well, you've got a country to run, Mr. President. We're going to leave you alone." And he said,

“Now, you’re coming over to the house tonight.” I said, “Thank you, we will be there.” And he said, “Just wear your golf shirt, it’s going to be real informal, going to be another two or three couples. That’s all.” I said, “Okay.” I wore a suit to the house. He had on a golf shirt and just looked at me but didn’t say a word about my not wearing a golf shirt. He knew there was a new protocol in place.

Smith: Now, when he said “the house,” he meant the house in Alexandria.

Parma: They were still living in the Alexandria house – they’d taken the garage and made it a Secret Service command post and put bullet-proof glass all through the house. But, then he said, you come over to the house and wear the golf shirt and he says to an aide that was standing there, one of the Nixon staff, he said, “Do you think you could arrange for Mr. and Mrs. Parma to have a car take them over there?” The man says, “Yes, Mr. President, we’ll take care of that.” So, with that we went back to the hotel.

At five o’clock that afternoon, I met with the President’s old law school buddy, Phil Buchen. Phil Buchen and I had visited after the swearing in. I’d gone over to Phil to say hello to Phil and I had something to give him. And he said, “Come to the meeting in the Cabinet Room at five o’clock, it’s going to be the Transition Committee; all of us involved in the transition, and you’ve got to be involved in this thing. So be there at five o’clock.” Okay, so at five o’clock I’m at the west entrance and told the receptionist I was supposed to be at the five o’clock meeting with the President, thank you. And I sat down and waited, and nobody came. I said, “What about this meeting?” It was about five after five. About that time Bob Griffin comes in and I said, “Are you in the five o’clock meeting?” And he says, “Yeah, come on.” So we walked in the meeting.

The meeting had already started and we walked in and Bob, obviously, had a seat someplace, so I was going to go around and sit on the side there. The President said, “Sit there, sit right next to Al Haig.” It was at the big Cabinet table. So I sat down next to Al Haig. I have a piece of paper at home – the White House tablet – I wrote down all the names of the men who were in the

meeting. Rummy was there. He'd flown in. In the course of that meeting, the President said, "I don't want a wholesale movement here of the Nixon people. We'll take care of that in due time, if we need to do any changes. But, we don't want the White House emptied." Mind you, Obama is going through how many months – two months or plus of the transition – this was less than 24 hours that this thing was coming down.

Smith: I think it was Jack Marsh who said something also about that. He said he didn't want to taint the vast majority of Nixon folks who had honorably done their jobs by tossing them out. By gradually, incrementally, replacing them, they could then go out into the job market, having worked in the Ford White House with all that that implied.

Parma: I think he thought the process was, you can't move this functioning government out of the way, because we don't have anybody in place, practically speaking. And he said, "I don't want resignations coming out of any of the Nixon people." And Rummy says, "I already sent you my letter of resignation." And Ford says, "I didn't get it. And you're not going to resign." So that was the first indication to me – and Rummy had already moved into place. Ford had told him to set this thing up. I felt that was a *fait d'accompli* there.

Smith: And what was it in their relationship that led Ford to repose such trust in Rumsfeld?

Parma: I think that through a long period of time that he worked at the White House and all, that he'd held good jobs and he was ambassador to NATO at the time. I remember there was a tie that I found someplace that had the seal, the eagle on it. It wasn't really a good silk tie, but I purchased several of these things. And Ford saw it and said, "I'd like one of those." So I bought him all the colors of that tie and sent them to him. And I saw Rummy one time, and he was still ambassador to NATO, and so he said, "I want one of those." Okay, so I sent him six different colors of it. Rummy sent me a NATO tie, and I still have it in my drawer in the plastic.

Anyway, I think he saw in Rumsfeld a solid guy who had some background on the Hill at the time.

Smith: Also, a guy who could say no?

Parma: Yeah. And kind of steel. Grabbed onto things in a hurry. He and Hartmann were like this. And Rummy ran a tight shop.

Smith: I wonder if that's why – as you know, I'm doing this Rockefeller book –my sense is that Hartmann formed an alliance with Rockefeller. Bill Seidman was part of that group, too. And clearly, the one thing they all had in common was they all, in their own minds, had reason to see Rumsfeld as an adversary.

Parma: Possibly. I don't know. I know that generally I thought that Nelson Rockefeller was well received, other than the Reagan people who dumped on him.

Smith: There's a classic Ford story. It tells you so much about the man on multiple levels. All these people said Rockefeller moved to the right, tactically maybe, but it was never convincing, which was the problem. He saw the energy crisis, so he came up with this characteristically immense government program, the Energy Independence Corporation, \$100 billion, which was going to be funded with bonds – New York State government on a larger scale. And there was a discussion in the Cabinet. It was very clear that Rockefeller was alone in supporting this. Bill Simon was particularly pointed in his criticisms, some of which bordered on the personal. And the president came down on Rockefeller's side. When the meeting ended, Simon – and it just reveals so much about Ford and Simon – continued the argument. The President said, "You and I both know Congress is never going to pass that legislation, but I'm not going to humiliate Nelson in front of the Cabinet." Now, that tells you so much about Ford's, for lack of a better word, emotional intelligence – understanding better than a brainy guy like Bill Simon, how things work. But it also does raise questions about the Congressional mindset, as opposed to the more ruthless executive mindset.

Parma: I think that Jerry Ford always lamented the fact that he didn't take Rockefeller as the vice president, it probably made a difference. Actually, he could have had – if he had taken Reagan, it would have made a difference. It would have been a slam dunk with Reagan, I think. An interesting byplay took place at the convention. I never had any formal standing any place, few people even knew who I was or why, other than he's the guy who plays golf with the President. That's about the size of it.

The first day we were there, Bill Smith, William French Smith, Reagan's lawyer went out of his way to find me and visit. It was a nice conversation, nothing came out of it. About a day later, the next morning, Smith found me again and he said, "Reagan would like to have an interface with President Ford. I'm going to be Reagan's guy, and he would like Ford to name somebody." I said, "Okay, I'll go to him and see if we can get a person for you." So I went to Ford and Ford said, "I don't know what that's all about." I said, "Well, I think they just want to be comfortable that they have some way that they can reach you, knowing that it's not going through all your whole organization."

He said, "Okay. You do it." "Okay, I'll do it." And so the attorney general of California at the time, and had been our state co-chairman with me, was Evelle Younger. So I got hold of Evelle Younger and I said, "I don't know what Bill Smith and these guys are up to, but..." I told him about it. I said, "I want you in the meeting whenever we have these meetings." And we met a couple of times a day during the convention. Nothing extraordinary happened. When it came time for the vote, Bill got hold of me and he said, "If Ford wins, Reagan does not want to be the vice president. He's very strong on it and he doesn't want to have the meeting if he thinks he's going to have to tell the President no. He doesn't want to do that." So I went to Ford and told him that. "It's up to you." In the meantime he's talking to everybody, Bob Dole, and others. So he said, "You tell him that if I'm the nominee that would be the case." If nominated, the President was going to have the meeting that night with Reagan. And so, when the time came, Sears got hold of Cheney, told him

the same thing – that this is the condition of the meeting - that he's not to be asked. So Ford said to assure him that we won't ask him. So that took place.

A little sidebar to that was in September, after the convention we had a meeting in Sacramento. There is a breakfast meeting in Sacramento. Justin Dart came up to me and he says, "I got a letter here you've got to give to the President. I don't know why it never got to him at the convention." And he said, "I laid it out here why Reagan should have been the vice president nominee. He didn't take him." And I said, "Well, I was told by William French Smith and Sears told Cheney, that this was the case. All these conditions were laid out." He said, "I had it all set up." I said, "And what were you going to do with Nancy?" He said, "We were going to get her out of the room." And that was how it was going to work. But he wanted him to ask him to be vice president. And he was kind of the leader of the Reagan Kitchen Cabinet with Holmes Tuttle.

Smith: The Kitchen Cabinet.

Parma: Yeah, the famous Kitchen Cabinet, who were going to take over Blair House. I don't know if you've ever heard that story. They will deny it to this day, but the plan was that the Kitchen Cabinet would have Blair House, and they would be there to help Ronnie. Some guy said, "You can't have Blair House, that's a government facility, you know. We use that for visiting dignitaries and the rest of it." But that was the thought process that they had. It would have been a different election, probably.

Smith: Did Ford have a Kitchen Cabinet?

Parma: Closest he had was his Transition Committee, and I think – another part I wanted to tell you about. That five o'clock meeting, I think was the first realization that the President had that he was President of the United States. At the time of our meeting, the ambassador corps was coming to the White House and presenting their credentials. They had them set up in the Roosevelt Room, and so Terry would come in and whisper to the President, he said, "Okay." And the President would stand up and we'd all stand up. "Sit down,

sit down. SIT DOWN.” We’d just remain standing and he’d leave the room. This happened twice. The third time – oh I guess he came back from the second one and we all stood up. He said, “Sit down! How many times do I have to tell you to sit down?” And Congressman Johnny Byrns of Wisconsin says, “Mr. President, we’re not standing up because you’re Jerry Ford; we’re standing up because you’re the President of the United States of America.” Ford kind of looked at him and kind of looked around at us, and sat down. And I think that moment was the exact time that he knew things were going to be different.

Smith: I want to go back, just briefly. That California primary in ’76 must have gotten pretty ugly, the Ford-Reagan contest.

Parma: It was and it wasn’t. That primary was very difficult. I had California – he told me, “You’ve got to deliver California.” And so I got Evelle Younger to be the state chairman and then right away had a problem with Evelle because he was putting all his people into key jobs. And so I had Stu Spencer come to the LA airport. Had Evelle fly into the LA airport and then I had a guy who worked for me by the name of Ron Fuller come in and we had a meeting. The meeting was to tell Evelle, “You’re not to set up your governor’s campaign on our account. We don’t want to get your race in the way of whoever the other candidate is going to be.” They had a good candidate that was getting ready to run against Evelle. Evelle didn’t get it.

Smith: Houston Flournoy.

Parma: Yeah, I guess it was Flournoy. And so he kind of challenged me. “How can you do this?” I said, “Well, I’m doing it. Do you want me to have somebody else tell you what I’ve just told you? Be happy to call him right now.” And Evelle said, “No, that’s fine.” You can ask Stu Spencer about this question. But at that point we settled it – it was going to be a Ford campaign not a Younger campaign.

- Smith: Let me ask you, and this may be unfair, if you were in my position and you had six hours to ask Stu anything, at this point in history, is there anything you don't know about that race that you would ask Stu?
- Parma: About the...?
- Smith: About the '76 campaign?
- Parma: The '76 campaign? Well, I'd ask him, why couldn't you get Reagan to say something about Ford?
- Smith: In the fall?
- Parma: In the fall. Now the other part of this – there are a whole series of things that happened. Following Reagan's loss at the convention, Smith sought me out again and he said, "Please tell the President not to call Reagan." I said, "You've got to be kidding me. You don't want the President to call the Governor?" "I think it would be better that he didn't." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "I'm not sure he'd take the call." That was not Reagan, to me. It just didn't sound like Reagan.
- Smith: But it also suggests that there was a real lingering bitterness.
- Parma: Yes, there was. There was absolute bitterness.
- Smith: And it probably wasn't limited to the Governor.
- Parma: And it was his staff as well. And so Ford had a little campaign committee – I think Dick Herman was on it, Rockefeller put a guy on it that was an executive vice president of one of his companies, or something – a lawyer. A nice guy, can't think of his name. And Thurston Morton was there, Ford would attend meetings, I was there. So I asked Ford, in order to maintain some relationship with the Reagan people, why don't we put William French Smith onto this thing? You've got Rockefeller's guy – and he said, "That's fine." So I called Smith and asked him if he'd come to the next meeting.
- In each one of those meetings – and I have notes about this – I'd say, "It's time that these two talked." "Nope, it's not time, I will tell you when it's

time.” So it was just a very, very bitter feeling that exists. It wasn’t until we were into the campaign six weeks or more we had a meeting at the Mayflower of the group, and he got me aside and he said, “It’s time.” I said, “Okay.” I called Cheney over at the White House and I said, “I’ve got Bill Smith with me and we need to talk to the President tonight about calling Reagan.” And he said, “Okay, he’s at a reception at the White House, over in the main floor of the White House. Why don’t you come over, I’ll clear you through, come to that reception. Then when he goes upstairs you and Smith follow him.” I said, okay. So we went up after he’d done his thing and we went upstairs into what was their living room at the time. I said, “Tell the President what you have to say.” And he said, “It’s time now. You can call Reagan.” He said, “Okay, I’ll do it tomorrow.” Was not going to do it right now – three hours difference – it was still early in California.

So he did it the next day and had a nice conversation, he said. But as a result of that, I think – I don’t know that Reagan ever knew this. I don’t know. The reason I say that, we were at a meeting later during the campaign at the Marriott Hotel at LAX, one of those big hotels going down to the airport. And we had all the Reagan people there. I was sitting next to Holmes Tuttle. Holmes Tuttle says to me, or he made the statement before Margaret Brock and all these people who were sitting there, “Ford didn’t even call Reagan after the campaign.” I said, “Holmes, we were directed not to call him.” “That’s a lie!” I said, “You’re telling me I’m lying to you?” And he said, “Yes.” I said, “No,” and I told him the story. Bill Smith told me this and we waited. About that time Bill Smith walks up. I put my hand on Holmes’ arm and I said, “Holmes, don’t you say a word, I’m going to ask Bill a question, and you wait for the answer.” And I turned to Bill and I said, “Bill, would you tell Holmes what you were telling and I was passing to the President about calling Reagan?” And he repeated verbatim what I’d just told him. Holmes shot out of his seat, grabbed Smith by the arm, took him over in the corner, and I could hear him, “Don’t you ever tell that story again.” I mean, it was a rant. But, that led me to believe, someplace communications had broken down.

In a way, Ford was the victim, because Reagan did not – I offered Lynn Nofziger a thousand dollars – I said, “I’ll give you a thousand dollars, Nofziger,” and he was a dear, dear, friend and covered us when I was working in the Congress. “I’ll give you a thousand dollars for every time Reagan mentions Ford over twice in a speech, if you’ll give me a thousand dollars if he doesn’t mention him in the speech.” He wouldn’t take the bet. And I’ve never gone back to check the speeches because I know they are all doctored. But I don’t think ever, I never heard it, that he ever mentioned President Ford, by name, or as president.

Smith: Were you in DC on election night?

Parma: Yes, I flew in. In fact, I took an airplane out of LAX election morning, flew to Logan, Utah, picked up Jack Ford, and we flew cross-country to the White House. Not a cloud in the sky. I said, “There’s got to be a cloud there, Jack. Someplace, it’s got to be raining!” Like Michigan or someplace.

Smith: Was Jack upbeat?

Parma: Yeah, he felt good about it. He’s a junior in college or something like that. Oh yeah, he’d had a fun campaign, and all that. We had a nice time. We flew into Washington and the little Learjet – I guess we refueled in Utah, we were able to make it from there right on in. But then we went right to the White House. Joe Garagiola did a great job during the campaign – everything Stu would ask for, I guess, Joe did. So the President asked Joe and his wife to come over. Well, Joe brought his wife and I don’t know how many kids were there, and it was an interesting group. Jake Javits was there. Pearl Bailey was there.

Smith: The Doles were there.

Parma: Dole? I don’t think Dole was there. It was an interesting group. Kennerly had a bunch of pictures. I was kind of the scorekeeper. I had a copy of *Newsweek* magazine that had an excellent layout on the states and the delegate votes. So I was keeping score. The President kept saying, “Leon, what is it?” So I’d show him. I’d circle the states that were still coming in. It was not good.

Smith: Were you watching TV?

Parma: We were watching the television, but it was difficult to keep the score sheet and knowing the states we had to win. And I guess it was like two o'clock in the morning, or something like that; Cheney came in and told us how dire it was. Once the President asked, "Where you staying? You staying here?" I said, "No, I don't know where I'm staying, frankly." "Well, why don't you stay here?" And I think Betty overheard him or something, and somebody said, "Mr. President, there aren't any bedrooms." All of Joe's kids were in the bedrooms. And so I said, "Oh, don't worry about it. I'll bunk out with somebody else downtown." I said, "I want to be back here in the morning when you do your thing." He'd lost his voice and I was concerned.

Smith: That night, was he able to speak?

Parma: Not much, he'd lost it in Grand Rapids. It was his last stop, I think, before he came into Washington, he'd gone to Grand Rapids. And that's where it finally gave out. Next morning, he didn't have a voice. And there was a debate amongst the family, who should read the statement. Have Jack read it, have Susan. He said, "Betty will read the statement." Just the four kids and Betty and me, we were in the Oval Office. So, with that we walked into the press room. I walked into the press secretary's room to watch the television. I wished I'd gone into the other room, I could have seen everything. I was more interested in how Betty was going to do.

Smith: And remember Ohio, which was so close. Did it take him a while to get over the loss?

Parma: Oh, I don't know that he ever really got over it. Give me 9,000, he'd be president. I figured that out one time. It was that close. And the pardon thing took him down. The Polish thing was a big deal. I think that cost him votes.

Smith: People tend to forget about this, but the last weekend before the election, there was some new economic numbers, which, at the very least, suggested that the comeback that they were trumpeting had stalled out. It wasn't as robust a recovery as it had appeared to be.

Parma: Well, the debate in San Francisco – after the debate we went out to this Suitros (?) home. This lawyer from one of the big law firms in San Francisco. And Henry got him there. Henry told him what a great debate it was and how well he'd done. Didn't mention the Polish thing.

Smith: Was that characteristic of Kissinger?

Parma: Yeah. But the next day we flew down to USC, and there was a big meeting and was not in the meeting for some reason. Stu was in the meeting and can tell you what happened there. And Ford was very stubborn about it. "I didn't make a mistake." Ford had been, I think after Helsinki, had gone into Poland. A million people lined the place and were throwing roses at him and everything else. And he saw that, and he felt it. They were not minions of the Soviets, and this was what he was trying to say.

Smith: If he had put it in those personal terms, no one would have thought twice.

Parma: Oh, the next day or that night, or if anybody had said, "You didn't look into the eyes of the Polish people when I was driven through their streets and they were throwing roses at us. They were not controlled by the Soviets. Yes, they were occupied, but they had not caved." Even the head of the American Polish Society flew out to meet with him, saying how wrong he was. No one sensed this. And it never came out like I just said it, to my mind. It never came out.

Smith: What does it tell you about – frankly, it's not up to the President to come up with a formulation like that? Were there people around him who could have?

Parma: Yeah, I don't know why they didn't feed it in. I said it. I didn't say it to the press, they didn't know who the hell I was. I asked somebody, I said, "Don't they understand what he said? I mean, he saw the people." He was standing in a parking lot, or something like that, and the press had him cornered and he tried to explain his way out of the deal. And Carter kept hammering away on it. It was an interesting time.

Smith: Did he ever talk about it in later years?

Parma: Yeah, a little bit. He said they didn't understand what I was saying. It was a shame.

Smith: What's it feel like to come back to this room?

Parma: I felt, from the first time we walked in the Oval Office, I couldn't believe that this friend, this golfing partner, who we'd been on so many vacations with and all that, was, indeed, the President of the United States. If you go to that door, you can look out across and see a house on the 150 yard marker, of the 12th fairway, this is 13. He called me up one day and he said, "I found a house for you. You've got to come." I said, "Mr. President, I don't need a house in Palm Springs. Barbara's aunt has a house, we'll stay there whenever we go down." "No, you've got to buy this house. I can see it right from here." I bought the house.

He'd call me up – I'd let him know when I was in town – and his thing was, "We can tee off on 13, then we'd come around and play 12. You go home, then I'm right here." And this was it. We'd play the nine holes. We wouldn't play the eighteen. We did this quite often.

It was that kind of a warm relationship. And I'm always in awe. I never addressed him as anything but Mr. President. Very few times did I, when we were really alone, did I say Jerry. But it offended me whenever I heard anybody call him...he had a bunch of New York guys that were hanging around. Loved to be Jerry. I just couldn't understand – it was Mr. President.

We talked a lot of football.

Smith: College and pro?

Parma: Well, he could have been a pro. I was a half-assed quarterback at San Diego State, so we knew the lingo and talked about it.

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

Parma: We just had a nice little chat. I sat there and we talked about something. He had some pictures he was showing me. The last time I saw him was the day of

the – I guess it was the Ohio State-Michigan game – and he was in his hospital bed sitting in the study. He was right there. Right to the end, he thought he'd win the game. They lost. He thought that they'd win the game. We had a coach down at my University of San Diego State, Steve Fisher, who had been the assistant coach the year that they were going to the Final Four. Fish took them to the Final Four. I think they won. The Fab Five, I think they called it. Ford knew him and he was always telling me, "Say hello to Fish."

We went to Ann Arbor one time for something. It was after he was President. They'd always take him down to the locker room. In '77, we had the major league all star game at San Diego. And Bowie Kuhn, Baseball Commission, had invited him to the game, so he invited me to go with him. He loved to go into the locker rooms. We went into both locker rooms. Bowie had his box right on the first base – right opposite the first baseman and we sat there and watched the game. But he loved that; he just absolutely loved those things. He was a good jock.

Barbara and I accompanied Betty aboard Air Force One from Palm Springs to Washington, Grand Rapids and back to Palm Springs. It was a great moment for me during the funeral services, flying from Washington to Grand Rapids aboard Air Force One. And when we passed over Detroit, we were told the pilot was going to do something over Michigan stadium, it was going to be on the left side, so I was sitting on the left side and I sat, going to Washington with Betty and going from Grand Rapids with him. Just had the feeling that he shouldn't be there by himself. Whenever I saw no one was there, I sat down. When we went over Detroit, the pilot started letting that airplane down, and he took it down, had the full flaps down, he had the wheels down. Everything was down in that airplane, I swear, and there was an Air Force officer came to me and says, "I've never seen one of these airplanes go this slow." But he brought that airplane down, a thousand feet or so, he was low. He dipped the wings in salute and just throttled slowly back up to altitude towards Grand Rapids. When we were over the stadium I was hitting the casket, and I said, "We're over the stadium!" I just totally lost it. And Marty Allen had walked in about that time, I know he thought I was going crazy. And I had this heavy

ring on so I was hitting the top of the casket. I had restrained myself the whole time. That did it. The old jock received the ultimate accolade on his trip home – he was give a low level flyover Michigan Stadium where he had so many fond memories. I know this would be one of the most special events of all that were held that week.

Smith: That's perfect.

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