

**Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project**  
**Peter Pocklington**  
**Interviewed by**  
**Richard Norton Smith**  
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Smith: First off, Peter Pocklington, thanks so much for doing this, we really appreciate it. Tell us a little bit about you, and how your path first happened to cross that of Gerald and Betty Ford

Pocklington: Well, I was an owner of a hockey franchise in Edmonton, Alberta, and bought the Oilers in 1976 when it was in the World Hockey Association, and by '79 we'd joined the NHL and started to amass some pretty incredible talent. One of them being Wayne Gretzky, who I bought when he was seventeen. He flew into Edmonton, I sent my plane for him. They came into Edmonton, he was a young guy that I doubt had even started to shave yet, and yet he was probably, looking backwards, he was certainly the greatest hockey player that ever was.

Smith: Did you have any idea at the time?

Pocklington: I knew he was damn good but I didn't know he was as good as he turned out to be, obviously, and bought Wayne and then we assembled, through good management, and maybe a lot of good luck, probably the greatest NHL team that ever was – really did great things during the Eighties – and early Nineties – we won five Stanley Cups and, at one time had five players on the team that scored at least more than fifty goals each. Which is incredible now if you get one, you're in great shape. So we really had one of those fairy tale teams, and I think my ego grew along with the fact that the hockey team did so well, and I also did other things – bought and sold businesses and, one of the things that I championed was the thing called Junior Achievement, because I wanted youngsters to learn some of the things that I had been fortunate enough to learn – business wasn't all bad and, it is kind of exciting, actually, and to raise the profile of that I brought in speakers. And this would be in 1979 or 80, and I'm trying to remember exactly when I did phone President Ford.

But I phoned his office and asked for him and they wanted to know who I was, this audacious character wanting to talk to the president. And finally they put me through to President Ford. And I said, "Mr. President, I really want to have you up as a speaker." I gave him a little background of me and said, I'm trying to bring in people from the...number one, with integrity, and some conservative thought, poor old Canada is pretty Socialist, and he agreed to do it. So, I sent my airplane down to Palm Springs and picked him up and brought him into Edmonton and I believe we had thirteen or fourteen hundred people show up at the speech that President Ford put on and he did a great job and stayed the next day and we had him for dinner at our home and met

various people. But I charged them all to come to dinner to meet President Ford because of the fact we needed the money for Junior Achievement.

So he kind of set the model for what I did with many, many speakers and he also helped me, by the way, and introduced me to many of these speakers. One was President Bush '41, who I had up, and also Maggie Thatcher and Kissinger, and the list is long. And raised millions for Junior Achievement, in fact, because the strongest Junior Achievement chapter in Canada, really because of Jerry Ford. Jerry Ford got the thing rolling and gave me a few ideas on it. And part of meeting him and I really enjoyed him, he was kind of down to earth and...

Smith: What did you expect? Was this the first time you met him?

Pocklington: Oh first time I met him! I met him at the airport when the guys brought him in and I was a little reticent, you know, and poor little broken down Canadian kid with the President of the United States coming in, but he made me feel very much at home and warm and got to know him over the next two days – more than maybe I thought I would and ended up making a deal with him that I would like to kind of use him as my mentor and pay him an honorarium and arrange the odd speaking engagement for a couple of my companies. And he agreed to that and we became pals ever since and starting, I think it was that year, it became a tradition, I had the team down to Palm Springs, and then finally Pebble Beach with President Ford. He would play golf with the players and after the game, we'd all go to his residence for a cocktail party and meet Betty. Kind of old home week, he loved to be around people and sports.

Smith: Now, did that include Gretzky?

Pocklington: Oh yes, of course.

Smith: Did they hit it off?

Pocklington: Oh, they really did, and he was just a kid at that time, of course, 20-21. They were all pretty young. He really, really, really, enjoyed being around the players and then after the cocktail party at his home we went over to a place called Wally's Desert Turtle, and we rented the whole restaurant, and it was kind of a charming restaurant in Rancho Mirage, and after dinner he'd get up and give a ten or fifteen minute speech and motivate the guys. Part of my reasoning was that if these kids could hang around with prior presidents rather than, whatever, raise their self-concept. In building the team, I brought in a fellow from Los Angeles called John Boyle, who ran a thing called Omega. It's a four-day seminar. You become what you think about. If you want to raise your behavior and ability to do things, you don't worry about practicing that, you raise your self-concept – kind of like the inner game of tennis, the inner game of whatever. And with Wayne it was very easy – he took to it and that's

really the reason the team was so damn good, because it was programmed. So Jerry Ford was part of that.

Smith: He was in effect the motivational speaker?

Pocklington: Oh, but in a different way than rah rah rah. It was more strength and integrity, and never say die, and we're going to win regardless. He was almost Churchillian in the way he hung in.

Smith: I didn't know if you heard, again the notion of him as tongue-tied...he had a practice of going back to Ann Arbor, usually before the big, I guess, game with Ohio.

Pocklington: Right.

Smith: And he would go out on the field with the team and give them a pep talk.

Pocklington: Yeah.

Smith: And I never had a chance to see it, but I've talked to a number of people who did, and they were all of the same mind. In that setting, there was a kind of eloquence, free-flow, beyond articulate – I mean, almost a sermon, pushing all the right buttons...

Pocklington: Oh, no question.

Smith: And connecting, you know, emotionally.

Pocklington: He had an alter ego that nobody knew about that just popped into, as you say, with youngsters that were going to win. And man, could he get them going. But not in a rah rah sense, but more in a, "you're not going to beat us," sense, and damn it, they won continually. And we all looked forward to our yearly meeting with President Ford and the golf and, finally, we took it over to Pebble Beach, and for years did it at Pebble Beach and played two days. Played Pebble and then we'd play Spanish Bay and then maybe, Pobby Hills.

Smith: And how long, do you remember the last time you did it?

Pocklington: Well the last time, I sold the team in 1993, so it would be '93. So every year, we didn't miss a year. And every time we won a Stanley Cup the guys would present President Ford with his Stanley Cup ring and so he's got five Stanley Cup rings in the safe somewhere.

Smith: Did he know hockey?

Pocklington: Well, he sure got to know it. Growing up in that part of the country there was lots of hockey, and, being close to the Canadian border, and of course, the great hockey in Chicago and Boston and New York, when he was young, of course he saw it.

Smith: Did he seem knowledgeable about the game?

Pocklington: Yes and no. I don't think he was a student of hockey, but he loved sports and loved the players and loved to be part of the action.

Smith: Do you think it applied to all sports?

Pocklington: Oh, no question. But, maybe strongly football. As you know, he was a football fanatic. In fact, we flew him into Ann Arbor – and they presented him with his sweater – they retired his sweater and there had to be a hundred thousand people in the place. I've never seen anything like it. And they drove him around in a golf cart, and of course everybody cheered and went mad and so it was very exciting.

Smith: Very emotional for him?

Pocklington: Oh, absolutely, and emotional for me, because I love sport and I love that kind of theater, which it was. But he was very instrumental in, believe it or not, helping us win five Stanley Cups. Nobody knows that.

Smith: No, that's great. Did you get to know Mrs. Ford?

Pocklington: Very well.

Smith: Was there anything about either one of them that surprised you as you began to get to know them?

Pocklington: Well, let me give you a little background with Betty, because being in the sports business with guys that love to drink, I had seven of them go through Betty Ford. Sat them down and said if you want to clean up your act and be part of the team, you're going to have to go dry out. So we sent them to the Betty Ford Center and straightened every one of them out, strangely enough. One died afterwards from cirrhosis of the liver, but they really enjoyed the Betty Ford Center and through that association I became a board member on the Betty Ford board and got to know, obviously, Betty very well, because she was there at every meeting. She ran a tough ship.

Smith: How so?

Pocklington: She – I mean the reason it is so successful is because of Betty Ford – no other reason. They put on a great program, but she oversaw everything. She was very detailed, she was there every day, visited every day, talked to the patients, made sure that the board did what they had to do. It was very tightly run and professionally run. I was surprised that she had that acumen. She was pretty outstanding.

Smith: She ever have to fire people?

Pocklington: Well, she did through the president of the place – a guy named John Schwartzlose – and John did a good job in doing her bidding, very strong and good at it and to this day it has a rating of – check it out with people - 96% of them refer to the Betty Ford Center. So it's like Kodak – it's got a pretty strong branding. So she saved a lot of people, turned a lot of people around and I enjoyed being part of it, and now that she no longer – now that her daughter has taken over – I've now become – I think they call me emeritus – no longer go to the meetings. They are bringing on a bunch of younger people.

Smith: And how frequently were those board meetings?

Pocklington: While I was on their executive committee and the finance committee, every three months, and finance meeting, every six weeks.

Smith: And I take it she was involved in everything?

Pocklington: Absolutely. There is no question. That's why it reached the pinnacle of turning people around. I think it has the, in fact I know it has the highest, turnaround rate of any bunch in that it is also very well priced. It is medium priced, it's not way up in the sky like most people think because of the few celebrities that went through. They gave it a celebrity status.

Smith: And does that reflect her wishes as well?

Pocklington: She wanted to make sure that, in fact they give away ten percent of their tuitions to people who can't afford them. So she makes sure that everybody gets looked after. But we do have or did have a lot of celebrities that went through, that quite frankly gave it a profile that a small, new business needed.

Smith: The general public wonder, what if any, ongoing relationship any of those people might have with Mrs. Ford.

Pocklington: Oh, I don't think any of them ever had, other than people that maybe she knew before they came in. I know she had two or three or four people that she knew well that went through, but one of the things that we instituted in Betty Ford was an ongoing follow-up with the patients who had come through, because, as you know, a lot of them fall off the wagon afterwards and to raise the level of keeping people sober we contacted them a couple of times a month for a couple years to make sure that they were behaving themselves and stuck to the program. So that's one of the reasons it was very successful.

Smith: And I assume, because of its visibility, there must be more people who want to get in than the place can...

Pocklington: No, it's – Betty wished to keep it small and private. She didn't really want to get to the point where it was some great big hospital that lost its personal

touch. I think when I left a month or two ago, it was at 115 beds and they are always full. And one of the things I helped institute was – they'd get all these calls but they weren't closing them – so we put together a bunch of people to train them on how to close when people phoned and not only just phone, they get put together and made sure we got them in. So, that's why it's always full. It's very well run, even from the business end of it. They have everybody that phones, we put the full court press on them to make sure we bring them in because they are really just reaching out – we need some help and before they weren't closing enough of them. And it's 50/50 men and women.

Smith: Age diversity there?

Pocklington: Oh, anywhere from 20 to 70. It's amazing, and now, of course, the drug of choice is, I guess alcohol is still the strongest, but I tell you there is so many other things now, from crack cocaine to meth to some....

Smith: So it does address drug issues.

Pocklington: It does address those others, but mainly alcohol was easier to do, because with drugs, especially meth, it takes a while to bring them down to where their system is almost normal to get them turned around on the Twelve Step program.

Smith: There must be instances that, I'm not looking for names, obviously, but there must be cases where friends, or friends of friends, approached her directly.

Pocklington: Well, that has obviously happened a few times and she simply addressed the situation, says come with me and takes them to the hospital and they put that particular person in and two or three of the high profile celebrities just that way.

Smith: Were you surprised, or was she surprised to know that she has turned into this administrator?

Pocklington: Oh, I think she probably looks at how it all started. As you know, President Ford did an intervention on Betty with the family. He said, Sweetheart we love you dearly, but you've got a serious problem here and the family is going to implode unless we correct this. And they did and she went to, I think it was a Navy hospital, and within a few months she and Leonard Firestone decided to put together the Betty Ford Center. And because she is so strong and dedicated, there is no question that it was going to be successful.

Smith: But it must have been an extraordinary process of self-discovery for her to learn that she could do all of these things, that she could meet all of these challenges. That there were such untapped abilities.

Pocklington: Well, you know most successful marriages, you marry someone certainly with equal abilities and strengths, and there is no question that Betty was certainly Jerry's equal as far as abilities and she was amazing, and their marriage was one of the best I've ever seen.

Smith: Do you think there is a secret to that? If you could bottle it, and market it, what was it?

Pocklington: I think number one was strong loyalty, because they'd been through a lot of, you know, bang-bang – he was on the road a lot, he was away a couple of hundred days a year.

Smith: Do you think he felt any degree of guilt about that? Let me ask the question differently. My sense was that he really made an effort in later years to spend quality time with the kids, and obviously with her as well. And that he was certainly aware of the fact that he had been on the road.

Pocklington: He was aware by the time she got into trouble with the drugs and the pain killers and the alcohol, and I think it was kind of a, wrong expression, "come to Jesus" meeting, but it was kind of that, "let's get things back under control" and he even quit drinking when she did. Not that he drank a lot, but had enjoyed the odd cocktail and he said he quit and became dedicated to helping her remain sober, which she did and never lapsed. But he was part of her strength and vice versa – they really complemented one another in their endeavors and he went to a lot of, in fact he went to all the social gatherings for the Betty Ford thing. The yearly alumni dinner, he would always come and be present and go to a lot of the meetings.

Smith: I've heard stories of him on the grill cooking hot dogs.

Pocklington: Oh, absolutely. During the day when, it's really a two and a half-three day effort, and he became very involved. No question. Cooked hot dogs and got involved with the people. And I think that is another reason – that's part of the glue that held the whole thing together, because she was so involved and brought him into these things, people loved to be part of it.

Smith: Did people feel at all, initially, awkward, about interacting with the Fords?

Pocklington: Well, there's no question, because I know how I felt when I first met, then he was President Ford to me, now he was Jerry, but, when you meet a former president, you figure he's God – he is elevated to we, the folks, so I'm sure most people feel that way. I know when we introduced him to people, when we brought them as friends of the hockey club to these things, part of our deal every year, I'd bring in twenty or thirty business friends, and the first time meeting they were all kind of awed, and it meant a lot to them. So he really was the glue that helped me put all this together and keep it together. So

people do feel, no question, feel awed by him. And he's kind of a striking character, he's kind of patrician.

Smith: Interesting you should say that because it's an interesting observation. I mean he was very approachable, very accessible, in many ways down to earth, but there was also a dignity...

Pocklington: Oh, without question.

Smith: ...about him.

Pocklington: There was another strength. Absolutely. So many people felt that, and a lot of them couldn't get by it and I didn't know any better.

Smith: How so?

Pocklington: Well, he radiated kind of a strength, and they really never got by it to know who he really was – the kind guy behind the patrician sense. He really was, he really had a soft spot.

Smith: Tell me about that.

Pocklington: Between all of these crazy meetings we'd fly around and I always had to make sure we had ice cream on the plane, which I wasn't supposed to tell Betty about.

Laughter

Pocklington: And that was a secret – I could have the ice cream on it and he'd eat it as long as I wouldn't tell Betty.

Smith: Did she watch out for – watch his weight.

Pocklington: Oh, without question.

Smith: Really.

Pocklington: So we had to keep the ice cream thing fairly quiet.

Smith: He seemed like a pretty self-disciplined guy.

Pocklington: Oh, he sure was. Yeah he really was. But other than the ice cream he would devour newspapers – he'd go through three-four-five newspapers before he really started to chat and then we'd talk about the events of what he had just read about. And then often we'd go back and talk about some of the things he did when he was president and before he was president. I was always curious about the Warren Commission. And he said that, with the information we were given, this is the conclusion we came to. And he would never vary from that statement, because I always tried to wiggle around behind and see if he

thinks there really was a conspiracy, etc. But he felt not and said again, with the information that they were supplied, this was the conclusion they had to come to. I think that its showing that that was absolutely correct.

Smith: He wasn't happy with Oliver Stone, was he?

Pocklington: Oh.....many times, playing golf, because I ran, too, for the leadership of the Conservative Party in Canada against Brian Mulroney – he ran and I ran and four or five other did – but I really ran because we had this character Pierre Trudeau who Jerry obviously knew and ...

Smith: What did he think of Trudeau?

Pocklington: Well, he was a Socialist – an absolute Socialist. And the reason I ran for the leadership of the party was number one, a New Year's speech he did with CBC and he said, "I will guide the ship with such skill that the destination will not be known until we arrive." I mean you know he was going to dismantle the whole damn thing and create a Socialist society, which he was trying to do and came close to. I mean it is still pretty far left. It seems what they like to do down here, the politics of envy, they got it and we want and we're going to pass it out. But Trudeau was a very charming character and I...

Smith: There is a kind of Kennedyesque aura that attaches itself to that whole era.

Pocklington: The press did that. It was kind of Canadian's Camelot – similar to Jack Kennedy. I took Trudeau skiing one time – I owned a ski mountain in western Canada in Kamloops, and skied with him for the day, and he'd just gotten back from visiting Castro. And talked about Castro using the French word *lumière*, light bulb. I mean, "Pierre, the guy's a Communist," "Oh, no, no, no." I mean he was, Pierre liked to think he was above all this – that we commoners didn't understand and he had had a tough time in that, if you remember he had a wife, Margaret, who was a bit of a character, in fact...

Smith: Decidedly unCanadian?

Laughter

Pocklington: Kind of decidedly very common Canadian. She loved to carry on with, in fact, two or three of my hockey players – had carried on with her. But Pierre was not very happy – they had just come back from Cuba and I'm sure that Castro had had a roll in the hay with Margaret and he was not very happy. But he is a great skier and we didn't stop for lunch. I was beat by three and he was still wanting to go. I said, "Pierre, we gotta calm down." He was twenty-thirty years my senior. But it was because of that outing that I got involved – wanted to get into politics and change the way things were. I was an egotistical pup and thought, damn it, we can't let this guy destroy Canada. So I ran for the leadership of the Conservative Party and got to know Brian

Mulroney, obviously very well, running against him. And we had, at that time, a fellow by the name of Joe Clark who was...

Smith: a short-lived prime minister...

Pocklington: a short-lived prime minister, thank God, 'cause he was way to the left and not that Brian was much more to the right, but it was maybe center. But I ran on flat-rate tax of twenty percent, get rid of all crown corporations, 45% of Canada's industry was owned by the federal government, and promote free trade with the U.S. and free trade with anybody that cared to trade with us. So I was, at that time, a bit of a radical as far as the press were concerned. But I really enjoyed politics, and that's why I enjoyed Jerry Ford so much. So many times when we were golfing, just before I was going to hit a drive, he'd start talking about Trudeau, and I'd say "For god's sake Jerry, shut up!" He knew he'd get me roiled and...

Smith: What did he think of Trudeau?

Pocklington: Oh I think personally he enjoyed him. He liked Pierre, because Pierre was a charming guy. And, as you know, President Ford wasn't as far right as I was, he was pretty centered, but Trudeau was pretty left, and he'd really get me going when we'd chatted about that.

Smith: Was he knowledgeable about Canadian politics?

Pocklington: Oh, absolutely. He was unbelievably well-read. I mean, as I say, every time we'd go somewhere he'd devour his five or six newspapers before we went... once we took off he'd get into the newspapers and you couldn't bother him until he ate a little ice cream and read his damn newspapers. But he spent an hour on them. He'd go through the *Wall Street* and the *Washington Post* and, I'm trying to remember what other papers he had.

Smith: He read *The Times*?

Pocklington: *The New York Times*. He also had the British *The Herald*, but he was really very well read. I don't think most people really understood that he was as knowledgeable as he was on everything. You could talk to him about anything and everything – once you got to know him, but most people didn't realize that.

Smith: What other subjects, what other interests or kinds of things that might surprise people.

Pocklington: What did surprise me was that he didn't like fishing. I love to fish. I used to go fishing a lot up to the area, could take a bunch of businessmen, always tried to get Jerry to go along. "Naw, I don't want to go fishing." He didn't like roughing it, he was, he liked to be in good surroundings and civilized.

Smith: He wasn't a camper.

Pocklington: He wasn't a camper. Wasn't a shooter or a fisherman – that was the other part of him that was very different, because to me, most men that I like to be with like to hunt and fish and golf and sports and so on. But Jerry wasn't that, and it was interesting.

Smith: As you got to know him, did he talk much about his colleagues, did he talk much about Nixon?

Pocklington: I asked him a lot about Nixon, because I wanted Nixon to come up and speak and Jerry wrote him a letter on my behalf, but he said Dick had a bit of a dark side to him – he said he was very bright – knew what he was about – but he really had a dark side that he didn't, I don't suppose he's told many people that, but he said there is that dark side.

Smith: Did you sense that Watergate surprised him – or the language, for example...

Pocklington: That hurt him, because Jerry doesn't use profanity – I've never heard him – oh a time when he misses a putt or something – but no, he was very eloquent, well-spoken at all times, always a gentlemen. I know he was shocked by Dick Nixon and the tapes and the fact that he had to lie and didn't need to and said he'd still be there if he hadn't lied.

Smith: Ford really was a bit of the Eagle Scout, wasn't he?

Pocklington: Yeah. Oh he really was – all the way to end, he was an Eagle Scout. No question. Loved that, that upbringing really meant a lot to him.

Smith: Did he talk about his parents? Or his upbringing?

Pocklington: Well, he sure loved the folks that adopted him. He was very close to them. And they obviously did a good job on him. And I met his brother when we went to Ann Arbor to the football thing and they're all pretty conservative, laid back people. But yeah, he talked about, told me the whole story of when he was adopted.

Smith: You know that's interesting, because he from boyhood, he had a temper.

Pocklington: Oh, I've seen that two or three times. There is no question. He could really get, you could just see him seething.

Smith: What would cause him...

Pocklington: What would set him off, I'm trying to think what did set him off. I tried to look around it, because he was, he'd get pretty upset.

Smith: Red-faced?

- Pocklington: Oh, very red-faced. You could see him having to try to control it and he always did. You knew he was really pissed off at something, but he always controlled it. So he did have a temper. There's no question.
- Smith: Beyond missing a putt?
- Pocklington: Beyond missing a putt when it came to serious stuff, yeah, he really got teed off, but always controlled it.
- Smith: I only heard him speak negatively of two people. I'll never forget, he said, the ultimate epitaph was, "He's a *bad* man."
- Pocklington: Yes, I've heard him say that.
- Smith: He's a bad man, and there were only two people I've ever heard him say it about. One was John Dean and other was Gordon Liddy.
- Pocklington: Yeah, I've heard – he told me about Gordon Liddy. He didn't think much of him, but, I tell you one fellow we brought to one of these golf outings was Alan Shepard, and Alan Shepard played golf with Gretzky and Jerry and I and what a charming, wonderful guy he was. So Jerry asked him what his experience of being on the moon was, and he said, "You know the thing that was really interesting was the fact, when you look up from the earth in the sky and see the moon, when you look from the moon, looking at the earth, it's four times as big." He said that was the thing that really impressed him the most. And Jerry was awed by that, as I was.
- Smith: Of course he was on the original NASA committee in the House. There's a reason that if you go to the museum in Grand Rapids that it's a spaceman out there. He didn't want a statue of himself.
- Pocklington: Right.
- Smith: So that was one of his interests.
- Pocklington: Very much so. So he was, we really enjoyed Alan Shepard – and when we played then, he had cancer at the time, I don't recall what brand it was, but it was obviously fatal, and...but what a sweet man he was. One of the most charming guys and very eloquent. He made a little short speech after Jerry made his that evening.
- Smith: You'd think that to go through life forever being thought as the first American in space, in some ways would be very limiting. It obviously would open a lot of doors, but would also be the first, and in most instances, the only thing, most people knew about you. I suppose it is similar to having been President of the United States.

Pocklington: That's very true, but he was more than that. I tell you, he really impressed me a lot.

Smith: Were there other people who impressed the President – or people he became friends with or, frankly, didn't impress the President?

Pocklington: I don't think he was really enamored by Bill Clinton. He never said anything that was untowards, but I knew him well enough that that kind of behavior wasn't acceptable.

Smith: The latter half of the Clinton presidency and the whole scandal.

Pocklington: That's right. I mean that did not impress him "a-tall." Jerry was a straight arrow, he didn't fool around ever on Betty and he was always straight and very loyal.

Smith: Plus, you think of him as someone who was of a generation that had a reverence for the White House and the presidency.

Pocklington: Oh, absolutely. And that really upset him. That really bothered him.

Smith: Did he talk much about his years in the White House – did he tell war stories?

Pocklington: Well, he did. I was always interested in his war stories. He was very strong on the *Mayaguez* thing, he was bound and determined that no one was going to pull any wool over his eyes and always was incredibly strong and got it handled immediately. I also asked him about his meeting in Russia and, as you know, a lot of people thought he was weak-kneed on it, but he said he enjoyed it and got a lot done and he thought positively and had a bit of an admiration for the Russians, even though they were obviously not what we wanted.

Smith: Maybe the hardest thing of all is for somebody in that position is to see someone across the table in human terms and not just as the leader of another system.

Pocklington: And not the enemy. From my point of view, he looked at most people as, he checked them out, tried them out and see if they were real people, regardless of what side of the aisle they were, or what crazy country they were from. So he had a bit of a respect for the Russians in the fact that that was their culture and we had to deal with it and I think he did so very successfully.

Smith: Did he form judgments about people quickly? My sense was that he was a pretty optimistic guy.

Pocklington: Oh, he used the word optimist, optimistic, I think in every speech he made. He said I am an optimist. And he was. I think that was one of the reasons we got along so well. Because I love optimism, I love to see people win win win.

You become what you think about. He was always optimistic, I always believed that good was going to overcome evil. And that was really what he was about and that was who it was – always optimistic. I always gave someone an extra chance, an extra yard.

Smith: Did he harbor regrets about '76, about not having that full term?

Pocklington: I think he was very disappointed, like really disappointed. He said to me, it really came down to, "you know if we just had thirty more days the economy was turned around, we missed by such a small margin." I think he got to know Jimmy Carter when he went over to Egypt to the funeral and I'm not so sure he was his best pal until then, but he did get, obviously closer, and spoke nice things about him after that. But, he was really disappointed. I think he was heartbroken deep down that he didn't have that second term. And one that he had won legitimately in his mind, that he had gone to the voters. I also asked him about the pardon of Dick Nixon. He said, "Peter, I had to do it," he said it was taking up "forty percent of my time. Talking to the press about that problem, and he said, "You know, the guy was human, there's no sense hanging him up," but he said, "I had to clean up the office. I had to put it behind us, closure. Let's get on with building America and not worrying about what this character had done." And that's the reason he did it. He said, "I know it was going to harm me politically, but that's too bad."

Smith: You know, the wonderful thing that was unlike someone like Lyndon Johnson, who only lived four years – in fact, literally died the day before the peace treaty was announced – President Ford lived long enough to know that most people had come around to his way of thinking...

Pocklington: No question...

Smith: I'll never forget that day at the Kennedy Library, when the Profiles in Courage Award that was the cherry on top of the sundae. He must have taken real satisfaction in knowing that...

Pocklington: Huge. In fact, he invited even me to the Profiles in Courage thing, and for some reason didn't go. It's a long damn way to go to Boston, but I wish I'd gone because it really meant a lot to him. And he spoke of it afterwards that this was pretty good stuff.

Smith: He didn't ever seem like someone who would think in terms of personal vindication.

Pocklington: No...

Smith: But you're only human, it must have been...

Pocklington: You're only human, he was almost egoless from the point of view of "I have to be better than you." He just wasn't that.

Smith: Which is so unusual in a politician.

Pocklington: Ah! It's huge!

Smith: And a president!

Pocklington: A president! I mean, I've known a few of them and they are pretty egocentric folks. Jerry wasn't 'a-tall' – just wasn't. And I think that's one of the reasons that I really came to admire him. I learned from it and had to grow up and get over the ego nonsense. So, from that point of view I got more out of the relationship than he obviously did.

Smith: Did they have a lot of friends?

Pocklington: They had a lot of acquaintances.

Smith: I was going to say, the whole apparatus has got to get in the way of a kind of natural, relaxed, you know. My sense, at least from the time I was around them, that they consciously tried to have younger people around them. That it was almost a deliberate effort.

Pocklington: It certainly was in my case, because I was twenty-five younger, thirty years younger. And I'm trying to think of some of his other people that he would call friends. I'm not really sure that he got too close to too many people. Lots of acquaintances, lots of people that he was obviously very polite to. But he certainly had lots from the White House years and a lot of the people on his board – they were all pretty good pals.

Smith: Let's face it, there is also a sense that there are a lot of people out there who would like to use you. He would spend, to me, and I think most people would agree, an obscene amount signing autographs. Baseballs, footballs, pictures, you know, whatever. Virtually setting a day a week aside just to do that sort of thing. Maybe it goes with the territory, but there must also be people out there who would like nothing better than to attach the prestige of former president.

Pocklington: Oh, there's no question.

Smith: And yet he was criticized, particularly early on, for commercializing...was he sensitive about that?

Pocklington: Well, I remember one time when we played golf with a couple of fellows and I think Jerry and I lost ten bucks each to them and they said, we'll take a five, but you've got to sign it. I mean, that kind of crap and he wasn't particularly impressed with that, nor was I, quite frankly. I mean they tried to use the fact

that they'd rather have, that they could show their pals they played with President Ford. So there was a lot of that and I'm sure he had to suffer that. But never suffered fools well. He just didn't.

Smith: Can you think of an instance?

Pocklington: Oh, there were a couple of instances. I had him up to Toronto to do a speech, I had him, three or four other things that he did and people that tried to get too close too quickly, you know, he would become very professional...the guard would go up and that really incensed him when people tried to close in on him too quickly, unless he wanted to be there. So he kept his guard.

Smith: I guess you almost have to, don't you, as a former president?

Pocklington: Of course, no question. I mean, that's a balancing act, too.

Smith: Do you have a sense of how the Fords related with their Secret Service?

Pocklington: Oh really well, in fact, one fellow, damn, I'm trying to remember his name, because they always went on these golf outings and he always had, at least a couple of fellows in the front of the plane that were Secret Service, and this one guy, oh goodness...Lee Simons, and he really got to know these fellows and they became almost friends, it seemed. Yeah, he really related very warmly with his, people who were around him for a while. And was very kind to them. Maybe kind is the wrong word. Very respectful of them, but liked them a lot.

Smith: He had been the target of two would-be assassins.

Pocklington: Oh no question, that crazy broad in California, Weezie, or...

Smith: Do you think he had an extra sort of sensitivity about such things?

Pocklington: Well, I also had been through something like that. A guy came to the house to kidnap my wife and at the end of the day I ended up getting shot. So, there's always, with a profile, he had a world profile, I had a Canadian profile because of sports, but after that I was a little bit wary of, and I'm sure he was, had to be, having been tried to get shot a couple of time. A lot of crazies out there.

Smith: Did he talk about Reagan?

Pocklington: I sensed there was a – that he thought – he, Jerry, thought he was just as good a president as Reagan was. That there was a bit of a, how would I say, yeah, there was something there. Because I was Jerry's friend I really didn't want to find out an awful lot about it, but there was a sense of why him and not me?

Smith: And the whole challenge in '76 had to have been....

Pocklington: Ah! No question.

Smith: Yeah.

Pocklington: So there was an underlying something there that I really didn't never discussed.

Smith: Can you think of anyone he held a grudge against?

Pocklington: No, I don't think so, he really let bygones be bygones. No, well, maybe not. I remember, George Will, I always enjoyed. A pretty smart guy, in my opinion. Jerry didn't like George Will.

Smith: Why?

Pocklington: Oh, I've got a feeling that this goes back to something George Will said about Jerry when he was president. So he had no time for George Will. Or for that other clown that was on Saturday Night Live.

Smith: Chevy Chase.

Pocklington: Chevy Chase – no time for Chevy Chase.

Smith: Because, you know, they appeared together at a conference on humor. I mean, he was a good sport.

Pocklington: Oh, that's right. Yeah.

Smith: He was a very good sport.

Pocklington: He went beyond it. But, I'm not sure he was very impressed with Chevy Chase. He kind of, I think in Jerry's sense demeaned him a little and he didn't like that.

Smith: There is a school of thought that says, you know, that his health was extraordinarily good, up until about his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday...

Pocklington: And then he failed.

Smith: My sense was, once he was no longer able to travel, that was a kind of death.

Pocklington: Oh, without question.

Smith: He loved being on the road.

Pocklington: Loved to be on the road. Loved to be doing something. No, I remember the last two or three years he wasn't Jerry any more.

Smith: How? For someone of his will, and self-discipline and all of these qualities, it must have been an extraordinarily difficult thing for him to go through.

- Pocklington: Well, it was tough because he loved to golf and then he got down to nine holes, and, the fact that he could only play nine holes, and then very slowly, really bothered him. He didn't like to ever make an excuse about ever letting go, never letting up.
- Smith: The only time I ever saw his temper, and he really was blowing up at himself, he came back to Grand Rapids for a speech, and he wouldn't wear glasses. And and the lighting wasn't what it should have been...
- Pocklington: Right.
- Smith: And the paper wasn't at the angle it should have been, and he stumbled over a few words, and he was visibly angry, and I think he was angry at getting older. Did you sense that?
- Pocklington: No question. He said, Peter it's no fun to get old. And I said, well, Jerry, it beats the alternative. He said, "I'm not so sure." And this was when he was just playing nine holes.
- Smith: When did he give up golf? How long did he continue to play?
- Pocklington: Oh, he played until he was – how old was he when he died? – 93?
- Smith: Yes.
- Pocklington: 91? Yeah, he could, he still wanted to, his heart was still there.
- Smith: He continued to swim.
- Pocklington: Oh, yeah. He needed that conditioning. Every morning get up and did his lengths and made sure – it was his routine – he had to – it was what kept him going. Because he was a strong guy.
- Smith: And he wanted to keep going.
- Pocklington: He sure did. He never wanted to give up. One of the last memories I had, I got him an aircraft carrier, a model aircraft carrier that's now in the museum, and it was an absolute detailed 1 to 350, and he just was so proud of that ship and the reason I knew he would like it, I met him in Grand Rapids, oh, twenty years ago and we went through the museum, and he showed me the original ship that he was on during the Navy and said he damned near fell off the thing. He was really into that ship and into the Navy and loved the Navy and loved the whole experience. So when I got him this aircraft carrier, he was delighted and it was not far before he died. I've got a good picture of it. So he had that sense – that he loved the Navy, loved that part of his life – very much so. Talked about it often.

Smith: Their friends, of course, the last couple summers, would all try to get them to not go to Vail.

Pocklington: Well, you get up there and you have to go on oxygen, I mean, it's 7,000 feet where they lived. And he loved it, he seemed to want to go.

Smith: Tell me about the place in Vail, and the place *they* had in Vail. I mean, it seems like they were First Citizens.

Pocklington: Well, they were. He invited my wife and I to AEI, that first year he started the conference. And I think it was in 80 or 81.

Smith: And tell us, for people who don't know, about the annual conference.

Pocklington: This thing was really well attended and people loved to go. He had people from all over the world, business people from all over the world, plus ten or fifteen, there would be always seven or eight people from the House, sitting members, either Senate or House, and he always had five or six or seven ex-world leaders. He had Giscard d'Estaing, Jimmy Callaghan, Helmut Schmidt, what a character he was.

Smith: Really? How did they get along?

Pocklington: Well, you know, they all got along famously. Especially Giscard, that silver-tongued Frenchman, who to me is an outright Socialist, which really bothered me.

Smith: Well, you look at Schmidt, and you look at James Callaghan, old Labor...

Pocklington: Oh, no question – they all got along famously. It was fun, I enjoyed meeting them all. In fact, I flew Giscard d'Estaing back to Canada, he was staying at a ranch near where we lived, and we lived in Edmonton, up near Calgary so I flew him back and spent a couple of days horseback riding with him. Charming guy, very charming.

Smith: Did they say what it was about Ford that...

Pocklington: They all loved Jerry Ford. He was the salt of the earth to them, and that's the only reason they came all the way to Vail, because of Jerry Ford. For no other reason, they wouldn't have done it for anybody else, so he had cemented a strong relationship when he was president with these people.

Smith: It clearly transcended ideology.

Pocklington: Without question – no question, because Jim Callaghan, as you know, is a very, very, very, left Socialist, but a charming guy.

Smith: Sunny Jim.

Pocklington: Sunny Jim. Charming guy. He had Maggie Thatcher there one year. The Iron Lady.

Smith: What was the chemistry there?

Pocklington: Well, I'll tell you, she's very, very different. I'm not sure they were, I think AEI brought Maggie in, and I had her up to Edmonton for a couple of days. I have a cute story about Maggie, she did her speech and taking her back to the hotel with her, I don't know what they call their Secret Service guys, a couple of cops, actually. And she leaned over across to Eva and said, "Like to come up for a wee noggin?" And I said, what the hell's a noggin – so it turned out to be a bottle of scotch. Christ, we coiffed the whole thing between the three of us in two hours. But she was – she's always been my hero.

Smith: Larger than life?

Pocklington: I mean, Eva said if she'd been ten years younger I would have tried to run away with her, I mean, to me she was – I liked Maggie. But I like that kind of strength, I'm really a Libertarian myself, and tend to be conservative, but in strength and create wealth and let's get at it, but these guys who want to take it and distribute it, I have no time for. But Jerry said nice things about Maggie Thatcher, although he was out of office by the time, I think, when she came in. When did she come in? '78?

Smith: '79

Pocklington: May of '79, so she was new, but...and who else did he have there that was interesting? Oh, he had the premiere of Jamaica, I can't remember his name. Anyway, he all these interesting people to this AEI, Seega, that's the guy's name. He wanted me to build a fish plant, or some damn thing in Jamaica. So we flew down and spent three or four days having a look at – it's too wild and wooly for me – Jamaica. It's nuts. Who the hell else did he have?

Smith: Was Ford involved in dealing making?

Pocklington: Only from the point of view to introduce you. He was strictly a catalyst. He wasn't a dealmaker businessman from that point of view, although he was on the board of Travelers and really respected. What's his name, that ran...

Smith: Sandy Weill?

Pocklington: Sandy Weill, he really respected Sandy Weill. I remember a couple of times on the golf course he should have been on a board meeting, and he'd be half on the board meeting and half on the golf course, a lot going on in one of them. And he said, "Peter, I'm going to have to take nine holes off, because this is important." I said, "You go right ahead, do what you have to do."

Smith: What was your take? Because, again, he took some criticism. Every president, in effect, invents the job of ex-president and it shouldn't come as any surprise that they tend to project their interests and personalities and priorities. You knew Richard Nixon would spend the rest of his life crafting a comeback.

Pocklington: No question.

Smith: You knew Jimmy Carter would pursue, from whatever pulpit he could create, the causes that mattered to him.

Pocklington: That's exactly right.

Smith: It's not terribly surprising.

Pocklington: Not at all.

Smith: And I wondered, again, about Ford who left office with virtually nothing.

Pocklington: He had zero. I remember the first AEI meeting, and he had a rented house in Vail near the hotel where we put on the conference, and within a couple of years, of course, he had a \$5 million house that was beautiful and was very well done. But he worked hard, after he left the presidency, as I say, he was on the road a couple of hundred days a year, did a lot of speeches, and not for the kind of money they pay now, but maybe fifteen, twenty, twenty-five grand a shot. But he worked hard and made a lot of money. Did well.

Smith: And wasn't apologetic about it.

Pocklington: Oh, absolutely not! And I don't think he should have been. Because he had grown to that lifestyle in being the President of the United States, and being with, obviously, people who had a lot of money and were very successful, and he wanted to continue that. He wanted to be part of that structure that he had become used to. And he never had his hand out, he always worked hard for everything he did. So I was always very impressed with that. That was one of the things that impressed me about Jerry Ford.

Smith: And also, presumably, wanting to leave something for the kids.

Pocklington: Absolutely – and did a good job of it. I don't know how big his estate was but it was certainly ample. And he earned it all. More power to him.

Smith: How...did you see him with the kids?

Pocklington: Played golf a few times with Steve. I enjoyed his son, Steve. Always up, optimistic like his dad, and he got along well with Steve. I'm not sure he was very close to Susan or Jack, oh, maybe Jack. Jack's kind of an entertaining, nice man. Very bright. I have a lot of time for Jack, he's the best of both his dad and mom. Yeah, he's a charmer. And I think Jerry felt the same way, but

I'm not sure he was really close to his other son, or maybe Susan. But, of course, he was always on the road, and you can't build a family life, a strong family life, unless you're part of the family.

Smith: I want to talk about the guilt – whether, he felt that, in some ways, Mrs. Ford, because of that, had had to bear an extra portion of responsibility.

Pocklington: Oh she did. There's no question. She had four kids to bring up and she worked hard. He was never there during his years in Congress and the Presidency. I mean, he was always busy. And she, that's why, I guess, she took a drink and she hurt her back or something and got on those damn pain pills. And between the two of them, it got her. But that's understandable.

Smith: She turns out to be almost a representative figure, I mean, there are lots and lots and lots of women of her generation who were in the same situation, and certainly could relate to her.

Pocklington: No question.

Smith: The kind of quiet desperation.

Pocklington: Yup, there's no question. I remember one of the speakers we had up to Edmonton was a guy – that was Hague – and his wife came with him and I felt she was in quiet desperation, without question. And she was kind of a mummy compared to...I felt badly.

Smith: Did you get so you could detect the signals?

Pocklington: Oh, without question. Very much so.

Smith: What is it about political wives that make them so vulnerable? I don't know if that is still the case, but certainly at that time – is it because they are relegated to the shadows and are expected to play this kind of one-dimensional role?

Pocklington: Well, I think most strong men that get into politics, and obviously the ones that win get to the top are the strong ones – they become so much of what they've done in the office, that they are the present and, I don't want to say, but you're my little wife, but that's really what happens. In very few instances, except when now, Brian and Mila Mulroney – they're both friends. Mila is as strong as he is, maybe stronger. And she's a pistol. But unless these women are as strong and tough as the guys, man they do get pushed down, very quickly. It's a tough life – real tough. Look at the Kennedys, I mean she suffered from having a character like Jack around.

Smith: Did Ford ever talk about JFK – apart from the Warren Commission?

Pocklington: Because he was so straight, he wasn't impressed with the carryings on, and he wouldn't talk much about it. It's too bad that you have to do that.

- Smith: You are absolutely right in what you say about his own moral standards, and yet it is interesting because over time, influenced in part by her, you know obviously we know what his position was about a woman's right to choose. He remains the only president who ever signed his name to a gay rights petition. Was there a sense that he sort of moved? Did he change, or was he what he'd always been and it stood out by contrast with the party's move to the right?
- Pocklington: Well, he was pulled. Because I asked him about abortion, because I ran for the leadership of the party in Canada. And he said, as far as he was concerned, the way to answer that is abortion is intimate domain of family. And leave it there. Then you don't get on either side of it. And I thought about it and I said, "Jerry, you are absolutely correct, that's what I believe."
- Smith: To me, he is of a generation of mid-west conservative, who were defined first and foremost as economic conservatives, who had a very healthy skepticism about the role of government, especially when it was promising to re-engineer society. And at the same time, want government out of the board room, out of classroom, out of the bedroom. It was a generation that wouldn't discuss these subjects that were frankly too personal, too intimate to be part of the public discourse.
- Pocklington: The other thing that bothered him was the fact that we were becoming a society with little or no shame. As you just said, he grew up an Eagle Scout and, you know, there was right and wrong. Doesn't seem to be much of that, much anymore. He and I, one of the things we disagreed on, was he figured all these drug felons should be thrown in jail. I said, Jerry, we can't do that. Our prisons are too damn full now, I said, in fact, we should let 70% of them go that are there because of drugs and I said, I'd rather, because I've now got involved with your wife, that we've got to get people off drugs, help them, that's one place I will extend them their help, and get them off drugs and alcohol and so on, because they are not bad people, but they're sure as hell going to be if you throw them in jail with the felons. And we disagreed on that.
- Smith: In many ways he remained a rock ribbed conservative. Certainly, fiscally, he was...
- Pocklington: Oh, absolutely. He said to me one year in his presidency he ran a \$60 billion deficit, and he was just appalled. It hurt him to his heart. He said, we can't do that, we've got to run a balanced budget. And we got to cut spending, and...
- Smith: And that raises the Republican Party. Clearly, the flipside of living as long as he did was, he saw the party twist its form.

- Pocklington: Quite frankly disintegrate. It just upset him to the end. Especially in the last few years, it really bothered him. As you know, I think Jerry had the strongest veto pen of any president ever, and this character has none, and that's...he always stood his ground where... that's too bad.
- Smith: He is probably the last president who was really going to spend his political capital on behalf of some kind of budget balance.
- Pocklington: Oh, without question. We talked about that a lot, because that's why he asked me why I tried to get involved in Canadian politics. I said, Jerry, the place is mad, they want to Socialize everything. This damn Socialized health care is going to destroy the country. I said don't ever get it in the U.S., it'll break you. He said, I know. He said, try to tell that to the people on the other side. No, he was always strongly, fiscally conservative and wanted to uphold those values.
- Smith: And what about his sense of humor?
- Pocklington: Oh, he had a good sense of humor. We used to tell mild stories, never the far out jobbies, you know, you'd try to save the ones that weren't too far away from who he was. No, he had a good sense of humor. He chuckled and get a good smile on his face.
- Smith: And if he ever was a just a little bit full of himself, Mrs. Ford had a very gentle way....
- Pocklington: She brought him down to earth. Yeah, there's no question. Like, "Take the garbage out, Jerry." Yeah, she was a great mellowing influence, that's why the marriage worked so damn well. I mean, she was, in her own rights, strong enough to keep up with Jerry, especially in the latter years.
- Smith: It wasn't opposite attracts, was it?
- Pocklington: Oh, no, no, no. No, I think, early on, she was a pretty good looking outfit – looking at the pictures way back, and, chatting with him over the years, he was pretty enamored by her, and they got married very quickly and it was a great marriage. But then he got drawn away a little bit because of the politics, but brought back in when he saw the damage that was done. He couldn't have done without her.
- Smith: You almost wonder, on the downside, if he'd won in '76, if there hadn't been this intervention...
- Pocklington: Oh! God only knows where it would have gone, because he would have been pretty busy, obviously, if he'd won in '76. But, no, it worked out, maybe there was a greater calling – a great spirit heading for Betty and Jerry.
- Smith: I think of her as something of a free spirit.

Pocklington: Oh, she is, very much so. He's a little more regulated, but she's uh....

Smith: Outspoken?

Pocklington: Oh, can be. Yeah. But she's very smart, also. She's got pretty good judgment, you know, on some of the things in the early years of Betty Ford, when we were trying to find other revenues. She said, "Peter, there must be other ways we can make money." And I said, "Well, what if we sold underwear with Betty Ford across it." And she looked at me and she said, "You're out of your mind." I said, "Betty, you asked." I said, "The younger kids have these BFC parties and they all, a lot of them, their bathing suits..." and she thought that was a little bit out of...anyway.

Smith: Was she open to new ideas?

Pocklington: Very much so. Oh, we'd discuss everything. And you could discuss everything with Betty. She was a little, uhmm, she had her raunchy side. (Laughter) She was fun. I got a kick out of Betty. You know, she's not as prim and proper as...

Smith: She didn't need to drink to be...

Pocklington: Naw, yes...you're absolutely correct. She's got a real laughable, folksy side to her, too. Yeah. I like Betty. In fact, I love Betty – she's very special. Loved them both.

Smith: Have you seen her since his death?

Pocklington: Yes, I have. A couple...

Smith: How is she?

Pocklington: Oh, according to Penny, she's getting better, but the first two times she was pretty frail, she came out to the alumni thing in November, was it November?, yeah, November, and man, she was very, very, very frail. I mean really frail. I think she had just gotten over a bout of bronchial pneumonia, and she was, I didn't think she was going to make it. But apparently, Penny said she is charging back now. But she also said that Jerry, in the last few years kind of forced her to do more than maybe she wanted to. But she was always bright and front and center when he was around.

Smith: One sensed that it was really difficult for her. I mean, first of all, there was this ongoing debate, people pressing them to get trained medical care in the house. Because that's not their job, the Secret Service.

Pocklington: You're right.

Smith: I think they both resisted it as long as possible.

Pocklington: They did – no question.

Smith: And I think it hurt...and you can understand why, but, my sense was, in her case, there was an extra element, which was, I'm going to take care of my husband.

Pocklington: Yes. I remember when I took the aircraft carrier over, and he had a nurse then and he kind of didn't want me to see him in that position, where he had a nurse. He was such a proud son of a gun, you know.

Smith: He was always immaculate.

Pocklington: No question, immaculate. Yeah, he was a very proud guy, he didn't want me...anyway, we knew each other well enough that he knew I'd understand and vice versa, but it bothered him.

Smith: Was that the last time you saw him?

Pocklington: Yes, it is.

Smith: How...?

Pocklington: It was a couple of months before he died. It was in September, September – yeah.

Smith: And was he still going to the office at that point?

Pocklington: No, no, he was sitting at home. The nurse was there and he had his kimono on and slippers and, then he went in and put on something for this picture, a pair of slacks and, and his eyes started to light up when he saw the ship and I've even got the proper airplanes, I phoned the Navy Department and told this character that built the thing what fleet, what wings should be on the deck, and good God, what a model. So he was really excited about that, and it seemed to bring him out of his weakened self to become the old Jerry I had known for about fifteen minutes and then he lost his energy again. And so you could see he was clearly on the way out. It was tough to see.

Smith: How was Mrs. Ford?

Pocklington: Oh, god, she was right there, you know. "Okay, Jerry, now you go in the living room with Peter, and let's get this picture taken." She took command again. Yeah, right up until the time he died, she was very strong. Even during the funeral she was very strong. I was shocked.

Smith: Remember that last walk – to the grave site?

Pocklington: (Exhale)

Smith: Where I thought, my god, is she going to be able to make it? We'd been told at ABC, with the very first ceremony in California, don't be surprised if she is in a wheelchair. Of course we didn't see her in a wheelchair.

Pocklington: No.

Smith: Until, very briefly, and then I think she was on Steve's arm. Everyone was urging her to sit down and, you know, she wasn't...

Pocklington: Not a chance.

Smith: She wasn't going to do that, you know?

Pocklington: No, that's true.

Smith: And someone asked her later on, how she managed to do that, and she said, that's what my husband would have wanted.

Pocklington: No question. That's a good point. That's true. Yeah, that's true. She was the ideal gal for Jerry Ford. Perfect couple.

Smith: What made her the ideal?

Pocklington: Just that one comment – that's what Jerry would have wanted me to do. I mean, how many wives would go outside of herself and make sure that he was looked after first. And she was that way, as I said, "No ice cream, Peter, don't give him ice cream."

Smith: How do you remember him?

Pocklington: Well, I'm not sure...my dad and I were really close, I was probably closer to Jerry than I was to my own father. And he was kind of, if I had something to chat about, I remember in '82 or 3, the Canadian government wanted me, I was in the meat business, I owned Swift in Canada, they wanted me to go to Cuba and help the Castro government set up some abattoirs. So I phoned Jerry and he said, well, Peter, you know if you do, you and I are going to have to maybe distance ourselves. And I said, "Enough said, Jerry."

Smith: Really?

Pocklington: So I phoned the Canadian government and I said, I don't think I have any interest in wanting to go to Cuba.

Smith: What do you think he meant by that?

Pocklington: Well, because of the American position on Cuba. He couldn't be seen hanging out with a character who built a meat plant in Cuba. So that was enough said – and done. So he and I were pretty good friends. Very close. I could really ask him anything, period.

Smith: Personal issues?

Pocklington: Oh, absolutely. He was, we were pretty close.

Smith: Do you miss him?

Pocklington: Oh a lot. I look at that damn shelf and I get a tear – and I've got so many pictures of he and I on the golf course, or he and I during these Oiler things, because we always hired that great big tall bugger from Palm Springs, what the hell was his name, the photographer, umm,..he was at all the events.

Smith: Oh, Kennerly. Was it David Kennerly?

Pocklington: Um, Mark.

Smith: Okay.

Pocklington: Mark, um, he's about eight feet high and he always there with his camera. So we've got some great pictures. About a week ago I got them out and looked at a few.

Smith: Imagine talking to someone who didn't know him, and maybe only thinks they know him ...what would you tell them that they don't know?

Pocklington: Well, in my opinion, I don't think he was, and I should never use a negative, but to me, when you look at what is a politician, he wasn't a politician. He was really just a strong friend that you'd want through thick and thin. If you wanted somebody at your back in a fight, man, he was it. He was always there, didn't matter the circumstance, didn't matter the – he was going to win – he was that positive – that strong – and that's why I wish he'd won the second term. Because America needed him at that time, not Jimmy Carter, who was to me a patsy. But, we needed a Jerry Ford and everybody lost because he didn't make it. All because, I think of that damn interview on TV and Poland – I mean, to me, that really hurt him. And I saw that before I knew him. I thought, oh my goodness, Jerry.

Smith: Did he talk about it?

Pocklington: No. No, I didn't want to go there.

Smith: We actually, maybe I got away with murder, on occasion, when we re-did the museum...

Pocklington: Right.

Smith: and we had the Polish gaffe playing...what other former president would think it was a good idea to get the staircase from the embassy in Saigon...

Laugh

Smith: I mean, you know, who would think of that?

Pocklington: That's true.

Smith: Not only was he comfortable with it, but, he insisted on it. Anyway, there is this gallery, and it plays over and over again, and, the way we would handle this thing..."Mr. President, you weren't wrong, you were just ten years ahead of your time."

Pocklington: That's exactly right.

Smith: And he laughed.

Pocklington: Well, he was self-deprecating. There's no question. And he didn't mind that. Golfing, he hit some awfully bad shots, and of course we'd rib him about it.

Smith: Would any ever hit a spectator while you were playing?

Pocklington: Well, as he says, he turned golf into a contact sport, he used that line in his speeches. No, I never saw him tee off into somebody .....

Smith: When we were working on the funeral plans, it's very revealing, the one thing he was adamant about was he didn't want a caisson through the streets of Washington.

Pocklington: Oh really? Why?

Smith: I never really could pin him down, but it was very clear, you knew when Gerald Ford felt strongly about something...

Pocklington: Yeah, you didn't want to go there.

Smith: You didn't go. One particularly inept individual who clearly didn't know the president very well, tried to change his mind by shaming him into the.....

Pocklington: Oof...

Smith: And actually said something to the effect of, "Well now, Mr. President, you wouldn't want people to think of you as a second rate president."

Pocklington: Oh, you've got to be kidding. The guy said that?

Smith: Can you imagine? Talk about exercising self-control.

Pocklington: Wow.

Smith: But they just, literally didn't, didn't understand. First of all, he felt strongly enough about it, he didn't go there.

Pocklington: I always knew where his bounds were. Absolutely.

- Smith: But he was adamant about it. And, you know, the way it turned out –I thought very moving, coming in that night, that Saturday night, going through Alexandria where there were thousands of people...in a neighborhood where they hadn't lived in thirty years, and then stopping at the World War II Memorial and then up to the Capitol. And the whole point was, it was a very individualized ceremony.
- Pocklington: Very much so.
- Smith: Reflecting his .....
- Pocklington: It was who he was.
- Smith: Yeah.
- Pocklington: Yeah. It took me a few years to understand where the bounds were. Once I knew where the bounds were...you just didn't go beyond. Well, you could tell in general conversation where his bounds were, and I would come to a halt at that point, because the friendship meant more to me than irritating – going somewhere that obviously he wasn't going to be too pleased about. And to me the relationship was more fun than trying to test him. I didn't need it and he didn't need it. Because I respected him a lot, the position in life that he had attained and also, I must admit, he added so much to what I was doing that I didn't want to interrupt that. He did such a job with the team, in helping me to win, and the more you won the more money I made, obviously.
- Smith: One last thing. He was not the sort of guy who lay awake at night wondering about his historical legacy. Although as we've said, he was very gratified by the fact that, particularly on the pardon, people had come around to his way of thinking. But beyond that, it may very well be that the Betty Ford Center makes the case that what she's done has impacted ordinary people and how they've lived their lives as much as most presidents.
- Pocklington: Oh no question.
- Smith: And my sense was, he was inordinately proud of her.
- Pocklington: Oh! Hugely proud!
- Smith: There was the joke, that for fundraising purposes, he had east of the Mississippi and she had west of the Mississippi.
- Pocklington: Oh – I did and it was all rot. I remember we were going to put on a hockey game up in Ottawa for Mila Mulroneu to raise – we raised a million, seven or eight, for cystic fibrosis, and I'd phoned the Montreal characters and said come on down, and we'll have this game and I charged everybody \$5 grand a couple to go to 24 Sussex, which is our White House in Canada. And charged the hell out of them, played Robin Hood. And wanted to do that here for the

Betty Ford Center, so I phoned Eisner, at the time, who had the Ducks. And he's a raving bloody socialist, but I didn't know this going in, so I took Jerry and Betty and we flew them over to a game, and we sat in their box and we watched Edmonton play the Ducks. And thank god we beat them. But maybe we shouldn't have, they should have said, let the Ducks win tonight, and we're going to do the same thing there. And Betty said, look, you've got to make sure that you split this thing, not all for the Betty Ford Center, but split it to make sure that his charity gets half. And, anyway, he (Eisner) said to me, you know, this isn't quite my politics. And I said, what the hell you talking about? And I found out he was a raving bloody Democrat and...

Smith: But what's political about the Betty Ford Center.

Pocklington: Well, that's what I thought. I said, "Goddamnit, we're saving Democrats as well as Republicans here, I need your help." And he pulled out, the son of a bitch. God, I was not very happy with that. But they came up with some lame excuse where I had to get Celine Dion to come and do part of the show, and so I phone her manager. And at that time they were busy, which was probably so. But, he then kind of pushed it away and that was it. And there was another time that I didn't realize the political divide you have in this country. I wanted Jerry to be on the NHL board of governors as an advisor. And talked to two or three of the guys and then talked to a couple that were very Democrat – are you kidding? Man, they deep-sixed that so fast, they had more power than I did...and I, unfortunately told Jerry before I brought it up that I was going to try and do that and he thought for sure I could probably get it handled, and I couldn't. I was very embarrassed by that.

Smith: How did he handle it?

Pocklington: Oh he said, yeah, I understand. He didn't say much. He was a very understanding guy, and I guess he understood what I didn't understand – that kind of tough going there with a strong Republican against a bunch of Democrats. But Billy Worts from Chicago was obviously a Democrat and he deep-sixed it.

Smith: One last thing, we've gone full-circle. You said he really enjoyed, obviously loved sports, did he have friends who were athletes? We all know about people like Jack Nicklaus.

Pocklington: He had lots of golfing pals. I've got a few pictures – one of them he's coming off the beach at Pebble Beach – he's playing with Arnold Palmer and I had it blown up and put some comical remark coming out of the mouth of Palmer, and Jerry said, "Hhm." And I got a kick out of it, wasn't going to say much, but he did, his ball erred a lot on the...Pebble Beach is a tough course, too.

Smith: Was he no-nonsense on the course?

Pocklington: Pretty much so. He was always, with other people around him, he was always all business. He was the President and that was it. And he was fun when you got away from the rest of the folks – he lightened up a little. Yeah, he was a good guy.

Smith: This has been fun. I can't thank you enough.

Pocklington: Well, I've enjoyed it, too. It's brought back a lot of good memories.

Smith: Well, that's the point of the whole exercise. And we'll make sure, once we get it, we'll share it with you.

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