

Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project
Phil Jones
Interviewed by
Richard Norton Smith
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Smith: First of all, obviously, we'd be interested in knowing about your life before you crossed paths with Gerald Ford. What happens before this story begins?

Jones: Well, in many ways, I was just like Gerald Ford – a Midwestern boy. I lived on a farm in Indiana. Used to milk cows by hand and drove the tractor, and I was a farm-son. When I was on the farm I wanted to be a broadcaster, and I wanted to be a newsman.

Smith: This would be roughly when?

Jones: 1949-50.

Smith: Was it Murrow who inspired this?

Jones: I don't know what inspired it. Suddenly I had this desire to do it. The fascinating thing is that, at Fairmont High School, Fairmont, Indiana, a little town of 2,500 people. Just a word on that later – but I had senior cords. All the seniors wore yellow cords – that was a big thing when you were a senior. And then you had them painted with cartoons and names of people and so forth. And I remember taking my yellow cords to the artist up in Marion, which is ten miles away, and telling her that I wanted on a leg a trombone player, because I'd been in the high school band playing trombone. And on the other, I wanted a broadcaster. Now I remembered telling her and I wore those yellow cords throughout my senior year. You seldom got them dry cleaned because they might fade. But many years later, after I had ended up at CBS, I still had them, and I took them off the hanger one day and looked. And this broadcaster is standing at the old-time microphone, and on the microphone it says CBS. But anyway, I think being from the Midwest really did help me understand and appreciate President Ford much more. All these Midwesterners tend to stick together.

Smith: And there is a bit of a cultural condescension toward the Midwest, isn't there?

Jones: Oh yes, and we all have the little – I have the Hoosier twang, and Gerald Ford had all these little things where he used to talk about gar-an-teeing instead of guaranteeing.

Smith: And judg-a-ment.

Jones: And judg-a-ment. And I must say that I have a lot of the same, so I never really it found it too funny to make fun of him. But, anyway, I had that background and I did some years in local television in Terra Haute, Indiana, and then I went on to WCCO in Minneapolis-St. Paul, which was *the best* CBS affiliate at the time. And I ended up at CBS because I was at WCCO.

Smith: Now that wouldn't have been, by any chance, the sort of stand in for the *Mary Tyler Moore* affiliate in Minneapolis?

Jones: Well, I think that part of the history of that TV market, not necessarily WCCO, but the whole market, was a very energized news market and it was so because it was a major-league state. It was major-league – we had a football team – the Vikings – and we had the Minnesota Twins baseball, and we had two major-league politicians, by the name of Hubert Humphrey and Eugene McCarthy. That's where I really did get accustomed and used to, and enjoy politics – because they were so involved. I said, I really want to do that. But anyway, I ended up at CBS because I was at WCCO.

Smith: And when did you come to the network?

Jones: In 1969. April of 1969. I was one of Cronkite's kids. CBS was the name of the game – sorry NBC and ABC. That's where you wanted to be.

Smith: Was it still the house that Murrow built, or had Cronkite made it his own?

Jones: No, I never worked with – I had met Murrow – but he was legend, and Walter moved right in. The transition was seamless. It was where news was done. And not made. And that's where the networks have all gotten into trouble, because they have become news makers.

Smith: That's interesting, because one of the criticisms that modern news people make of that generation is that it was supposedly too Washington-centric.

Remember the amount of time – I bet if you went back and looked at the old Cronkite broadcasts – the amount of time that devoted – and NBC with Brinkley was the same way – the amount of time that was devoted to what was happening on the Capitol Hill. Process. Less celebrity journalism and more political journalism, if you will.

Jones: And shorter pieces. Keep in mind, the newscasts started out, at least Huntley-Brinkley at ABC, and Douglas Edwards, started out as fifteen minutes. And so they didn't have time for a lot of long things. Plus, back then, journalism was all about – much like newswires AP and UPI, and that's pretty much where we got our news from. It was developed from there, but the first go would be from a wire story. And at CBS, Walter, being an old wire service reporter, he loved process and was not ashamed at all of it. Other correspondents and producers in New York ridiculed him a lot for that, and made fun of the broadcast – “Oh, my God, another Washington piece – another political piece.” But, back then, politics, political stories and government stories got on because Walter Cronkite thought they were important. And in the generations that have passed since then, it's a superficiality of the producer - who cares about the process – we just want – what's the bottom line? As a result, they've destroyed it.

Smith: I remember the first time I was doing PBS for the convention was in 2000 and I used to gripe that, at that point, the networks were being overly influenced by cable. And now, it's the internet that in many ways is defining the standards, which is an oxymoron when you are dealing with the internet. Networks have abandoned coverage to cable. But even where they are still covering it, they've got an eye over their shoulder at what cable is doing, and to some degree, the web.

Jones: The networks of today, and I'm speaking broadly, there are some exceptions, but they are conceding news to everybody – to the internet, to the local, whatever. And they don't care anymore. It is all about the bottom line and never in the history of this country, have we needed experienced journalism like we do now. And they are not there because they have either been worn

down and left on their own, or they were making too much money and they were put out to pasture by the networks.

Smith: And also it was a water cooler nation. The fact is that what Cronkite covered one night, people talked about the next morning around the water cooler. That's really gone. What gets people talking – a celebrity divorce – it's a much more ephemeral, superficial, in many ways, celebrity journalism - if *that's* not an oxymoron.

Jones: No. It's cable. Cable ought to be the most wonderful thing that's ever happened to this country. They've got time. They've got twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. And, again, I'm making a generality here, but what did they do with that 24/7? They don't cover the news, they talk about the news. And they'll pay the Lou Dobbs and Bill O'Reilly these enormous amounts of money – but that's still cheaper than putting together a staff big enough to uncover the news.

Smith: Now there are two things, because I remember at one point during the convention coverage, Judy Woodruff made a very shrewd observation. I'm sure other people have said it, but it's the first time I've heard it said quite this way because it goes to the heart of what's happened, particularly to the conventions. "Cable needs a new narrative every twenty-four hours." The dirty little secret is there is not enough news to fill a 24/7 news cycle, but you need a new narrative. You get the story line and you get a new twist which you can debate endlessly until the next twist comes along. Black hats, white hats, it's much more about opinion than it is about journalism.

Jones: Exactly, and that new narrative, that new lead for the next half hour is determined by some kid just out of journalism school, who is cheap and has no experience, and they hype like you wouldn't believe. And as a result, I think the major networks have gone a long way to destroy news and their credibility. But right there are the cables, too. And people are not stupid. They're watching this stuff and they have determined that it's sort of irrelevant.

Smith: It's showbiz.

Jones: And they are live and there is not much credibility, and that their lives are swirling around and they have to prioritize. It used to be when they were cutting that pie three ways with ABC, CBS, and NBC. Those days it was appointment television. The evening newscasts were an appointment. You planned your day, and I planned my day, so I would be there to watch the evening news. Why? Because I learned that if I wasn't [there], I might miss something. The water cooler – that I wouldn't be able to talk to somebody at the water cooler the next day. Well, once the networks started softening their news with some producers saying, "Well, you know we've got to get rid of process stories and politics and government, and all of this, and we've got to put more human interest..." Once it started doing that, well, the consumer, the viewer, detected that and said, "Well, after five minutes, why am I watching this? I don't need it." And now they don't need it, and they are not there. It's really tragic.

Smith: Here's a segway... because there was never on the planet, a more assiduous newspaper reader than Gerald Ford. As long as he was traveling he had a half dozen newspapers – that was a ritual – that's how the day began. You didn't bother him until he was done with his newspapers. How did your paths first cross?

Jones: Well, I had gone to the Washington bureau from Vietnam and Hong Kong. I had been gone for a year in Hong Kong and I was assigned to the legendary Washington news bureau. We had twenty-seven correspondents there.

Smith: Was there jockeying for the post-Cronkite era?

Jones: Oh, yeah, sure. Roger Mudd and Dan Rather. And that was in the Washington area. Of course back then Bob Shieffer thought that he should have been considered, too. He was sort of disappointed at the time that he wasn't. But he got the last laugh.

Smith: Yes, he did.

Jones: But, anyway, in New York you had Mike Wallace and Harry Reasoner, and these big guns who also thought that they ought to replace Walter. And Walter had to fight all these people all the time. Other names in Washington

were David Schumacher, who really thought that he... anyway, there were a long list of people who said, "I'm the next Walter Cronkite." And he hung around and he hung around.

Smith: And would have liked to hang around longer?

Jones: He got pushed out. And the real irony of all of this is that he was eased out to make room for Dan Rather. Roone Arledge at ABC had decided he was hiring as many people at CBS as he could. Even at one point, in one of my contract cycles, I was wooed by Roone to go to replace Sam Donaldson at the White House. So it was a big deal. Roone offered Dan the contract – not to anchor their evening news, but as a sort of roving correspondent. Well, CBS panicked and they had their audience research people go out and they determined from that, that they could afford to lose Roger Mudd. No big deal, but they couldn't afford to lose Dan Rather.

That's when they made the decision and that's when they went to Walter and said would you please retire and step aside and we'll still use you. Walter did it reluctantly. But he also did it because he had been assured that he would continue to be a force on the *CBS Evening News*. That didn't work out because, for some reason, Dan thought that the change should be made, the transition should occur, and that Walter hanging around would be nothing but trouble. And once Walter wasn't used, that's when he started to get his bitterness over CBS.

But, the tragedy here, again Walter, as part of his enticement to leave, they put him on the CBS board of directors. And he had a big say. When Larry Tisch bought managing control of CBS and did the first slaughter of the CBS news budget, I contend, never could prove that, but I contend that, had Dan Rather and Walter Cronkite gotten along – had Dan treated Walter better, and had they been allies, Larry Tisch would have never been able to pull off that gutting of the CBS News.

Smith: And you stop to think, for Paley – I think there must be nothing worse than to outlive your creation. I mean, here he is convincing himself that Larry Tisch is his white knight and living long enough to see the consequences of that.

Jones: Of course, he was weary. Paley was weary at that point between Jessie Helms and Ted Turner who were trying to... Jessie Helms was running around Washington saying, "I'm going to become Dan Rather's boss." So, the whole thing had to be tragic for Paley. These people who replaced him, every one of them hadn't even been close to the class act that Bill Paley was. And some of them have very specifically done everything they could, to destroy the reputation and name of Bill Paley.

Smith: You don't hear CBS referred to as the Tiffany Network these days.

Jones: No. It's somewhere in here (referring to bookshelf) is, "Who killed CBS?" has got a book. But that's a complicated answer and it would take more than one volume to do that. On the other hand, you can sort of cut to the bottom on who killed CBS. Larry Tisch – I'm sorry, he's gone now – but he should have been, when he was alive, he should have been taken to Times Square and publicly executed on the *CBS Morning News*.

Smith: Which Mr. Paley would have seen.

Jones: Yes.

Smith: When you were in the Washington bureau, where were you assigned, initially?

Jones: In 1972 I was assigned from Hong Kong to the Washington bureau. And I came as a general assignment reporter. I was at the bottom of the heap. Bill Small was the legendary bureau chief at the time, always made sure that he reminded young upstarts like me of where I stood in that bureau, that I was behind the likes of Eric Sevareid and all these people. And so I did general assignment. One day I was called in by the bureau chief and he said, "We, at CBS, are going to take over the television part of Watergate. We're going to be the television version of the *Washington Post*. I want you to immerse yourself and I want you to know everything you can about Watergate."

Smith: Was that something that presumably would have originated with Cronkite at that point, as the managing editor of evening broadcast?

Jones: Oh yes, absolutely. Bill Small and Walter Cronkite were very, very close. Just parenthetically, Katherine Graham, when she was alive, every speech that she would do after Watergate was over, she talked about how CBS had saved the *Washington Post*, because, at one point, they were, the *Washington Post*, was under heavy, heavy heat. And we had Deep Throat and Katherine Graham and Ben Bradlee – they were dancing around – they were shaky on it, but they stuck with it. But when the *CBS Evening News* with Walter Cronkite and the entire Washington bureau of twenty-seven correspondents, resources, started weighing in every night, it became more of a legitimate story. And in journalism, you always say, you want to be ahead, you want the scoop. And that's great, but within an hour or two, you'd better hope that somebody is there or you start to get nervous.

Smith: In some ways it's almost a parallel between the famous story of LBJ saying, "Well, if I've lost Walter Cronkite on Vietnam, I've lost the country."

Jones: Yeah. So, anyway, I was assigned to do Watergate. And I arrived in Washington in December, right after Richard Nixon had been re-elected in November of '72. So this thing was really popping and I spent most of my time at the Federal Court Building – for months, doing that. One day I got a call from the bureau chief to come in and he says, "You know, we really like your work, and we want to see more of you on TV and we want to see more of you on Saturday. Every day, as well as Saturday. So I'm going to change your days. You're going to be working on Saturday." Well, I came from Indiana, the heartland, and where I had been taught that if you ever amounted to anything, you had Saturday and Sunday off. And Bill Small says, "How do you feel about that? Changing your days off and you'll work on Saturday. You'll have Sunday and Monday off." And I said, "Well, I really don't care much about it." And he said, "Well, what makes you think I care if you care?" I said, "Well, when you put it that way, to start." So, I said, "Okay." And that was on a Friday morning, and on Friday night there was a prime time speech by Richard Nixon announcing his choice to be his new vice presidential designate, Gerald R. Ford, replacing Agnew who had gone out in flames.

Smith: Let me interrupt for one second, because we did an interview with Jerry Jones, who was Al Haig's deputy, who told us something striking. At that point he was, at Haldeman's behest, reorganizing the personnel office. This is before Haldeman and Ehrlichman leave, so it's going to be no later than April of '73. He gets a call from Haldeman, who wants to know how many people report to the vice president, and Jerry does some figuring and he comes up with a number of about fifty. Haldeman says, "Fine. I want letters of resignation from all of them." Meaning, before Haldeman left, he knew Agnew would be facing some problems significant enough to warrant replacing his entire staff. Now, I'd never heard that before, that's in April of '73. What I'm asking is: the Wall Street Journal story in August of '73 is when the world heard about Agnew's problem. Had you picked up anything beforehand?

Jones: No. I had not. I mean, I was so focused on the Watergate part of it, and I didn't get involved in that. The only area where I got into the Agnew story was that I worked in Minnesota for a while, at WCCO, and while there, I became friends with Dick Moe who was Mondale's chief of staff. Back then, Mondale was attorney general. So now it's Senator Mondale, one day I get a call from Dick Moe. He says, "Are you aware that they are plea bargaining with Agnew?" And I said, "No." He said, "Well, long story short: I have a friend who was just at the Justice Department meeting somebody on some business, and this guy was sharing an office with another attorney. And he heard this conversation. The other guy was saying on the phone, 'There's no way. Absolutely not.' And the other attorney said to Moe's friend, 'You know what that's about?' 'No.' 'Well, that was Henry Peterson of the Justice Department and he was talking to Agnew's people. He said they are trying to plea bargain.'"

Smith: So what do you do with a tip like that?

Jones: What do I do? I was new in town. I had one very good source, but I couldn't get the second or third source, and back then you had to have those. It doesn't happen too much anymore. So I went to the bureau chief and told him what I had and he called in Fred Graham, who was our legal correspondent, and said,

“Tell Fred what you have.” So I told him and Fred worked on it for two days, three days, never could get anything. And then finally on Saturday the *Washington Post* hit the street, big front page story: *Agnew Plea Bargains*. So, anyway, that’s as close as I got to the Agnew thing.

But anyway, I’m doing my first Saturday duty with my change of shift for CBS news. And Friday they just announced that Jerry Ford, and I am told, your first assignment for Saturday is go do a day in the life of the new vice president designate. So I showed up like at five-thirty, six o’clock in Alexandria, and stood out there and waited for something to happen with Jerry Ford. And that’s when I first met him. I traveled with him for the next ten months, spent more time with him than I did my own family, and then when he became president, I moved to the White House.

Smith: That period is fascinating. In some ways it’s the dark side of the moon. It’s the part of the story that I think has escaped detection until now. Because, clearly, there was a strategy which was to stay out of town as much as possible – to stay on the road as much as possible. It beggars belief to think that, in the course of those ten months, he, or those around him, did not seriously contemplate the prospect of his becoming president – something that he could never publicly acknowledge, and something that I sensed to the end of his life, he really tended to minimize. But there must have been conversations, off the record, about how this thing was evolving.

Laird says by the spring of ’74 he was talking to Ford about the kinds of people he should have in his cabinet, and taking for granted that this would, in fact, come to pass.

Jones: But, did Laird say that he, Ford, was engaging in this back and forth conversation? See, this is the thing about Gerald Ford. He set the tone. And he had never planned on being president – never dreamed of it. All he wanted to do was to be Speaker of the House. That was his golden light. And then, all of a sudden this thing happened, and all of the intellectual folks, the historians sit back and journalists, and say, how could he not be thinking about that? He might have been thinking about it, but he didn’t focus. He was not focused on

it because his job was to be a good vice president and he liked Dick Nixon. So I don't think there anything where he was being disingenuous.

I think he honestly did not think it would happen, as it started out. As it progressed and these people started coming to him, I think he probably had to think a little bit more about it. But I don't think he thought about it. I think a whole lot of the political junkies, and in some ways Ford was a political junkie, and in some ways he wasn't. Compared to Mel Laird, he's a novice. And I think – remind me to talk about this later – but as I look back Don Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney, and everybody says, “How did they turn out the way they turned out?” And to those of us who were covering the Ford White House, we loved Don Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney. Well, we respected Rumsfeld and we loved Cheney. We all were saying, how could this happen? Well, I think I have a reason for this.

What happened was, they were different people inside that Ford White House, and they were different people because Gerald R. Ford set the tone, and he was a nice guy who believed that democracy was based on compromise. He'd fight like crazy, and the end of the day he was ready to shake Tip O'Neill's hand or any Democrat and say, “Okay, it was a good fight. I lost.” And get back the next day. Jerry Ford, when he became president, he said, “This is the kind of relationship I want with the Hill and with Democrats.” If he didn't say, by God, they knew – Rummy and Dick Cheney knew that if they were going to work for Jerry Ford, he'd better not get a call from some Democrat about them running roughshod over. So they had to play that way.

So then, Rumsfeld goes off and into the private sector – Searle Drug, and he's very successful, and his basic instincts, even when he was at the White House is, to be a bully. He is a bully management guy. And so he has success.

Then Cheney, he leaves after Ford has left, and he's on the Hill for a while. He's from Wyoming and those conservative instincts begin to come out, because that's his constituency. But still, even on the Hill, a guy, a Republican who worked with the Democrat, but he always wanted to be as successful as Rumsfeld. Wanted to make as much money as Rumsfeld. Cheney once told

me, “Rummy has made more money than God.” So then, he goes off and has his big success at Halliburton. And he’s changed – he’s a different guy.

This is what’s happened. Both of these guys were kept in line by Gerald R. Ford, who said, “By gosh, we’re going to get along.” His favorite line always was, “We can disagree without being disagreeable.” And they knew they’d better toe the line. And once he was not there to snap the whip, they reverted to their tendencies. And that’s why. That’s it. And George W. Bush was not Gerald R. Ford.

I don’t know – I went off on something here.

Smith: That’s an important part of the story.

Did you have fun times on the vice presidential plane?

Jones: Fantastic. They called it the slingshot airline. It was a twin engine prop plane, and that’s all the Nixon White House would give him.

Smith: Everyone knows he wasn’t Nixon’s first choice. He wasn’t Nixon’s second choice. There is a story, and I’ve come across it in the Rockefeller research, that supposedly he tells Rockefeller (they are in the Oval Office, Nixon and Rockefeller), and he says, “Can you imagine Jerry Ford sitting in that chair?” Nixon believed, and it tells you volumes about how out of touch Nixon was, Nixon looked at Ford as insurance against his impeachment; whereas in fact, it was exactly the opposite. Did you ever get a sense of Nixon’s attitude toward Ford at that point?

Jones: No. I think everybody had the same attitude on Ford. He was viewed by politicians on the Hill, by Nixon, by Hugh Scott, by all these people, that Ford was a nice guy, but not really smart, too smart, and would sort of do anything that you wanted him to do. And he did do a lot of that stuff. And I think there was a lot of ridicule of him. As Lyndon said, he played football without a helmet too much – which is sort of interesting. Your question – did he feel that?

Smith: Yeah, did he sense that on the part of his own nominal allies?

Jones: You know what? I don't think he focused on it. It didn't register with him because his ambitions were somewhat limited. Now you say, he wanted to be Speaker of the House, that's a pretty big ambition. But he was a celebrity, he'd been a celebrity – all-American football player, and married this beautiful woman who was a dancer, and he was a handsome guy. He was just having fun doing what he...

Smith: And, of course, remember he had already promised Mrs. Ford they were going to go home at the beginning of '77, so the vice presidency is sort of this unexpected capstone to a career. He realized he was never going to be Speaker, and I'm sure it made perfect sense.

Jones: But I think other people talked about Jerry Ford, worried about him and were more preoccupied with how smart he was or how stupid he was, or whatever, more than he did.

Smith: Over and over, you hear people talk about how comfortable he was in his own skin, which certainly set him apart from Nixon - and probably most recent presidents.

Jones: Yeah, and he was a guy who believed, as I said before, Jerry Ford believed that democracy was the art of compromise. And in the end you had to come together. Oh, he was fiercely partisan on lots of things.

Smith: Did you hear him express regret or not for the whole Douglas impeachment business?

Jones: No.

Smith: One sensed that was a sore subject.

Jones: The only thing I ever heard Jerry Ford express a sense of regret was basically dropping Nelson Rockefeller as his vice president. He told me after he had left the White House. He said, "I am really sad about that. It was a huge mistake, and I have thought about that and wish that I could do it over many times." Once he became president, he really wanted to stay president.

Smith: There is a sense, too – he said something to the effect that – just as he had learned to do the job was when he lost it.

Jones: Yeah.

Smith: The transition from the Hill to the Oval Office is a big one, and not everyone is Barak Obama. Just as he felt that he kind of mastered the job, he lost it.

Jones: After he had lost the election to Jimmy Carter, as you remember, he had lost his voice in that whirlwind eleven day tour, where he almost pulled it off. I mean, he literally grabbed all of his campaign staff and his White House aides and he said, “Come on, let’s leave Washington. We’re going to go out and win this thing.” And he almost pulled it off, but he lost his voice, couldn’t speak. Betty had to give his concession speech, and after he was able to speak, he’d walk around the White House and he’d say, “I lost to a *peanut* farmer. A *peanut* farmer.” He could never, ever get over that. It was, in many ways, sad, because I thought that he was a good president. And I don’t know anyone else who could have done as good a job as he did in healing the country.

At the time of his death, I went back and looked at some of the news conferences and things that he had right when he became president, and he was good. The press, we all portrayed him, I guess, I’m not guilty of that, but he was portrayed as this bumbling, fumbling, inarticulate guy. I looked at his first press conference and he stood up there – he’s six three, six four, stands with great stature, and he spoke of budgets and things like that with great authority. He knew them. That’s what everybody said, well, he was an accidental president. Yeah, he was in a way – but in many ways, the most prepared president that the country has ever had. For years and years he slogged through those budgets that came up there, and intelligence matters, and whatever. He knew what he was talking about and he was just as good as – as I looked at that news conference – and it wasn’t a time for humor during that period – but he was just as good on the facts as the great John Kennedy, or anyone.

Smith: You know, it is interesting you mentioned the press conference. Because it was the triggering event – the first press conference on the 28th of August, and

I think you can accuse him of a certain naiveté. There was a quality, some people said Boy Scout-ish, but he went into that press conference really believing, three weeks after Nixon left, that reporters would want to talk about Cyprus and Turkey and inflation – and of course the only thing they wanted to talk about was Nixon. And he left that press conference angry. Angry at himself as much as at the press corps. And they, as much as anything – who knows when and whether the pardon would have come – but I think he, at least said that that news conference as much as anything else triggered the schedule.

Jones: Absolutely. He told me that. There was no question. He was mad as he could be after that because all the questions were on Nixon. That's when he went to the office and started the whole process. And he was *right*. And we have found out just how right he was. Back at the time I was shocked and upset with what he had done, but we found out he was right. Even the Kennedys, the Profiles in Courage [Award], recognized him. Ted Kennedy went to the ceremony.

Smith: Transformed his life. Ford said, after that ceremony, he said, "For twenty years, everywhere I've gone, they've asked that question. You know what? They don't ask the question anymore."

Jones: Exactly.

Smith: The Kennedys, in effect, made it 'okay' to move on.

Jones: Now, let me tell you something – what I think is more concrete on why he's been vindicated. I think we found with President Clinton's impeachment and trial, exactly what happened to this country and to a president when he is impeached and is then tried. With Nixon we had the luxury of him resigning. With Bill Clinton we had a guy who said, "Well, let's just go out and win." No shame, hung in there, [he] should have done what Nixon did, but didn't. And we went through, the whole country, went through a trial.

Again, you can't prove this, but I have always wondered if we would have had 9/11, because during that second term, and during that trial, Bill Clinton was totally preoccupied with saving his presidency, and he was not taking

care of things. And we find out that he was, in some of these national security meetings, he would stay up all night and he'd read these books and he was coming down with these off the wall, out of the box, thoughts about Bin Laden, and had he been able to totally focus on that and not worried about saving his presidency, I wonder if it would have happened.

Smith: We know for a fact that now, because people around him have said, he had actually hoped with the mandate that he had from '96, to use '98, because he wanted desperately to be a great president, or a near-great president anyway. Short of a war, he was prepared to spend some of his capital to go after entitlements. Which if he'd done it, and brought his party along with him, would have ratcheted him up that much higher in terms of historians, and their assessment of his consequence as a president. And that whole thing disappeared.

Jones: Yeah, I think he would have done it because, look, there was welfare reform. He did get welfare reform. That's not anything that his liberal Democrats had any interest in. They were mad at him over the whole thing. He had the talent, Clinton had the talent to take on Social Security, welfare reform, entitlements, you name it. He had the smarts, and the gift to have pushed these things through, but he got involved in this and he didn't have the guts, the sense to resign so he decided to take this country into a trial. We think that we're so resilient in this country, or we used to before the current crisis, but back then...I don't think we can ever go through the impeachment trial of a president of the United States.

Smith: That's fascinating. The Ford aspect of this, and I've never really talked about this, but you may remember, it was before the House voted impeachment – it was in October of '98, a month before the off term elections, and of course, Republicans were – there was hubris on both sides. Ford – I wrote it with him – we wrote an Op-ed that appeared in the Sunday *New York Times*, which the impeachment managers were furious about, because they thought it pulled the rug out from under them. Gerald Ford proposed a unique punishment for a unique offense. And it wasn't a censure.

The President of the United States would appear in the well of the House, wouldn't speak, would accept a formal public rebuke from an unanimous vote of the...and it would be televised and it would be dignified. And when it was over the country could go back to its business and people would have been assured that their elected representatives had risen to the occasion. And he took hell, as you can imagine, from his fellow Republicans.

Now, the White House, at that point, thought this was manna from heaven. And they were actually seriously considering this – until, of course, come the midterm elections. And the Republicans of the House Committee weren't going to consider it. Then come the midterm elections, and guess what? The shoe's on the other foot. Lindsey Graham, I know for a fact, said, "Well, maybe we should dust off Jerry Ford's idea," and by that time, of course, the Clinton White House had no incentive to do so.

Jones: Now, as I understand, President Ford had a telephone conversation with Bill Clinton, with President Clinton, and that Bill Clinton told him, "I can't do that." And it was at that point that ex-President Ford said, "Well, good luck."

Smith: My understanding is, you are absolutely right, but part of the problem was that Hillary was in the room. So it was just...but anyway, but he gave him all these reasons why he couldn't do it. Ford said, "Bill, let me tell you something. I spent twenty-five years up there, and in my experience they can do pretty much anything they want." But at that point Clinton was feeling his oats because he had come through this and everything was political. And, of course, the great irony is – again, it illustrates these two sides – right after the piece appeared, he got a six page, single-spaced, rant from Tom DeLay, outlining all the reasons why this idea wouldn't fly. He was echoing everything Bill Clinton said, only from the other side of the political spectrum, and basically lecturing Ford on all the Constitutional impossibilities of this proposal. Two weeks later he got another letter from Tom DeLay, wanting his help in getting into some golf club in Rancho Mirage. Neither letter was answered, which is very unusual for President Ford.

Jones: President Ford's retirement, yes, he got very wealthy. There was some controversy about whether or not he should have done the things he did to

make that money, but I went to visit him constantly because my daughter lives out there and every time I was in California, I'd go over to Rancho Mirage and say hi.

Every time I visited him, it was sort of sad in so many ways because he was such a party man and he believed in Republicanism. He believed in compromise and he believe in treating the Democrats with respect. He watched his party shoot itself in the foot time after time after time. And nobody cared. Which sort of leads me to one observation about the Ford presidency; I watched Ford over his retirement and felt sort of sad about what he must be going through, because he was a guy who believed in Washington, who believed in the political process, who believed in fighting for your partisan way, but believed in compromise in the end. And there he was, sitting out in California...

Smith: And he believed in government, in governing.

Jones: Believed in government, and not big government, but he believed in governing, as you said. And he believed that government had a role. And every time I'd go see him, there was something – Republicans in Congress had just shot themselves in the foot on something else. They were so partisan, and so anti-his motto, "Can't we disagree without being disagreeable?" And it had to be a real downer for him. But I've always said of the Ford presidency, it is the forgotten presidency. And I say that because all the historians, or most of the historians, every time they write, every time they talk on the talk shows or whatever, they jump from Richard Nixon to Jimmy Carter, as though Ford never existed. I thought, at least in his death, that that would change. And it has a little bit, but not really. It will always be the forgotten presidency.

Smith: And I would modify it slightly – they go up to the pardon, and then they skip to Jimmy Carter. The first month - but that's all Nixon. They see Ford as a coda, Ford's an add-on, an accidental coda to the Nixon presidency. One of the points I tried to make in the eulogy was, if you step back far enough, you realize that Richard Nixon is the last New Deal president. Because he's the last president accommodating himself to the Roosevelt consensus. Whatever you think of economic deregulation, it began under Ford. Block grants to the

states – there are a whole host of initiatives. And then you stop to think of the talents that Ford recruited. Again, it goes to being comfortable in his own skin – to surround himself with people who were sort of militantly bright, extravagantly sometimes egotistical, and he was perfectly comfortable. And he seemed to be particularly comfortable having people argue things in front of him.

Jones: But did he – I don't recall any ideologues surrounding him.

Smith: No. And in fact, people who were ideologues, like a Bill Simon, toned it down.

Jones: They knew they had to. And you know as I was saying with Rumsfeld and Cheney. Their tendencies were sort of to be bullies and ideologues, but that wasn't going to hunt with Jerry Ford.

Smith: Just to finish the vice presidential period...I see the picture of the...

Jones: Well, the travel group with Vice President Ford was interesting. There were maybe half a dozen of us. And he had two or three aides with him. The travel group included the three networks. I was for CBS, Ron Nessen was for NBC, and Bill Zimmerman was a correspondent for ABC. One of Ford's very favorite reporters, ever, was Maggie Hunter of the *New York Times*, a southern gal. She covered Congress when he was there, and then when he became vice president, she was out covering him. He loved her, and David Kennerly, and Bob Leonard from the *Voice of America*. So those were the hard core, every trip. It was this slingshot airline and it was part of the presidential fleet. We would get on first, and then the vice president and his staff would come on. Well, they had to pass us to get back to the vice president's cabin in the back. It was always banter back and forth and we might have done something that he would needle us about, but it was fun.

Smith: He liked reporters, didn't he?

Jones: I argue that Gerald R. Ford was the last president who really liked reporters. I'm not sure about Obama yet. He seems to have some of these tendencies, but certainly up to Obama, Jerry Ford was proud to say that some of his best

friends were reporters. And he enjoyed having fun with us – poking at us – we felt comfortable poking with him. And I, as a journalist, as a correspondent, always when I worked was very careful to try to put this little distance between the politician and me. I must say that I was never afraid to say publicly that I liked Gerald Ford, and he was my friend. I didn't worry about some Democrats coming along and saying, "Well, you're in the tank." But I could do that – and he was a rarity – the only other politician that got close to that, that I felt that comfort zone with, was Howard Baker, Senator Howard Baker, when he was Majority Leader. But as president, I knew that I could do any story that I had to do. If I were out at some dinner or social event, which I didn't do a lot, but what I did, I didn't worry about, because I knew the next day if I had to do a story critical of him, he'd understand because he understood journalists.

Smith: Did he ever go after you on a story?

Jones: Me? No. Would he needle me about something with a smile? Yeah. But ironically, the other person who had that same personality is Ted Kennedy. Now, all the people around Kennedy, all the staff – oh, God, are they sensitive – and a lot of the people around Ford were sensitive, but as far as him being sensitive, no. He knew I had a job to do. I've also argued that Jerry Ford was probably the most open vice president/president I have ever known. Without at doubt.

The reason I say that is that, when I started covering him right after he was selected, designated, he went back to Michigan – Grand Rapids for a trip. And while there we were the only crew with him, the CBS crew, and I'm ashamed to tell this story, but I'll tell it anyway. He had a dental appointment and I asked him if I could bring the crew along. And he says, "Sure, Phil, no problem. Bring them along." And so we went to his dental appointment with him and we're in there, and the dentist starts working on him and he's got him back like this, and he's got his mouth open like this, and there is this CBS camera shooting into his mouth, and I'm saying, "Oh, my gosh." Never made the air, but I don't know any politician who would ever allow something like that. He was open – literally – to us and that's what got him in a lot of trouble,

too, i.e., his skiing. Probably the best president skier in the history of the country, and he was so comfortable with himself, he would say to the camera crews out in Vail, "Come on. Come on along." And he'd go, and all skiers fall from time to time.

Smith: And he had the bad knees which were...I don't think it was well-known at the time. That contributed to the image.

Jones: Yeah, they were tricky, tricky knees and they would go out and so forth. As Ron Nessen, his press secretary made the argument once, he's the most athletic president in history, and I think he was. He had his golf balls that would hit spectators and things like that, but they could have put up a curtain and said no, no cameras. But he said, "No. Come on."

When he became vice president, his first Christmas, he went to Vail with the family and they had a condo in Vail, and again, I was the only crew there with him. I really got to know him a lot during this period, and he didn't have his press secretary with him. I said, "Look, can we bring the crew by on Christmas Eve and shoot pictures?" – because they opened their family gifts. He said, "Sure, sure." And we went there and shot everything – them having all their gifts. It was great.

I got all sorts of kudos from CBS. This is from Gordon Manning, who was a vice president at CBS News at that time, says, "That was mighty nice going on your part and the part of your crew with Vice President Ford and family in Colorado over the Christmas weekend. The scoops you produced one after the other, greatly enriched our holiday broadcast. We are most grateful for your enterprise for these exclusives."

And, guess what? I got a letter from Gerald R. Ford on vice presidential stationary and he says, "Dear Phil, a belated thank you note to let you know how much I appreciated the way you and your camera crew handled your assignment in Vail. I particularly appreciated your thoughtfulness in allowing the Ford family so much to enjoy our vacation in privacy. But a lot of people have said they saw it and they liked it a lot."

Smith: You can't imagine the Nixons doing that.

Jones: No.

Smith: Or any other president, for that matter.

Jones: And there is also the famous picture of me chasing President Ford.

Smith: Tell me - because that's a critical moment surrounding the fall of Saigon. You'd been in Vietnam, so you presumably had some strong feelings about what was going on. And let me preface it with something that Mel Laird said yesterday, which I understand - as kind of the architect of Vietnamization - where Laird is coming from. But Laird has never forgiven Ford and the Congress for, in effect, pulling the plug. As if, given the political mood...

Jones: As if Ford could have made a difference.

Smith: Exactly. Yeah. At that point...

Jones: Let me tell you the genesis of this picture. 1975 - Saigon is falling. The Ford White House is shut down. No comment. Ford is really upset because going through his mind is: here I am, presiding over the United States of America losing its first war - and there was nothing he could do. His hands were tied. And the press secretary would say nothing, nobody would have any comment. So he leaves town, he always did that a lot to get away from it. In crisis, he'd leave town, which is what he did during the whole vice presidential thing - stay away from Nixon.

But he leaves town and goes to California on an energy trip, because keep in mind, we were in deep trouble on energy at that point - oil. And he goes to the Bakersfield, California airport, and then he gets off of Air Force One and gets on Marine One, and goes out to an offshore drilling rig. The press corps has left, the pool went along, but the rest of us are left at the Bakersfield airport. I told my crew, "Give me a wireless microphone, and I'm going to go over and stand in line with all the other people who are out there to wave at him," and all this. "Because my bet is that he is going to come off of that and come directly and walk the proverbial rope line." So, I'm all set up. I'm in line just like everybody else, but there are no ropes. Security was different back then.

And so he gets off Marine One and goes immediately to the crowd. And there he is, going right down. And he finally gets to me and he says, “Phil, what are you doing here.” And I said, “Well, Mr. President, I wanted to ask you about Vietnam.” And he says, “Ohhh nooo, you don’t,” and he takes off running for Air Force One, which is probably a hundred feet away. And as he takes off running, he looks at me and he says, “Come on!” So we take off and that picture shows my camera, my soundman, you don’t see the camera man because he’s taking the pictures. You see Helen Thomas and the pool that had gone with him – they’re all running, and the Secret Service agents – and we’re all running. It looks like we’re having great fun, all smiles. It was a disastrous thing on television because all the way, I’m asking him questions about the fall of Saigon and he’s not answering. And he looks, on television, like a Vietnamese refugee, running like crazy. Finally he gets to the point where I respectfully stop, and that’s how that whole picture started.

As you look at it now, in these days – that was back in the days before Sam Donaldson yelled at Ronald Reagan – I took after him and he allowed it. It shows the dramatic difference between two presidents. You had Richard Nixon who had used the Secret Service to cut off the White House press corps. Used them as a political tool, really. And you couldn’t get close to Richard Nixon. The pool couldn’t even get that close. So he used the Secret Service, and the Secret Service knew that that was their mission to keep the press away. To a new president just in, and they know that he likes the press, he likes reporters, and so when he said, “Come on!” they were running with us. You couldn’t anymore do that today.

Smith: And it also illustrates – for lack of a better word – naiveté about how this would look on television.

Jones: Never thought about it.

Smith: It would be terrible.

Jones: And the White House got a lot of letters over that. Why was he running, and so forth and so on. But, you know, to all the handlers of future presidents,

yeah, it looked bad, but you know what? It also made him look human. It will make your boss look human. It's not half as bad as just, "No comment."

Smith: I thought this week when the president went up to speak to Congress and someone called to do an interview and I said, "I'll tell you one thing you won't hear tonight. You won't hear the president get up and say, as Gerald Ford uniquely did in 1975, 'The state of the Union is bad.'" Which was, again, politically boneheaded, except, in retrospect, it seems amazingly honest and authentic. And today we would appreciate it in theory, I'm not sure we would, even now, welcome hearing it.

Jones: The interesting thing about Ford and his speeches, of course, the greatest speech he ever gave was, "Our long national nightmare is over." "The state of the economy is bad." But these speeches were all done by Bob Hartmann, the late Robert Hartmann, who was a former *LA Times* newspaper guy.

Smith: And I take it, a rather polarizing figure.

Jones: He could be. He was very protective of Jerry.

Smith: Possessive?

Jones: No more than any presidential aide. They all have those tendencies - that I find. But Hartmann was a newspaper guy who believed in candor. And there was a great struggle over - Hartmann wrote the line "Our long national nightmare is over." Ford didn't want to deliver it. He told me this in the final interview, I did with him before the obituary interview. He told about this whole thing. And he said, "I just thought that President Nixon had gone through enough, and I didn't want to say it. And Bob Hartmann pounded his fist on the table and said, 'President Ford, you've got to say it, because that's the way the country is feeling right now.'" And so Jerry Ford talked to Betty and they decided, okay, to deliver and he said, "Am I glad I did it. I'm really glad I did it."

Smith: Tell me about Jerry terHorst, and that brief period that he was press secretary.

Jones: It came and went. He arrived and was three weeks or so, and I think we, in the White House press corps, all liked him. He was a fellow scribe with the

Detroit Press, and he was comfortable with Ford because he had covered Congressman Ford from Grand Rapids. And Jerry was a good personality, so we all liked him. I think those of us in television were a bit frustrated because he knew nothing about television, and the needs of television. So we were going through an education program at the time.

Smith: There has been an argument over the years, a debate – I don't mean to be critical, but you hear this – there is a school of thought that says, yes, indeed, he was deeply offended by the pardon and the fact that he wasn't taken into Ford's confidence. But, at the same time, he also felt that the job was overwhelming, and that this was the perfect way out.

Jones: You know, I've never talked to Jerry about that, but I think this is absolutely possible. Keep in mind that Ford's vice presidential press secretary, Paul Miltich, who had been with Ford when he was in the Congress and when he was Minority Leader, and all that. And Paul was an old press guy and he did not have the tools to deal with a presidential press corps. So he was sort of pushed aside – a little bit rough – he was made communications director, I think at the time. Promoted up. And that's when they brought in terHorst, and I think that probably Bob Hartmann, who was an old *LA Times* reporter and had been a colleague of *Detroit Press* Jerry terHorst – that's how the name that came. He was a friend, and that's how that happened. But Jerry terHorst would not have lasted, and did he use this as an excuse to cut his losses? I don't know. It's possible – I don't know.

Smith: Was it a mistake for the White House press secretary to go on Saturday Night Live?

Jones: Yes. You are talking about Ron Nessen?

Smith: Yeah.

Jones: I think Ron was not ready to take the job. He was a network correspondent and he was a bit of a showman. He liked to be in the headlines. So I think that much of what happened was caused by that, by his wanting to be...

Smith: Sure.

Jones: Look, I don't have any problem with Ron as a person, but I said at the time that he was press secretary, I said, "I think that Ron Nessen, like many press secretaries before him - and he will not be the last - Ron Nessen found it more glamorous to be a senior aide to the president than do the grubby day-to-day press secretary. And that's the fine. You look at the good press secretaries and they all have managed this. Marlin Fitzwater for Bush, but there are lots of those who have come and gone with a lot of fanfare. They had the same problem: it's about me.

Smith: Were you with or around the president during the two assassination attempts?

Jones: Yes. In Sacramento I was, oh, about nine-ten feet from him, following right as he was headed to the state capitol. I saw this scruffy looking woman, whom I didn't recognize at the time - later turned out to be Squeaky Fromme of the Manson clan - I saw her there. And I saw the Secret Service adviser, Larry Buendorf go after her, and I saw her go down. I think I was the first one on the air. I had heard no shots, and rushed off with him as they had her down. As a matter of fact, before I ever knew her name, I ran back to the hotel, which was just off the capitol grounds to the press room and filed a bulletin that there had been an attempted assassination on the president. But I didn't know her name at the time.

Smith: And the extraordinary thing is, he goes on with his visit to Governor Brown and never mentions what happened outside.

Jones: Exactly. And talks about crime.

Smith: Not attempted crime. Crime.

Jones: And then in San Francisco, I was outside the hotel when those shots rang out. Having gone through the Sacramento thing, why, it was spooky.

Smith: You ask yourself, of all the people in the world who you wouldn't think of as an assassination targets, Gerald Ford tops the list.

Jones: I know.

Smith: Two in a month.

- Jones: Then he had his presidential motorcade accident, so there were lots of little things.
- Smith: Did you know at the time, and/or others know at the time, about Mrs. Ford's problems, however defined?
- Jones: As they say in Washington: "with specificity?" No. I was aware that there was something wrong because, starting in Vail, his first trip out as vice president designate, and we did our Christmas Eve thing there, she was always late. At that particular event, it was half over before she ever appeared. So I knew there was something, and my conclusion was that it was alcohol. Didn't know about the pills and it was a combination of things. But, you know, after he became president, I got a call one day in the White House press room and it was Mrs. Ford's secretary and she asked if I would please come up and see Mrs. Ford. I said, "Sure." So I was cleared and went up in the residence. I'd been in the residence in the White House, and she was looking for suggestions on a press secretary for herself. She had interviewed and was about to hire Sheila Weidenfeld, who became her press secretary. And I spent, oh I'd say a half hour. Had a coke and talked and it was... I didn't sense any huge problems there.
- Smith: Did he feel guilt about all those years when he was away?
- Jones: Yeah. He felt guilt, and you could see at times when she was late, or they would be late, his jaw would...
- Smith: Because he was such a pro. He was on time, it was almost military precision.
- Jones: But he was loyal to her and there was love. Always was. He was a handsome guy, but we've all heard stories about the carousing around of other presidents, but I've never heard anything.
- Smith: There is that wonderful story, I'd heard it before, but I think it's in Tom DeFrank's book, of the time of the Frank Gifford affair. They were good friends, and the Fords called the Giffords to let them know they were praying for them. And someone happened to be in talking with the president, who had been in the White House and who made the observation, that of all the people

this person had ever worked for in Washington, Gerald Ford was the only one who would remain faithful to his marital vows. And the president had a wonderful response, because Ford could surprise you. He said, “Well, you know, you have to stop and think. If something like that happens there are nine bad things that could happen and one good thing. And the one good thing you can get taken care of at home.” Which is pretty wise, if you stop and think about it.

Jones: Well, it was a love story, on both their parts. It was sad on Mrs. Ford’s part, though, because there were so many years there that could have been better.

Smith: Then the breast cancer surgery came along and it’s hard to try to make people today understand why it was such a big deal. It’s hard for people to believe that there was time when women didn’t discuss that openly. And the impact that that must have had upon the country.

Jones: Oh, the lives that that saved – who knows? That was history-breaking. And they dealt with it in a public way. For the most part, I never found them afraid to deal with the issues, be they personal or public in the White House – except the one. That was the pills and the addiction. But in the end they handled that spectacularly.

Smith: Yeah. Remember, your network had the *Sixty Minutes* interview, and I go back and I look at that interview and I tell people, Hillary Clinton could not have said, when she was in the White House, what Betty Ford said in ’74 or ’75, whenever it was. But the fascinating thing was what it tells you about her mindset...

Jones: You’re talking about her daughter, Susan?

Smith: Talking about the daughter, talking about marijuana, talking about abortion. Pretty extraordinary stuff. And the fact that it was a Cub Scout den mother from Grand Rapids who was saying this. I’d love to hear your sense of this: my sense is that the initial, the good grey political types of the White House gasped, and thought, oh my God, what has she done? And they hadn’t calculated how the world was changing around them. And particularly post-Vietnam and Watergate, people found her candor refreshing. In many ways,

she actually advanced the Ford agenda of openness and restoring trust to the White House, just by being herself.

Jones: And you know what? She was an extension of him in that neither one of them ever planned, wanted to be, in the White House. That's what made them different. All the other first ladies and presidents – they were all calculated, and they had changed their lives over the years to get there. And the Fords had not.

Smith: And the kids – we now know that they weren't quite as vanilla as maybe they appeared to be at the time. They were members of their generation.

Jones: I speak as one White House correspondent, I never paid any attention to the kids. The times were too hectic. There were too many issues that were relevant. So I had nobody at the CBS bureau in Washington saying, "We need to do a story on the kids, and what are they doing? What's this I hear about so and so?" Susan was young and she was dating and all that kind of stuff. There was no pressure back at the office to do stories on those kids, and those of us who were White House correspondents had too many other issues. I thought about this since all those years, I didn't know much about the kids. You'd see them at events and say, "Hi, Susan, hi, Jack."

Smith: Jack Marsh told us a story. That first month when he is getting ready to go out to the Chicago – typical Ford – anyone else would announce a Vietnam amnesty program on a Friday afternoon – but he goes to the VFW convention to make the announcement – knowing that it is going to be less than rapturously received. The day before he goes, Jack Marsh comes into the Oval Office and says, "I've got some bad news for you." And Ford says, "What is it?" Steve hadn't registered on his eighteen birthday for the draft. And he said his dad look gob smacked, because he thought when the press finds out... here he is out here doing this speech and his own son... Well, anyway, they kept it out of the press. Before the day was over they got the head of Selective Service into the Oval Office – they got Steve signed up, they wrapped it all up. They took care of it. The story never surfaced. But the fact that the president's own son...

- Jones: What I'm curious about – I never heard this story – did some reporter get on to it and ask questions?
- Smith: No. Ford's immediate reaction was what the consequences are going to be if and when a reporter does get on to this story in the supercharged climate. And here he is about to go out to the VFW and make this speech. But the fact that it never did – that they could still keep a story like that under wraps...
- Jones: Which is interesting. How times have changed, because can you imagine – I'm asking myself – why weren't we, as reporters back in those days, finding out if all those kids had registered, if they had any deferment? I think it was because there was just a general feeling of our editors that it was not news and the other issues were too big. We've had too much time in the end of the Cold War. We've had too much time as a journalism headquarters – too much time to fill. So they've sent us out, sent their reporters out doing these inane, irrelevant, things.
- Smith: Did they underestimate Reagan, both in terms of the likelihood that Reagan really would run, and the seriousness of the threat that Reagan would pose?
- Jones: I don't know whether they underestimated it or not. But I'm on shaky ground when I head into this area because you never want to say anything critical of Ronald Reagan, it seems, within Republican circles. I don't have much good to say about Ronald Reagan because of what he did to Jerry Ford. Ronald and Nancy Reagan seized on the pardon and ran in the primary, figuring that Ford was vulnerable and this was their chance to get to the White House. And they gutted him. 1976 was the last time that either of the major parties actually nominated their presidential nominee at a convention. That has never happened since 1976. It's always been chosen by primaries and caucuses and all that stuff. And Reagan almost pulled it off. That convention was wild. But I thought it was just very unfair, what Ronald Reagan did, and I was never able to forgive him for it.
- Smith: The counter argument is, without dismissing what you say, that unintentionally Reagan made Ford a better candidate. That Ford was a better campaigner in October of 1976 than he was in October of 1975.

Jones: He wouldn't have had to be that good if Ronald Reagan hadn't wounded him. In my obituary interview that I did with President Ford, he talked about Ronald Reagan, and what Ronald Reagan and the Pentagon did in the '76 campaign. There were high ranking people, inside the Pentagon, who were feeding fodder for criticism to Ronald Reagan so he could use it in his primary campaign. That's about as scary as Eisenhower leaving and warning about the military industrial complex.

Smith: Was that a factor in the removal of Jim Schlessinger from the Defense Department?

Jones: Frankly, in retrospect, I think the removal of Schlessinger was that he was insubordinate. He was a problem, but I think Ford could have worked that out, had it not been for Rumsfeld. I think Rumsfeld wanted to be Defense secretary.

Smith: You think Rumsfeld also wanted to be vice president?

Jones: Yeah. Absolutely. He was involved in that, too. And I hate to say that because I like Rumsfeld.

Smith: I've heard from so many people, they say it in tones of admiration, that Rumsfeld never left his fingerprints – you won't find his signature. That he was masterful.

Jones: Oh yeah.

Smith: And, again, they sort of admire the skill with which he went about the operation.

Jones: And I think he was probably able to manipulate Ford a little bit. I talked earlier about how Ford set the rules and the tone, and I think he did. But I also think, around the fringes, a guy like Rumsfeld and Cheney, guys like them, were able to maneuver.

Smith: And because Ford famously said he was genuinely surprised that Nixon lied to him. Ford really believed that he was truthful with people and people were

truthful with him. Until he was proven otherwise, which would be a weapon in the hands of skillful couturiers.

Jones: Ford got in the last jab on the Reagan thing. To his death, he was upset with Reagan, and Mrs. Ford, even now, today, can't tolerate them in many ways. But I thought it was very interesting that in 1980, when Ronald Reagan was the nominee, and Reagan was really fumbling on the campaign trail, and he was losing his momentum, and his nomination was in jeopardy at one point, who was it who came onto the campaign trail with vigor, gusto, and tirelessly campaigning for Ronald Reagan, saying, "We have to get Jimmy Carter out of the White House. It is incumbent that we do that."

Smith: Did you know at the time how unhappy Rockefeller was as vice president?

Jones: No.

Smith: He was a good soldier.

Jones: He was. And, here again, I think if you talked about – to every White House correspondent during that period, we didn't have time to do anything except focus on President Ford and the issues. They were so overwhelming. The country was in a crisis. Not only a Constitutional crisis, but we were in an energy crisis and an economic crisis. We're all caught up with our current problems here in 2009, and holding on for dear life, but in some ways it wasn't as bad – it's not a Constitutional crisis right now.

Smith: And, let's face it, Barak Obama has the legitimacy of the ballot box, which Gerald Ford didn't have.

Jones: Yeah. But I just think that Jerry Ford had earned the right to be president in his own way.

Smith: Do you think at the end of the campaign, did you think he thought he was going to win?

Jones: Yes, I think he did, because he was seeing big crowds. They went to airports and they got everybody in, and he'd crawl off of Air Force One and do his thing. They looked enthusiastic, and he was enthusiastic, and the stories were

good and the polls were closing. I think he thought it was still a long shot, but I think he thought maybe they just might have done it.

Smith: You have to tell this story before we finish of the poster that you presented to him after the '76 election, when you went back out to Vail. The conventional notion was that he was kind of down and...

Jones: He was. As we all recall, President Ford had lost his voice because he'd been speaking at all of these rallies, and he'd been going around the White House sort of mumbling and saying to his aides, "I lost to a peanut farmer." So finally he grabs himself by the bootstraps and we pack up and we go to Vail for his final holiday visit as president. So, one day he was out skiing and I was walking around with a dear friend of mine, Dick Growald, who was with Helen Thomas and his White House correspondent for United Press International. And we go by this store and we see this big poster, and it shows these skis up against an outhouse, and it says, "Ski Poland." And we said, "Oh my gosh, we've got to get this," because it was his remarks about the freedom of Poland in the debate that had really cost him. Possibly could have been the one last thing that did make the difference. And he had said that basically, that they are free. And of course, the Soviet Union still existed.

So we got this poster and brought it back and where it said, "Ski Poland," if you look, we have inserted in here, "Free Poland." So we have this last party with the White House press corps and Mr. and Mrs. Ford, and I present him with this poster. You see in the picture, the guy just breaks into laughter. It's like it's almost sort of broken the ice. It was the one image that I will always remember of Gerald R. Ford. Good, decent, hardworking, and who did one hell of a job as president of the United States in a crisis. And I don't know anyone else who could have done as well, what he accomplished.

Ford was working so hard to try to get the country back on track, and sometimes he was really too serious for his own good. And he had David Kennerly, who was a former photographer for *Time Magazine*, who he had named his White House photographer. It was David Kennerly and Don Penny who had been hired as a speechwriter, primarily to write funny lines for the president. Don is a short fellow, and Kennerly and Penny decided they needed

to relax the president a little bit. He'd had a day, made a speech one night, and so the next morning, Penny and Kennerly went to the Oval Office and Penny got underneath the president's desk, right at the knee hole and hid under there. He was a small guy. And Kennerly, of course, is there. At every move that Ford makes, Kennerly is getting pictures of him. So Ford comes down and he's got his pipe and it's "Good morning," and he used to say, "Wide-eyed and bushy-tailed and ready to go." And, "How you doing, David?" and they have some small talk and the president goes over and sits down in his chair and scoots into the thing, and as he gets just about there, suddenly Don Penny jumps out and goes, "BOO!" Just to make him laugh.

Smith: Did it work?

Jones: It worked. Here again, what president, what aides could do that with any president?

Smith: The great story – when he fell down the steps in Vienna, in the rain, holding an umbrella for Mrs. Ford, and there is a famous photograph of him. And later on people around him, of course, were all lashing out at the photographers, how dare they take his picture? And his response was, "Well, of course they took them. If they hadn't they would have lost their jobs." Which again, tells volumes about the guy.

Jones: He understood.

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