

**Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project**  
**Robert DuPont**  
**Interviewed by**  
**Richard Norton Smith**  
**October 26, 2010**

Smith: Thank you for doing this. How did your path cross with Gerald Ford?

DuPont: I was there when he arrived.

Smith: Okay. How did you get to the White House?

DuPont: Well, that's a longer story. I left my medical training and got my first job outside of training on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1968. I had gone to Harvard Medical School and took my training in psychiatry there. I'd gone then to NIH to do two years of service in the public health service. And I was interested in a mission. I was inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr. and by John Kennedy and I was just captured by the idea of making a contribution. So, the question in my mind was how could I possibly do that? I'd graduated from medical school, I'd had my training, but the rubber's not on the road anywhere. Where could I put it on the road? And, one day a week, in my residency, I worked in the state prison in Massachusetts, a very famous prison that was the prison that—

Smith: Was that in Waltham?

DuPont: No, it was Norfolk Prison.

Smith: Norfolk.

DuPont: It's right next door. That's right. It's the prison that Malcolm X had done six years on a burglary charge. He went as Detroit Red and came out as Malcolm X from that prison. So, it was quite a historic prison. One day a week, I talked to those prisoners. I was just fascinated by them. I was fascinated by crime. I was fascinated by the issue of crime. I was fascinated by the people.

Smith: Were you surprised by anything they told you?

DuPont: Well, I was surprised that they seemed a lot more normal than I'd thought. Somehow I had them maybe more demonized in my mind. And they were

regular people. And, I guess, what really captured me were their stories. I've been a practicing psychiatrist all these years and what brought me to psychiatry was the stories. I don't think anybody other than a psychiatrist or a therapist hears these stories of people's lives the way you do, week in and week out. I really just was fascinated by these stories, so I decided, "Okay, here I'm leaving NIH, I'm going to make a contribution," and I was going to do this in crime. So I looked around the country and ended up settling on the District of Columbia. I ended up working for the District of Columbia Department of Corrections.

Now, that was very propitious because crime was rapidly rising at that time in the District of Columbia and Lyndon Johnson had established a crime commission to study crime in the District of Columbia. I'd gotten all caught up in that in the Department of Corrections. But the big event in my life was that Richard Nixon, in his campaign, made crime in Washington a major issue. He called it the Crime Capital of the Nation. So when he came in on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1969, he was distracted by all kinds of other things and some local citizens, including Edward Bennett Williams and Katherine Graham, marched on the White House, literally, and said, "We're going to hold a press conference every week until you do something about crime in the city." And he then turned to his assistant named Bud Krogh, and asked him to take over and fix the problem of crime in Washington, D.C.

I was then at the Department of Corrections in January of '69 and had lots of ideas for things to do in community corrections, which were going nowhere in the Johnson administration - were just in a file cabinet. And, all of a sudden, there was an interest in it and, by May of '69, all of my ideas were funded. Never mind waiting for things, it was just done. Bang.

Smith: That's interesting because it flies in the face of the notion that Nixon didn't care about domestic policy.

DuPont: Oh, absolutely. It was huge.

Smith: I wonder, at that point, how much of the local crime problem was drug related.

DuPont: Well, we're going to get to that. That's exactly where we go with this.

Smith: Okay.

DuPont: So, at that point, I don't do anything with drugs. I'm just thinking about the crime issue at that point. Then, there were a couple of things in the newspaper about drugs in relationship, particularly heroin. And we had a senator in charge of the Senate District Committee named Joseph Tidings, who was holding hearings on this. And I get interested in what was this connection. Some college students did a study in the D.C. jail taking urine samples of people coming in and seeing what kind of drugs we'd find in there and asking a couple questions. Well, what we found was some 44% of them were positive for heroin and when we looked at the question of when did they first use heroin, we could show that it started, this epidemic, in the mid-60s and was rising through this period of time.

If you laid that against the crime rate, you got an exact parallel to when the crime rate started up and what the slope of that curve was. It was very dramatic. This was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It was a historic paper that defined that connection. Well, the next step was, okay, if you make that connection, what do you do about it? And, so, I became a sudden student of addiction treatment and captured what was the best going around in the country, including a program in Chicago with Jerome Jaffee, and in New York with Vincent Dole, and Marie Nyswander (Dole's wife) methadone program. So, on September 15<sup>th</sup> I started the first methadone program in the city in the Department of Corrections. By February 18<sup>th</sup> of 1970, we had been funded, with White House support, a massive program to treat heroin addiction in the district. Over the next three years, we treated 15,000 heroin addicts in Washington, D.C. in forty centers.

Smith: Had that been done in New York?

DuPont: Never in the scale in relationship to this city. They had a big program, but not on a scale we had in Washington. This is the first time anybody had ever done it on a scale for the whole city. And, not coincidentally, by 1973 the crime rate in the District of Columbia was cut in half, the serious crime. I

mean it was a huge change that went on. And to say that it got the attention of the White House would be an understatement. As a result, I quickly established a relationship with Bud Krogh and with the Nixon administration.

Then off to the side another issue came up and that was heroin addiction in Vietnam. You'll recall that in 1970, Vietnam was kind of a serious issue in this country, politically and otherwise. And, all of a sudden, heroin addiction was a huge problem among American service men in Vietnam. And Nixon needed to do something about that. So, now he had two problems. He had crime in the cities and he had heroin addiction in Vietnam that was really threatening the war effort. I mean it was a huge problem. So, at that point, the White House came to me and said, "What can we do to get somebody in here to do something about this issue?" So, I had contact with a White House person named John Dunfeld whose distinction was he was dating Tricia Nixon.

But he is a wonderful guy and did a great job, but that's how he got there. He'd been president of USC, the university's student body president, and gotten the attention of the President and was just a twenty-five-year old attorney from California. Anyhow, I put him in contact with the leaders of this field and got him hooked up with Jerry Jaffee. So, on June 17<sup>th</sup> of 1970, again this sequence is so rapid to think about this, Nixon declared a war on drugs and started the first White House drug office with Jerome Jaffee as the head of it. That began the commitment of the White House. And that all grew out of the program that I'd started in the district which had demonstrated that, with treatment on a massive scale, you could change the dynamic of this epidemic.

It wasn't as if that was the only thing that happened, because Nixon did a lot of other things that reinforced that. He increased the police in the District of Columbia at that same time, dramatically increased the police department, and through the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs in international activities blocked the French connection and Turkey from raising poppies, which was the main source of heroin coming, particularly to the east coast of the United States. So, it was a coordinated effort. But the new element in it

was treatment. That had never been in it before. For the fifty years prior to that, American drug policy was just law enforcement. There was no treatment investment at all. Certainly not from the federal government, but very little treatment anywhere really.

Smith: Wasn't there a political downside? As I recall, the idea of the government providing a substitute, if you will—

DuPont: Oh, methadone was extremely controversial. Oh my gosh, absolutely. And it was a weird politics because methadone has become a liberal icon now. But at the time, it was seen as a conservative move because of the Nixon presidency, and was seen as this conservative man who hated blacks and the underclass. You were going to narcotize the inner city young men with this methadone. So, it sparked a tremendous controversy and there was a pushback that was just tremendous to this. But it was working. And, I mentioned Joseph Tidings who was the senator from Maryland who was the chairman of the Senate District Committee. He was a Kennedy Democrat. He was as liberal as you can get and he was totally behind this. So, we had complete support from the left and the right in terms of the political class. There was very little opposition to that. But, in the media, it was just tremendous. And the racial politics, then the District of Columbia was dominated by race, and I was then, and am now, white, and that was a serious liability in terms of—

Smith: Was this when Marion Berry was just rising to prominence?

DuPont: Absolutely. Marion and I came to Washington the same year and we're the same age. He had an organization called PRIDE and so I was very much involved throughout all this. It's interesting in that in the time in 1970, there was another organization called The Black Man's Development Center. The leader was this self-styled colonel, Colonel Hussan, who was a bigger force in politics in Washington than Marion Berry was at that time. But, he ran aground early.

Smith: It is such a challenge - I mentioned the Rockefeller book – writing about Attica. It is such a challenge to recreate for us forty years later the radical politics that existed—

DuPont: In 1970. That was the peak of it.

Smith: Yeah. It was just another planet.

DuPont: It is. And, you know, you mentioned about Nelson Rockefeller. One of my exchanges with Rockefeller that was very interesting was that he was offended by the fact that Richard Nixon, who he had very low regard for, had gotten so much positive reaction about his drug policy. Well, Nelson had taken nothing but grief on drugs and he just thought this was terrible and unfair and he couldn't understand why. And it's interesting, and I've done some thinking about why that was and I didn't see it, but now I have a pretty clear idea what happened. And that is, prior to 1970, there were only two states that had a significant infrastructure in drug abuse, where you had experts in the state, where you had a substantial investment going on, and that was New York and California. And, both of those states at the same time, in the late 60s, made big investments in civil commitment and nobody else did.

The federal government got into it in 1967, in civil commitment, but just put a toe in the water. The places that really developed in expertise [were New York and California]. So when this drug issue crested in the early 70s, Nelson Rockefeller had a deep bench, he had a lot of experts. Nixon had none. And, what happened was, Nixon turned to people like me and Jerry Jaffee, who were newcomers, not encumbered by what was going on. And Rockefeller had all these people who were taking him down, let's say, a path that didn't lead where he wanted to go.

Smith: That's fascinating because one of the real ball and chain issues that he drags historically—

DuPont: Oh, the Rockefeller laws.

Smith: Exactly. I think *The Times* has a key, you just push and it out comes "the Rockefeller drug laws." The irony is, that was his third drug program.

DuPont: I understand that.

Smith: And he was someone who believed that there was no such thing as a problem that couldn't be solved.

DuPont: Yeah.

Smith: And the first two, which had been much more 'conventional,' hadn't worked. Had he stayed on for another term, there would've been a fourth program, because the third one wasn't working. Was it simply frustration that everything else he tried hadn't worked, so he would try this draconian approach?

DuPont: Let's remember that methadone, which was what Nixon really did, was from New York. Rockefeller had overlooked that. It was right under his nose the entire time. And the reason he didn't go for it is because his experts didn't like it. It was contrary to their vision. And I tell you this now that we've got forty years to think about what happened at that point, so I'm now talking from this perspective rather than that, but the things Rockefeller was doing were not wrong. They were not dumb. All of his things - civil commitment - tough laws. All of those things were actually good moves. The problem was that the epidemic just swamped him. They had worked previously, they were good ideas, but they could not respond to what was going on, so they overwhelmed him with just the scale of it. And that was because we were in what I called 'the modern drug use epidemic.' And that epidemic is as new as the computer. People will say, "Well, drugs have been around." Well, yes, but what happened in the late '60s has never happened before.

What happened was we had whole populations exposed to a wide variety of drugs in a political environment and a demographic tender that was coming from the Baby Boom. Because that's when the baby boomers got to the teenage and early 20s, and they hit right at that same time. So the culture changed. The demographics changed. The drug use pattern changed. Timothy Leary set the stage that it was desirable to use drugs. There was something good about - fit with the kind of do it now value system that was going on. And that just exploded. So, what happened, in contrast with Nixon's idea was voluntary methadone. Rockefeller's idea was involuntary civil commitment. So, it was much easier to manage a voluntary open season in the epidemic. Nixon didn't have all the problems that Rockefeller had with his civil commitment in running that thing. Rockefeller had to get all those

prisons. He had to hire all those people. He couldn't manage the people coming. There was too many of them going on. So, it wasn't really that he had bad ideas. They just weren't scalable in the timeframe to what was going on, whereas Nixon's were. And, again, it had to do with the fact that Nixon turned to a whole new generation of people who had new ideas, who weren't stuck with what had been before.

Smith: When did you sense that the Nixon presidency was going to end prematurely? Was it a dawning realization?

DuPont: Well, remember that I'm a fairly narrow-gauged participant in the Nixon administration. I'm the drug guy. So, there's a lot of things going on. I had an experience one time talking to Bud Krogh in his office. Then he went to jail around those issues himself, and he was very close to Chuck Colson. He was the guy who Gordon Liddy reported to in the White House, for example.

Smith: Was Colson a legendary figure?

DuPont: Oh, yes. Oh my gosh, he was very big in terms of all of the stuff that was going on.

Smith: I mean at the time.

DuPont: Oh yes, he was the big figure.

Smith: Notorious?

DuPont: Notorious? Powerful. I wouldn't say notorious.

Smith: Okay.

DuPont: He wanted to talk to Krogh, and Krogh asked me to step out of the office so he could talk to him. And later, he said, "I did that to protect you." And I thought, "Whoa." That had never occurred to me to think about that at the time. This is an aside, but a personal thing. I was with Bud Krogh the night before he was sentenced. Now, he's already pleaded guilty. His role had to do with the break-in of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist with Gordon Liddy. He didn't go to jail for exactly the Watergate thing, but for that break-in. And he said to me, "If I don't go to jail, I think I'll kill myself. If I don't go to jail."

And I said, "What are you talking about?" And he said, "I'm guilty and I need to take my punishment." And I said, "But you've got two little kids, two boys. How are they going to handle this?" He said, "I've talked to them already about this and I said, 'When you do something wrong, you have to take the consequences' and that's what I'm doing. And they're comfortable with that and I'm comfortable with that." And I was just stunned.

Smith: That's fascinating because you do sense out of all that crew, he's one of the very few who have emerged with their honor intact.

DuPont: Enhanced to my point of view. But he was an extraordinary guy from the beginning. I mean, his contributions to the Nixon drug policy were immense. He was completely non-ideological. I was and am a Democrat. That didn't matter to the Nixon White House. They couldn't care less about that. I didn't care that I was working for a Republican president. I was thrilled to work for him and that had to do with Bud Krogh. He was a guy who had just tremendous integrity, but he also was a man of action. He knew he had to move right now. He wasn't interested in studying it. We had to have a program that was happening now and that was very wonderful to me.

Smith: I don't know what you've read, but the subsequent accounts that suggested that the President in the final days, however you define that, was acting oddly.

DuPont: Crazy.

Smith: Yeah. Was there scuttlebutt at the time?

DuPont: Not about me. Again, you've got to remember that I'm not a big player. I'm a small player. So, my time with either Nixon or Ford was very limited. A few visits and that's it.

Smith: But in terms of picking up from colleagues - you know there's an atmosphere and it must've been rather grim toward the end.

DuPont: My experience wasn't like that. It goes like this. I was right there at the beginning of the Nixon White House and we got something happening and it had a good effect. Jerry Jaffee became the first drug czar. I said he started June 17<sup>th</sup>, it actually was '71, not '70, as the drug czar. But that was going on.

We had a law that was passed in '72 that established that office. It created the National Institute on Drug Abuse. It established that office and the National Institute of Drug Abuse, and it passed the Senate and the House without a dissenting vote. Now, how many laws is that true about? So, that was the environment that I was in.

Now, what happened was, and you were talking about the pushback, what I had done or we had done in the District of Columbia was focus on heroin addiction and it relied on methadone. When the program went national, you couldn't do that. You had to deal with drugs. Methadone was only a part of what was going on. And we were using a system of delivering treatment services that was unmanageable. In the district, I could manage the money. I could make sure we had real patients. I could make sure they were getting services. I could target who the patients were. That was measureable. At the federal level, it was nothing like that. It was much more like the joke is you put the money on a stump and people run away with it. It was much more like that. The drug money would go to a treatment program and God only knows what they were going to do with that and who they were going to consider a drug user and what they were going to consider treatment. It was like pushing on a noodle to try to get it to go.

So, the focus was gone from that and the pushback in terms of a heroin focus on methadone was tremendous. So, when it rolled out as a national program, it lost its power. And, also, the pushback that Nixon was getting, he declared in '73 that we'd turned the corner on heroin addiction. Boy, the people who were committed to that not being the case - this was another manipulation by the dishonest Nixon - conservative manipulation - it was all this sort of thing. And then, of course, Nixon was distracted. He had been focused on this because it was about crime in the district. He had taken care of that problem. And so, what happened before Ford came in, at the end of Nixon's first term, Krogh was gone. He went to Transportation. The new people there didn't have that same kind of zeal about it. So the issue had already lost its traction. The excitement was way down, not because of any problem with Nixon or necessarily with our program. You're not going to hold that kind of attention for very long. That just doesn't happen in the real world.

So, by the time Ford came, the objective was much more to hang on, to consolidate, than it was to extend, expand, whatever else. You know, I'm looking forward to talking to you about what happened in the Ford administration. But just in the general sense – you were talking about the Nixon administration – I think that before Watergate really pulled the plug on the Nixon administration, the bloom was off the rose in terms of the drug issue.

Smith: Plus, isn't it, by its very nature, a chronic program, a plague? However you want to describe it that isn't going to go away.

DuPont: Well, but the president has got three or four issues that he can deal with. That's it. You lost the media, what they're dealing with. They're going to focus on three or four things that are going on right now and you're not going to be on that list for very long with pretty much anything like that.

Smith: I just wonder if there isn't over time a tendency to throw up one's hands as a society and just say, "This has always been with us. This is almost part of human nature for whatever reason. It's going to be with us." And to begin to erode public support or public confidence that government can address this problem in a significant way. That as long as the appetites are there, it's hard to imagine them being—

DuPont: That's true. The other side of that, though, is people very much underestimate the potential threat of drug abuse. We have 8.7% today of America's 12 and over have used an illegal drug in the last month. So, that's what our number is. The actual risk is more like 60% and the potential for that is just phenomenal. People are underestimating the power of the drugs in terms of taking over the brain, their thinking and the behavior of individuals. It's not like alcohol and tobacco. These drugs are much more powerful and you can see this in the lab in terms of what it does to people. And those two drugs have created immense social costs in this society.

But go back to the Ford administration, because the Ford administration went through exactly the kind of thought process and maybe we should spend a few minutes talking about how that was, defining what the Ford period did in the

drug field. In the context of this downplaying of the priority from really an unsustainable height that it had achieved early in the Nixon administration, not late in the Nixon administration, but early in the Nixon administration, there was an effort that was taken away from me and what I was doing and taken to the domestic council where Jim Cannon was in charge of it, Dick Parsons was the person put in charge, and a fellow named Ed Johnson was the guy who did the spear carrying, the heavy lifting. They did what was called the 'White Paper on Drug Abuse.'

That was their review, the Ford administration review, and I say 'they' because I contributed to it, but I have to say that I did not have any great vision at that time that I was trying to present. I was personally still reeling from the fact that we'd done such a great job in the district and we were having such a difficult time carrying it into the federal role and thinking about, okay, where do we need to go? If somebody comes to me and says, "Where do you want to go?" What is that? And mostly I could get my head to not losing the ground we had as opposed to saying where you want to plant that flag next. Anyhow, the 'White Paper' comes in and what it did is exactly what you just said. It essentially said, "Okay, we've got this problem. It's going to be here for a long time. We have to be realistic about what we're doing. Scale down the rhetoric. Scale down the commitment of energy to it. Manage our resources more carefully. And focus on the more serious drugs."

Because off to the side of this heroin issue was the marijuana problem. And, go all the way back to 1970, Congress had established a Marijuana Commission with Governor Schaeffer of Pennsylvania in charge, and that had produced reports in '72 and '73 that were talking about sort of making peace with marijuana use. Decriminalizing it. Accommodating to this. When I took office, Nixon said to me, "Bob, I want you to be in charge of drugs and to take the lead in this, but, if you say one word in support of decriminalization, you're gone, because that is the line you cannot cross. It's the only one. But that one you can't cross." So, even a hint would be your demise in terms of this administration.

Smith: Did Ford have a position similar to that?

DuPont: I'm going to tell you what happened with this. I, being the heroin guy, sort of dismissed the marijuana problem. It seemed unworthy to me as an issue.

Smith: It's what musicians do at two in the morning.

DuPont: Something like that. You didn't have the bodies piling up the way we did with heroin. We had a lot of overdose deaths. We don't have a big connection with crime the way with heroin. And the 'White Paper' reinforced that. I mean, it focused away from marijuana also. But there's this other process going on, this sort of rethinking this. I've got resonating in my mind, Nixon says, "Don't support decriminalization." Now, in August of '74, Nixon is gone. I've got a new president now. Okay, I have been thinking about this issue and think that decriminalization is not such a bad idea. In November of '74, I speak out as the Ford administration White House person at the Norml convention and support decriminalization. So, I supported it. In Ford's final strategy in 1976, it says we need to seriously look at decriminalization as a response to the marijuana issue. So, to the extent that there was a Ford position on decriminalization, it was sympathetic.

Smith: Was that something you ever discussed with him?

DuPont: Never.

Smith: So, basically, you were acting on your own -

DuPont: I was, but it was very visible and anybody could've stepped on my chain and nobody did. I didn't have any negative repercussions from that at all. And the speech itself was pretty interesting, because I spent 90% of it saying that marijuana was a dangerous drug, should be discouraged, was very undesirable to smoke it, legalization was a terrible idea. But, I said, I don't want to send people to jail for smoking marijuana. And that became the headline.

Smith: Did you clear that speech in advance?

DuPont: Never. I don't remember it ever being cleared. I don't remember that process.

Smith: And what response did you get?

DuPont: Nobody said anything. It was okay. I never talked to Ford about it, but Dick Parsons was my handler and he had no problem stepping on my chain on other issues. He could've done that, but he didn't care.

Smith: I realize this is speculative and therefore maybe unfair, and I want to be careful how I phrase this.

DuPont: Since you're being recorded, too.

Smith: Exactly. The Fords had children of an age where Mrs. Ford herself was famously asked about this in the *60 Minutes* interview, and she certainly didn't express astonishment. In fact, she said they probably tried it. In a larger sense, the youth culture that they represented and that they exposed their parents to - do you think that's a factor at all in this?

DuPont: Oh, sure. Absolutely. And I definitely think it had to. If you think about the different personalities of Nixon and Ford. I mean, Nixon was very strict on this stuff, sort of rigid, black and white. Ford was not a black and white guy. He just didn't do that sort of thing. Now, an incredibly to me rich irony is, during those years, and not by accident, there was a phenomenal escalation in marijuana use going on. The first state to decriminalize was Oregon in '73. And decriminalization was marching across the country during the Ford administration and it looked like the future was going in this way. And, by the end of the Ford administration, 1976 and early '77, I was deeply troubled by the increase in marijuana use.

Smith: Was there a direct link between decriminalization and the increase in use?

DuPont: Oh, absolutely, because what it did was it removed the sense of fear of using and when you do that, you get an awful lot of young people using the drug. So, it was a slope that went up like that - what was going on with marijuana use during the mid-70s. It scared me and I got a letter from a woman in Atlanta named Keith Schuchard who said I was part of the problem because of my positions about marijuana, and invited me down to Atlanta to meet with a group of parents who were dealing with this problem. And I went down there and I became convinced that I was part of the problem.

The sort of defining moment for me was when I gave a speech at the meeting there in Atlanta, a big drug prevention speech, and I was talking in support of decriminalization to this group. And my father, who was very interested in the news, but not terribly intellectually thinking about these things, watching my tongue as he was driving me back because my family lived in Atlanta, he said, “You know, I wish you just weren’t so pro-marijuana.” And I thought, “I have been so studious to say I’m anti-marijuana, but don’t want to put people in prison, that for my father to say I was pro-marijuana, was appalling to me.” And I realized that, with respect to this issue, there were only two positions, yes and no. There was no nuance. You could not say ‘but,’ ‘and’—

Smith: Particularly if you’re a parent with teenage kids who were vulnerable.

DuPont: Anybody. Or the head of the National Institute of Drug Abuse or the White House drug person. So, at that point, I wanted to change my mind. Now, the irony is that Jimmy Carter became president and I stayed on through the first two years of that administration and, there, Jimmy Carter supported decriminalization, so I couldn’t oppose it. So, under Nixon, I couldn’t support it. Under Carter, I couldn’t oppose it. And under Ford, I was left to my own devices. And, the regret I have in the whole thing was the Ford years, because I think I was wrong. I don’t think I did the right thing. I think I was going in the wrong direction and it had to do with my underestimating the importance of this. Think about this number. In 1978, 11% of high school seniors in this country were smoking marijuana every day and that number had doubled in four years. Now, you think about that trend. 11%, that’s 1 in 9 high school seniors is an every day smoker of marijuana.

Smith: We’ve often heard the argument that the worst thing about marijuana is that it’s the gateway to stronger drugs. Would you accept that as a broad assertion?

DuPont: Yeah, my 1985 book is called *Gateway Drugs*. It focuses on exactly that point. It’s interesting the argument against it, because it’s created a furor. The ‘gateway drug hypothesis’ as it’s called is one of the defining controversies in the addiction field. And it goes like this. The people who don’t like that term point out that, “Well, everybody who smoked marijuana

drank milk first, so you can say milk really is a bigger gateway drug to heroin addiction than to marijuana.” That’s one thing they’ll say is, “Well, most people who smoke marijuana don’t use heroin.” And that’s true, too. But I like to say, “Now, wait a minute, let’s take something very simple and that’s the relationship of cigarette smoking and lung cancer. Do you know what the risk of lung cancer for a two pack per day smoker? It’s less than 5%. But, it’s 100 times more than for a non-smoker. Now, does that mean it’s not a cause?” Come on. To be a cause, it doesn’t mean everybody has it and that’s the issue. But what you find is that the people who haven’t used marijuana just don’t use these other drugs. But it also is true that cigarettes and alcohol are gateway drugs.

Smith: This is off the wall, but I can’t let it go without asking. I remember when the President died and *Newsweek* had a great cover photo of him with the pipe. Someone wrote in to complain about the pipe. Was that an issue at all? Did people raise the fact that the President smoked?

DuPont: No, I don’t recall about Ford. But I’ll tell you, I was in the Oval Office one time talking to Ford and he stepped out or something. Anyway, I was left there alone for a little period of time and he was just getting ready to get on of the helicopter to go to Camp David. So, his briefcase was sitting on the desk of the Oval Office open. I couldn’t resist. What is in his briefcase as he’s about to get on this plane? And I walk over there and look in there and there in this briefcase were only two things, a copy of *Time Magazine* and his pipe and tobacco. And I thought, “Now, that’s Gerald Ford. That is really just tremendous to think that’s what he’s taking to Camp David.”

Smith: How would you describe his intelligence?

DuPont: Oh, gosh, he was just a very smart guy and very open. I’ll tell you a couple things, Gerald Ford stories. These both come from meeting him in 1992 when there was a dedication of DuPont Hall at the Betty Ford Center. You know, it’s got a building there with my name on it and this was its ten-year anniversary of the founding of the Betty Ford Center. And he and Betty were there and we had a nice little gathering for this dedication, thirty people. It wasn’t a big group of people. But he wanted to make some remarks. He

made several, but the one that just absolutely amazed me, he said, for the first forty years of their marriage, Betty had spent most of the time supporting his career and he was very grateful for that. Since he left the White House, he spent a lot of his time supporting her career, as he was doing at that dedication. And, he said, “I think when history is written and the two contributions are compared, hers will be seen as more important than mine.” And I was just stunned. I was just stunned. It was so much the kind of guy he was, the generosity of that was just breathtaking to me.

Another thing, I had lunch with him and Betty that day in their home and he didn't really get much into the drug issue, but he knew I was a doctor and he had something on his mind that he wanted to ask me as a doctor. He had apparently not supported a VA hospital in Grand Rapids and had been criticized for not bringing home this pork and wanted to know what I thought of the VA hospitals, and whether he'd done the wrong thing for Grand Rapids. I mean, it was amazing to me that that would be on his mind. It's funny, what I said to him, because that was 1992 and the VA hospitals were not distinguished in their medical care. They actually became pretty good over the next couple of decades. So, what I said to him then would not be what I'd say to him if we talked about it now. But I was just touched by the fact that he was troubled by that.

Smith: Is there a disparity between the Ford that you saw over time and the public image? And, I mean, to the extent that the public image—

DuPont: That he's a bumbler.

Smith: Yeah, that he's a Chevy Chase. People forget, 'Saturday Night Live' went on the air in '75 just at the turning point - the drug issue, the whole popular culture, obviously fed by Vietnam and Watergate. Reverence was out the door and he became caricatured. I'm trying to get a sense of whether it bothered him.

DuPont: Well, let me tell you a little bit about that, because this again goes back to that exchange in '92 when I was with him. I asked him a simple question. I said, “Okay, in the history of the American presidency, who would you think has

been the best athlete who's ever served in the White House?" It seems like a fairly straightforward question. He thought about it and then he says, "George Bush." I said, "Really? George Bush?" He said, "Yes, he was the captain of the Yale baseball team and played first base." And I said, "But you were an all-American football player at Michigan." He said, "Well, I was, but what you don't know is in my senior year, we only won two games." And, I thought, you know, that is so Gerald Ford, that he wouldn't even accept that.

Smith: Of course, the flip side of it is that, as the presidency became more and more theatrical, I always said he was the least self-dramatizing of public figures.

DuPont: Absolutely.

Smith: And it became in some ways detrimental.

DuPont: He's the only one who never ran for national office until his final time. I had the feeling during the campaign, in the beginning of it, that he wasn't even trying very hard to get elected. He was trying at the end, but at the beginning, he was too busy trying to do the right thing for the country. But, also, you know, what were the right moves? I mean, people make fun of him about the WIN program, the Whip Inflation Now, but what were the good moves? And, also, his antipathy for Reagan was very striking to me in talking to him. I mean, Reagan wasn't a good Republican because of those deficits. That was unforgivable. Republicans don't run deficits like that. And I thought, "You know, now that is very interesting. He was a non-ideological president. He was a practical president."

Smith: And you look at his selection of Justice Stevens. Classic illustration.

DuPont: And he supported it until his death. He never regretted it. That was another thing that was very interesting. The conservatives couldn't forgive him for that. And he supported Stevens right through to the end.

Smith: I made the observation in my eulogy that, you know, the cliché is we get more conservative as we get older because we have more to conserve.

DuPont: We have something to conserve, never mind more.

Smith: Yeah, hopefully. He, in a lot of ways, seemed to run counter to that. I wondered how much of an influence she was, how much of an influence having kids and then grandchildren and being open to that whole culture. How much of it was, quite frankly, an acute awareness of what he called 'the hard Right' which had after all come after him in the mid-70's. It wasn't just abortion. I mean, that was the most obvious, but he was outspokenly pro-gay rights. We've talked to someone who quoted him as saying ten years before he died that gay marriage was coming and society should adapt itself. I mean, things that don't fit the stereotype of the white bread west Michigan Republican Party. And I'm wondering how much of it was an outgrowth of his work with the Betty Ford Center. where he saw these people in his circle - good, decent people, who had a weakness - and whether that was a factor in broadening his horizons.

DuPont: To me, though, I would say the core of Ford was the sense of duty, a sense of responsibility, a sense of wanting to do the right thing and not promote his ego, but to fulfill the obligation to the public interest that came with his position. And, as his position became more prominent, it became more national and more international, and I think that that broadened him beyond Grand Rapids in terms of his role. And he grew with that, is the way I would see it. But, also, I think the parties at that time did not have an ideological litmus test. So, think about the fact that the Democratic Party through all those years, the Congress was led by the South. Those were Democrats, you know, and that was so different from what has happened now where you get this very sharp ideological divide that is going on.

Smith: Let me ask you, because you might be Exhibit A in this. How difficult was it in the early phase of the Ford presidency in terms of meshing the Nixon holdovers, who were clearly the majority of the staff—

DuPont: That's what I was.

Smith: Exactly. With the Grand Rapids crowd and others that he brought in. Was there tension between those groups?

DuPont: I don't think so. I think the people from the Nixon team, I speak for myself, were ready to go on. Dick Parsons was my handler and I just thought he was wonderful.

Smith: Were you also ready to go?

DuPont: No, I was going to stay. I wanted to stay. Absolutely, I didn't want to go. But Parsons was very inspiring. I mean, he was a wonderful guy to work for. I couldn't ask for anything better than Dick Parsons.

Smith: Could you have predicted at that point that he was headed for big things?

DuPont: I never knew anybody who didn't think he was wonderful. You know, I mean, no one had the sense that he's gotten this job because he's black and he's somehow not up to the job and he's a token.

Smith: A Rockefeller guy.

DuPont: Well, I was going to say about Rockefeller guys, my perception was - and Jim Cannon doesn't entirely agree with this -, is Ford was a legislative branch guy. Well, legislative people don't have any staff to speak of. There's nobody there. Rockefeller was an executive branch guy. He had a very deep bench. I mean, he had expertise in every direction that was tremendously deep. So, when the Ford presidency comes, where did they turn to fill the positions? It's Rockefeller people.

Smith: That's interesting. Did you see or sense the tension between Rumsfeld and Rockefeller?

DuPont: No, I never saw any of that. I wouldn't know that. I can imagine that, but I didn't ever see anything like that.

Smith: Was there a different feel at all about how Rumsfeld ran the White House and how Cheney ran the White House?

DuPont: I didn't see any of that because I was just related to Parsons throughout that whole experience and I wouldn't even know.

Smith: Did you have direct conversations with the President about your field?

- DuPont: No, I met him several times, but no real conversations. It would be a formal kind of thing, a presentation to a cabinet committee we had, but it would be very formal.
- Smith: So, really, it was in later years, when you worked with Mrs. Ford—
- DuPont: Yes, that got me in contact with him.
- Smith: And how did that come about?
- DuPont: The question is how did I get my name on a building at the Betty Ford Center; and the answer is that I had a patient in this office who I referred, as I have many patients, to the Betty Ford Center. This guy had a good bit of money. Is a wonderful man. He flew out there in his own airplane. He went into the Betty Ford Center and they put him in a double room and his first assignment was to clean up the bathrooms. This was, let's say, not the way he lived his life at that point. His reaction to it was to be delighted. He had grown up as an orphan. He had been turned out at the age of 18 from the orphanage with \$5 and a toothbrush and told, "It's a world of opportunity. Go out there and seize it." And so he was perfectly prepared to clean bathrooms.
- He was very attracted to the Betty Ford Center and wanted to do something to help them. And at that point in his life his purpose, if you can imagine, was to honor the people who'd helped him. So, he went to Betty Ford and said, "I want to name a building after my doctor who sent me here." So, they did and John Schwarzlose, who's the Executive Director out there, commented to me about this. He said, "Bob, I don't want you to take this too serious. For a million dollars, we would've called it the Mickey Mouse Center." That's how that happened.
- Smith: When she was setting up this thing, had she talked to you?
- DuPont: No. Where she got the things were from the Navy and from Hazelden. It's a direct connection. Hazelden was the pioneer of the modern treatment program, and all the really classy programs have their lineage traced back to what Hazelden was doing with the so-called Minnesota Model. Betty Ford Center and John Schwarzlose are not comfortable, really, with that. They

want to be themselves and not one to a program in the Hazelden shadow. And that's right, they are different. And, one of the things that I really give a lot of credit to, John and the Betty Ford Center, they have not gone the way Hazelden did to expand. Instead, what they've done is tried to extend their influence by promotion of ideas that can be used by everybody. So, what they created is the Betty Ford Institute to develop ideas that can grow everywhere and I think that's a brilliant move and that's very different from Hazelden.

Smith: Two quick things. In the White House, for lack of a better word, were there rumors, was there talk about her 'problem'?

DuPont: No. Well, maybe a little, but not much and it wasn't anything that I saw. I want to say one other thing about the Ford presidency since I'm worried we're coming to an end here. While I was serving in the White House, Congress refused the money to continue the war in Vietnam. So, Ford had all the White House appointees in the East Room for a meeting in which he spoke and Kissinger spoke about that. So, there must have been about 200 White House appointees and I was there at that meeting in this room. Ford introduced Kissinger. He got up and Kissinger said, "This is the darkest day in American history and what's ahead of us is disaster because of what Congress has done. They have undermined the presidency. They have undermined a ten year effort in this war. It is awful." And I was shaking my head and thinking, "Who is this guy? What is he saying? Either he's nuts or there's something terrible is going on in this country." I've never heard anybody give a speech like that. Now, that was never in the press that I remember. But, boy, it was unvarnished what he was saying at that point. And Ford introduced him, "This is my guy" at that thing. It was a stunning moment to me.

Smith: But, about the same time, remember, there was a big controversy within the administration. Ford goes to Tulane and gives the speech that Kissinger didn't want him to give in which he said, basically, the war is over as far as the United States is concerned.

DuPont: And let's move on.

Smith: Yeah.

DuPont: Which is what he did with the Nixon presidency. And I think that he put that behind him by pardoning Nixon. Otherwise, it would've gone on. And I think that was just the same way. That was the right thing to do. That's what Jerry Ford was.

Smith: Were you surprised when the pardon occurred?

DuPont: No, I think that was wonderful. I had no hesitancy about that at all. Just the idea of stringing Nixon up at that point would do no good and would set a precedent that would be horrible. Whatever Nixon did, he was doing it in his view in the public interest. I really think so. And that's true of Bud Krogh, too. Somebody said he didn't pay a high enough price. Please. He was the only president to resign. That's not a high enough price? I think that's plenty high.

Smith: How would you characterize Betty Ford's historical contributions? How should she be remembered?

DuPont: As a saint and a hero. She gave a face to addiction of dignity, of class, but also of compassion, of intelligence. I mean, it was a face that no one else had ever done or has done so well since. All the celebrities in the world don't do what she did. And her contribution with the Betty Ford Center also is just remarkable. It's a great gift that has been a gift to lots of patients, lots of families, but to the whole country. It's an inspiration to our field.

Smith: It's been suggested that she was equally important, maybe more important, gave a face to recovery.

DuPont: Well, that's what I meant. That's true. She didn't give a face to the fact that continuing to use drugs was a good thing. She gave a face to the fact that recovery is not only possible, but is achievable for everyone who follows the program. He stopped drinking and when I was with him the question was what did he think about that and what he said was he didn't want to drink anymore. She wanted him to go ahead and drink and he told me, "I don't want to drink. I'm not doing this for her. I really just don't want to drink." And I think that that's right because of what he'd seen it do. He didn't want

to do that. And I think his stopping drinking also was a statement that was pretty powerful and, I thought, very laudable.

## INDEX

### B

Betty Ford Center, 21–22

### D

Drugs, war on, 1–16

### F

Ford, Betty

addictions, 22

legacy, 23

Ford, Gerald R.

clumsy, perception as, 17–18

first acquaintance with, 1

intelligence, 16–17

marijuana, decriminalization, 13

Nixon pardon, 23

transition to White House, 19–20

### K

Krogh, Bud, 8–9

### N

National Institute on Drug Abuse, 9–11