

**Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project**  
**Sheila Weidenfeld**  
**Interviewed by**  
**Richard Norton Smith**  
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Smith: The death of Jerry terHorst brings up a question. There are a number of people who believe that while the pardon was a factor in his decision to quit when he did, it was not the only factor. There are those who claim that he felt overwhelmed by the job, that it was just not really what he expected. Do you have any sense of that?

Weidenfeld: Well, I had him on a TV show right after that. I wasn't in the White House yet. I remember, at the time that those of us who lived through this era, those of us who were doing TV at the time - I was a television producer of a daily television show - were absolutely thrilled that the Fords had come in because they seemed like such a calming, compassionate couple that could humanize the presidency.

Smith: And they weren't the Nixons?

Weidenfeld: And they weren't the Nixons. It was a sad time. It was a time when there was no faith in government. There was no faith in politicians. And while there was a big debate going on about the pardon - and many hoped that perhaps Nixon wouldn't be pardoned - we didn't know what the consequences of that would be. But Jerry terHorst - I have to disagree with that premise, because he really was a man of principle. That he wasn't told was the reason he quit. And I can understand that as a press secretary . There are things about Betty Ford that I knew that I would never have talked about, and in fact, never talked about until she actually went public about them. I thought at the time there were other things that were much more meaningful. But that, of course, is a different story. He felt that he should have been told. That he wasn't told was the reason, and I have to go by that because he was just so adamant about it. He was so principled about it and regretted having to resign because he would have loved to have stayed on.

Smith: Okay. That's exactly what we were after.

Weidenfeld: And especially when he was watching how the White House press was dealt with after he left. So yes, he would have loved to have continued.

Smith: I take it Ron Nessen was a somewhat controversial figure?

Weidenfeld: I was at NBC then and I can't say I knew Ron...Should we get into Ron and the West Wing and the East Wing and the chauvinism now?

Smith: Sure.

Weidenfeld: In terms of Ron, there were just so many stories about Ron and me I don't know who was coaching him but as far as he was concerned the East Wing was irrelevant. But then the whole West Wing thought the East Wing was irrelevant and that was the mentality at that time. The White House was so traditionally based. The West Wing wanted the First Lady to be quiet, not to make waves, to go to tea parties, to be seen and not heard. I tried to get Pat Nixon on the air numerous times, and I thought, "Well, you can be helpful. You will say the right things." Not that that would have saved him. I couldn't get any family member.

Smith: They wouldn't go on?

Weidenfeld: They wouldn't let them go on TV. Pat Nixon was kept behind the scenes. As a child I had known her because my father had been in Eisenhower's administration. She was a lovely woman, but the public knew nothing about her.

Smith: Shy?

Weidenfeld: She was a nice woman who had personality. She was a traditional wife. She listened to her husband. She had worked before she had met him. I believe she was a schoolteacher.

Smith: Right. She had a rough life.

Weidenfeld: She had a rough life.

Smith: She had a rough life; she had a lot of character, and I always thought that they served their own interests badly. I mean, to this day there are a lot of things

that she accomplished that no one knows anything about. She started the tours for blind visitors to the White House; lighting the White House at night so people could enjoy the house; she actually did more rooms in terms of the restoration...

Weidenfeld: And then Betty Ford undid some of that restoration. As all new First Ladies do. To make it their style, their place.

Smith: But the notion of the "Plastic Pat" caricature – we just had an opportunity to talk to Lucy Winchester, which confirmed the suspicion that there was a lot more there. A real sense of humor, which the public didn't see.

Weidenfeld: Well, it's the job of the press secretary to convey that – the style and the interests of the person who is there. But the challenge is how to do it when everybody wants something...

Smith: You just wonder – because one senses it's not just that she hated politics, but she hated the humiliations that they had been subjected to, that she in some ways never got over. The Fund Crisis and the Checkers speech, sitting there on national TV while he detailed how little money they had, and all of that. And then the '60 campaign – once that was over, it's like finally we can have a life. And then in '68 it all goes down the drain and you just sense that she brought a lot of old unpleasant memories and resentments, perhaps, at a time when most people would think you'd be lording it over everybody and enjoying life in the White House.

Weidenfeld: I don't disagree with that. But I would submit that it was more the mentality of the West Wing that had no understanding of a First Lady and didn't dare take a chance on her. So what you had was somebody who did traditional kinds of things which had to do, for example, with the White House, handicapped children and the like.

Smith: She wasn't a political partner.

Weidenfeld: She couldn't be. She wasn't allowed to be. She wasn't allowed to express an opinion. If she had been groomed, or prompted, then I think she might have had a different public personae. If she had married somebody else who made

her feel more secure in herself, she might have had a happier life. I'm sure she was also afraid to say anything – afraid of what the outcome would be. Would she say something wrong? Would this effect something? Would they scream and yell? She had no support whatsoever. And that was the whole reason I decided to take the job.—to give some meaning to the position.

I didn't know Betty Ford. And I'm going to probably say a few things that I never would have talked about – and I didn't – until she made them public. I had been at NBC and she had done a Heart Association PSA (Public Service Announcement) when he was vice president. Everybody there couldn't get over what was going on with her because she seemed really out of sorts. She was slurring her words and seemed very anxious. And that was the gossip going around the station. I thought it was probably just stage fright. Here was a woman who was thrust into that position who had never done any of this before. She had had a career before she married. That was then.

It never occurred to me in my wildest imagination that I'd end up as a press secretary to Betty Ford. I had one of the very few TV shows in Washington. Frequent guests were White House correspondents Bonnie Angelo and Clare Crawford. Clare helped start *People* magazine and Bonnie was bureau chief for *Time* magazine. Both asked if I might be interested in doing the job of press secretary. At first I said no. I mentioned it to my folks, who said I had to be crazy; that I should at least look into it because it would be like touching history. So Bonnie and Clare called the person who was in charge of getting a press secretary at that time. I got a call the next day I decided while there was no way I would get it, at least I would touch history. I didn't know what a press secretary did. I knew Lady Bird had done a good job with beautification but it was during Vietnam and I thought she should have expressed some opinion on that. At any rate, I drove to their Virginia home and we talked.... surrounded by all the packing boxes.

Smith: Oh, the house in Alexandria.

Weidenfeld: It was fun to go out there and see exactly what was going on. It was the day after the evening of the first State Dinner with Hussein. Susan was in the kitchen and still wearing whatever she had worn that night to bed, reading the

reviews of the dinner. I waited for Betty Ford who then came down in her housedress and we talked. There was just a lot of small talk and then finally I said to her, "What do you expect me to do?" And she said, "Well, how should I know? I don't know what I'm supposed to do." And then I thought I don't know if this is really good for me. I don't know about clothes that much – I'm not sure that I can...

Smith: Did she talk about her interests?

Weidenfeld: No, we just talked about the evening before, her children, her having gone to the dinner, what it was like. Just warming up to each other. And I spent several hours there. But I really didn't know what to say about a press secretary or expectations for a First Lady. I just knew that I hoped that it would be more than the description of dresses, tea parties or those kinds of interests that Pat Nixon had. Because here's a position - although the Constitution never talked about a First Lady – that is a powerful position. She has all this press, or rather the press is there to take advantage of.

Smith: Right. It can be a powerful position.

Weidenfeld: She can be useful to society, and if there was ever a time that we could use a role model, and somebody to set a mood for the country, it was now. I don't know how old you were during that period and how involved you were...

Smith: I was actually an intern in the Ford White House the summer of '75 – right after graduation from college.

Weidenfeld: You never came over to the East side.

Smith: That's so.

Weidenfeld: There you go. This long red carpet that separated both sides, right? But at any rate, on my way back I started to think – I hadn't told Betty Ford I would like the job and she hadn't told me she would like me to be there – but I started to think about the possibility of how she could be a great First Lady.

Smith: What was it about her that you saw as potential?

- Weidenfeld: She had a sense of humor. She told me frankly that you can't teach an old dog new tricks. I love that. There was good press about the way they related to each other....
- Smith: That was a real love affair.
- Weidenfeld: Yes, but it was hard on her as a wife, because he was never home. So she did suffer the consequences of his not being home.
- Smith: Yeah. Do you think he felt guilt in later years?
- Weidenfeld: No, I think that may have been afterwards, because I'm not so sure that he was really aware of that. He knew she had osteoarthritis, he knew she was in pain, he knew she had to take pills, the Valium. It was very hard for her to be alone. She really loved the family unit.
- Smith: And at that juncture where the kids are kind of off discovering themselves, and he's away, so she really is alone.
- Weidenfeld: I could relate to her because I'm one of four. My mother is in the same age bracket. She was a Radcliffe graduate, very bright, a colleague of my father's, and very helpful to him - but there was frustration. She was a housewife. And this was the mold.
- Smith: Who had been a Martha Graham dancer.
- Weidenfeld: Yes, and she also had worked in marketing and clothes. She had been around; she was an independent thinker; and she became a mother - but she was basically, especially for a few of those years, totally alone - which wasn't easy. And it had its consequences.
- Smith: But isn't it interesting that in so many ways, she became representative of millions of women who may not have political husbands, but...
- Weidenfeld: I believe that. There were pins that said, "Run Betty for President," because of her candor. She was always supportive, by the way. Always a great sense of humor, lots of candor, and fun.

Smith: The first time her name ever hit the *Washington Post* was in 1957, and it was some really condescending piece about her taste for quiet hats and slightly more talkative dresses. And that was it. And I'm sure that there was an inclination on the part of lots of people – just as they pigeonhole a president – to see this Cub Scout Den mother, Sunday school teacher from Grand Rapids, and pre-label her. Which is why, when she did open up and started expressing her opinion...

Weidenfeld: Well, wait a second – first of all, she transformed her tragedy into a public service; so you have to remember that that was quite something.

Smith: That was a defining moment for most people.

Weidenfeld: At that time cancer wasn't even mentioned in obits. People were terrified of it. You couldn't say the word out loud. That she did that publicly was pretty amazing.

Smith: Was there ever any doubt that it would be otherwise? In terms of handling the press...

Weidenfeld: There might have been doubt if somebody else had been there; if Pat Nixon had been there.

Smith: Really?

Weidenfeld: Absolutely. She did it on purpose. As a result she helped a lot of people, including Happy Rockefeller. Including – well, unfortunately she's passed on – but the person who was the producer of *Face the Nation* – Joan Barone. Joan told me she never would have discovered it and may not have had as long a life, had it not been for Betty Ford revealing hers.

Smith: Really?

Weidenfeld: There were so many people who told us that. The mail was extraordinary. She had an amazing effect. And when you ask would somebody else have done it? It was not talked about. You didn't talk about cancer.

Smith: It is hard for us today to put our heads in a culture that, as you said, literally swept this under the rug.

Weidenfeld: Yes. Look, that's the way it was with AIDS for a while, too. They always called it something else. But also, we knew she was divorced – Whoa! First Lady, divorced? She was divorced, she had worked, she had seen a psychiatrist. But also she always was protective of her kids. Whether or not some of the stories that came out about them were true, we'd disagree on how they should be handled. She'd want to go back and deny it. And I'd say, "Let it die. Just let it die, otherwise, you're going to make a story out of it." And that happened on numerous occasions because each of the kids got press that was wrong. I'd try to figure out how to tell the reporter to forget it. "This is a non-story," because of x, y and z. But it depended on the story as to how it might be handled.

Smith: I'll tell you a story that Jack Marsh told us that never got into the press. You can imagine what it would have been. When [Ford] decided two weeks into the presidency to go out to Chicago and talk to the VFW about the amnesty program – anyone else would have put out a press release on Friday afternoon and gone to Camp David – but Ford, being Ford, decides to announce it to the VFW. As he said beforehand, "At least I don't have worry about being interrupted by applause." Anyway, the day before he goes, Jack Marsh comes in and said, "I've got some bad news for you." And he looked up and said, "What's that?" And it turns out, Steve, on his eighteenth birthday never registered for the draft.

Weidenfeld: Ah, I didn't know that.

Smith: Yeah, no one does. But, before the day was over, they had it taken care of and no one ever knew. But you can imagine in that climate, it would have been a problem.

Weidenfeld: Definitely would have been a problem.

Smith: I want to zero in a little bit more about the cancer operation. What was it that prompted her to have the exam in the first place?

Weidenfeld: Nancy Howe. My understanding was Nancy Howe, who was there, who was getting an exam, too, said, "Come along with me."

Smith: Okay.

Weidenfeld: Is Nancy Howe still around, by the way?

Smith: She is, and she's not well.

Weidenfeld: Oh, she's not?

Smith: She's not well.

Weidenfeld: How is that? What is going on with her?

Erik: Cancer. She's been going through chemo for a year.

Weidenfeld: Oh really?

Smith: Because clearly that is a delicate relationship. I gather a closeness, almost a dependency some people thought.

Weidenfeld: She and Betty Ford – it was total dependency. And she was always there.

Smith: Was it just because she's in this totally new, terrifying climate, and one person, for whatever reason, provides her the support?

Weidenfeld: Nancy came in at the very beginning. She was the one who answered the door when I went out to the Virginia – Alexandria White House. She was always there to take care of any need, anything Mrs. Ford wanted, a cup of tea, a haircut, a this, a that. Nancy assumed the position of palace guard. And so she made it very difficult for many of us to get in. I didn't want to take much of Betty Ford's time, but I was dealing with the press and the only way the public knows anybody, is through the press. Not that I wanted to tell everybody everything, but I had to deal with the press and do what was best for Betty Ford. Do you want the press to be angry because you're not getting an answer over some silly little thing, because you can't get through? There was a lot of frustration for me because Nancy acted as chief of staff and palace guard. It was very hard for me but it was hard for everybody.

Smith: He obviously had years and years of dealing with the press. People commented on the fact that of recent presidents, he seemed to be the most comfortable with reporters. It was not an accident that a journalist was among

the eulogists at the funeral. But I'm wondering: did she have an overall attitude toward the press? Not necessarily hostility or even a suspicions, but maybe a caution?

Weidenfeld: I've got to answer that in two ways: one is that there were lots of journalists, especially the women journalists. She really liked them.

Smith: Really?

Weidenfeld: She really liked them. But she was very fragile. And her condition was often unpredictable because she had to recuperate from the cancer surgery – the mastectomy. She also had osteoarthritis, and I never knew exactly how I would find her if I scheduled something in advance. And again, I didn't know if what I had heard before, due to popping pills and having a drink resulted in slurred speech or just stage fright. But there were enough occasions – and since it was very hard to get to see her when Nancy was there (which was often) - there was no way I would know if she were just protecting her. I believed as press secretary and somebody who had come out of the media, that quality, not quantity was what was important. I also believed that she didn't always have to talk to the press. I could give them an answer, especially because you never knew if it were going to be a good day or a bad day. I had to be selective. She didn't need to give a lot of speeches everywhere. There were things she could do from her residence like the phones calls she made regarding the ERA legislation. What I had wanted to say earlier is that the First Lady can really have an important impact – I firmly believe this.

Smith: Sure.

Weidenfeld: The First Lady has that ability to play a big role in terms of not only helping her husband, but setting the mood and tone of the country by what she does and how she does it. I'll throw out a few examples: take the ERA. We never said anything to the press about the fact that she was trying to persuade or lobby legislators to amend the Constitution. But she called state legislators, she called Barry Goldwater, she called various other people to try to sway them. Unfortunately, it lost in the end. This was something, by the way, that

Ford didn't agree with necessarily. But she did ERA from her bedroom or the living room by making phone calls when she was up to it. I always believed it would come back and the press would hear about it. They might holler and scream, but it looked like it was something she did out of sincerity, which she did; she wanted to do it. So that was one thing.

Regarding Betty Ford economizing, I believe you show by example, which is what we did. I think it's great that Michelle Obama is also doing it as well by showing us by example what her family eats. I'd love to get into my head/heart theory, how I finally decided how we delineate turf, because the West Wing gave us no turf at all. We had to delineate it, and I did. As I saw it, we were the heart, they were the head; they were responsible for policy, we interpreted it by daily living, by example.

The citizens band radio – I have to thank my husband for that. I'm really jumping all over the place, so excuse me.

Smith: Describe it again. For people who weren't around in the '70s, what all that was.

Weidenfeld: That was about talking to truckers. Truckers were the first to have this little gadget in their truck to talk to other truckers. There was a whole lingo for it. Betty Ford never quite got it and it was very cute. Her handle [name] was First Momma. I have to thank my husband for bringing that in. A client of his had given us one and we gave it to her. She really loved it, and she was good at it. She had trouble with the lingo and her Secret Service would try to help her out. It got very positive press and showed that she wanted to be with the people, with the citizens.

You ask me questions. Various things are coming to mind as we were talking.

Smith: This is great. Did you have a sense of what her politics were?

Weidenfeld: Well, I had always thought she was fairly liberal, but I really didn't have a sense of her politics.

Smith: More liberal than him?

Weidenfeld: Yes, I would have thought so. Perhaps I should get to the *Sixty Minutes* interview. *Sixty Minutes* was the first big interview that she did, and that was in August, 1975 – she had been there since '74.

Smith: That was the first interview.

Weidenfeld: She was not ready until then; then all of a sudden, she just seemed ready.

Smith: Had she put it off?

Weidenfeld: We'd done the ERA. But she would still say, "I don't want everybody just to look at my breasts." She felt all that was going for her was her cancer and her mastectomy; so it used to really bother her that she felt that that's what she stood for.

Smith: That was her initial reaction?

Weidenfeld: She was pleased with what happened in terms of helping people saving lives. Save one life and that's important. She saved many. And as I mentioned earlier, she took cancer out of the closet.

Smith: Right. But that co-existed with a very kind of personal...?

Weidenfeld: Then she had to do something for society. She was in the position to do it. So the ERA was excellent. The economizing was important, as I said; also everything American, whether it be her dress or state dinner menu. As I said earlier, she loved clothes. But I knew nothing about clothes; I would feel the material and ask, "What is this you are wearing, Mrs. Ford?"

By the way, I always called her Mrs. Ford. She was conflicted – there was Betty Ford versus Mrs. Gerald Ford. She was so much more at ease as Betty Ford. When the campaign got started, those in charge didn't want to hear from her. When they found out how popular she was, they tried to use her for everything, which was not good for her. We'll get to that when you are ready for it. I threw that out in case we forget.

Smith: Had *Sixty Minutes* been after you for a while?

Weidenfeld: *Sixty Minutes* called at a time when I thought we could do this. I thought, she is ready. In fact, that's the only show I ever wanted her on. The first person who asked me for an interview was Barbara Walters. Barbara called herself. I'd literally walked into the office for the first time and she was on the phone. It was the first phone call I ever got in the White House. And I always thought she is terrific - really something. She makes her own phone calls. But I had to push her off because Betty Ford wasn't ready for that. What was she going to talk about?

Smith: Was this around the time of the breast cancer?

Weidenfeld: This was right after. I came in the very beginning of October. I was told the day before she went in for the mastectomy by David Kennerly who called to say I had the job. But he said, "You can't mention anything. She's going into the hospital." And he wouldn't tell me why. And then the next day I found out. Shortly after I started at the White House. But *Sixty Minutes* was the show I wanted her to be on. I loved Don Hewitt. He's always been my ideal of a great producer. I loved the show and I thought she could handle it. They loved her, too. But to answer your question, they asked her opinions on all sorts of things. Don sent me the transcript before the show was aired and the only thing I didn't like and asked, "Could you please take it out?" was when she said she *wasn't* for gun control. Don thought I must be crazy because I didn't say anything about the affair - when Morley Safer had asked her if her daughter had an affair, would she be surprised? She said no, she wouldn't be.

Smith: Was there a right of, or were doing you a courtesy in sharing the transcript with you?

Weidenfeld: I had asked for it and they gave it to me. It was not a problem. I think he was so pleased that all I mentioned was the gun control.

Smith: Well, I if were him I would have been, too.

Weidenfeld: But I liked her answer, by the way. I loved it. And it shocked me that it was misinterpreted. I shared the transcript with everybody on the plane going out to Vail, Colorado.

Smith: Before the program aired?

Weidenfeld: They knew nothing about our doing the show. It got to the point where I didn't share much with the West Wing.

Smith: Okay.

Weidenfeld: Because. if I shared it, they would prevent us from doing it.

Smith: Really?

Weidenfeld: Little things like going to the hospital for sick children, that was fine. They didn't care about those things. But not so with things that could make an impact, that were very positive, that I felt fairly strongly about. She signed a picture to me which I haven't looked at in a long time, but it said something like "To my ever loving press secretary who gets me in and out of trouble." I think controversy sometimes clears the air, and that it's not a bad thing. But I wasn't ready for this one. I wasn't ready for the reaction that ensued.

Smith: I just want to nail it down: did she see the transcript?

Weidenfeld: I don't know if she saw it or not. I'm sure I gave it to her; I gave it to everyone, but it doesn't mean that she would have read it.

Smith: Really?

Weidenfeld: Yes.

Smith: I guess, if I had waited this long to do something and I knew this was a big deal, and I was at all awkward or uncomfortable or whatever, and then I had an opportunity to shape the result, I would have jumped at that.

Weidenfeld: I had to put my faith in them. It was the only thing she had done. She really was fine about doing it. Everybody was all set.

Smith: When it was done, she felt it had gone...

Weidenfeld: But she cancelled the show that morning; she said she wasn't doing it. They were set; the lights were ready; the technicians were there; Don Hewitt was there, Morley Safer, and I got a call in my office while they were sitting with

me saying, she's not doing the program. She was hysterically crying. And I, to this day, don't know why and I never asked her. I went upstairs and she wasn't dressed. She was having her hair done, and she said, "I'm not doing it. I'm not doing it." And I left saying, "Alright," and I gave her every reason why she should, and I really don't know what was going on. I had tried everything I could in telling how wonderful this would be and that she was all ready. Then I had just started to leave the room. It was just moments after this very long period of saying, "But they're here. We're supposed to be taping it this morning. They got here at six this morning, all the vans, all the technicians, all the trucks." I didn't know what I was going to tell Don Hewitt, my idol. Anyway, she then said, "Okay, I'm going to do it." And she did it and she was great. And we went up to the sunroom...

Smith: Solarium.

Weidenfeld: Solarium, thank you very much. She was great. She was upbeat. Who would have ever, ever known three hours before, not only was she a wreck, but I was.

Smith: And I assume they never caught on.

Weidenfeld: For a year and a half, we hadn't done any press. I had held everybody off from Barbara Walters to both Helen Thomas and Fran Lewine, who were both very difficult people because they represented opposing wire services: UPI and AP and were always vying with each other. Nobody will ever understand the tensions in the press when it came to getting a story out after Watergate, when nobody got anything. No matter what I said, reporters (especially Fran and Helen) would often challenge it.

Smith: It's fascinating because I wonder if that's not a metaphor. You're right, no one seeing that would have ever guessed that she was anything other than totally comfortable and relaxed and so on. But I only learned long afterward, and it came as a surprise to me. When she would go on stage, she was wonderful. But she really had stage fright. It was more than butterflies.

Weidenfeld: As a talk show producer, I was asked to set up a program on public speaking and dealing with the media for the State Department in the early '70s when I

was at NBC for the top ambassadors and senior officials. Kissinger was even a student. It was a three-prong program. One was when a mike is shoved in front of you, how to handle it; another a la *Meet the Press* with three journalists who are querying you; the third speeches. I learned a technique from Dorothy Sarnoff, who I had on lots of shows when I had lived in New York and was with NBC then and Metromedia, which I used with Betty Ford.

So what I gave her was an approach to what I thought was really good in terms of not reading a speech, but delivering a speech and being confident in doing so. We'd go over talking points ahead of time. This was how I dealt with what I believed was her stage fright. But I know there was another component. I know it, because this was beyond stage fright. When she cancelled something reporters would say, "It's her cancer coming back." They always thought it was her cancer. If she slurred a word, it was her cancer. Well, it was osteoporosis, it was whatever. She had been accustomed to Valium, she had been accustomed to various things like that, and it is possible that it was some of those things that undermined her confidence and brought her down. She had once said something to me on a trip on the campaign trail when she was being over-used and abused by the West Wing when they discovered her talent. She actually broke down and started to cry. I've never talked about this.

Smith: No, this is great. And by the way, you'll get a copy of the transcript and you'll have an opportunity to...

Weidenfeld: Do I get a copy of the video?

Smith: We can give you a copy of it, too.

Weidenfeld: Thank you. But I wanted to know what was going on, why was she so down? She said, "If you only knew." And all of these years later, I wonder, if I only knew – what was it? I wanted to know because if she got nervous, I was more nervous for her. But she wouldn't tell me more.

Smith: Of course.

Weidenfeld: I wanted her to perform well. I knew how wonderful she is and was, and she had this sense of humor. So I wanted to ground her and believe I did a good job at it. Some people accuse me of saying I produced her. No, I didn't produce her – she is who she is. My challenge was how do you translate her and put her in an environment that made sense for her, where she can be comfortable and herself.

Smith: Legend has it, and you can tell me if it's true, that the initial reaction to the *Sixty Minutes* interview in the West Wing bordered on horror.

Weidenfeld: Bordered on horror? It didn't border on anything, other than they were horrified. Nobody spoke to me the entire time I was out there. Ron wouldn't talk to me. It was my anniversary – so my husband came out, and thank God he comforted me. Because I didn't want to do her in. If anything, I thought this was the most wonderful thing. I was so excited about it before it happened.

Smith: What was her reaction?

Weidenfeld: Well, she watched it with Donald Rumsfeld and her husband. The President said it was fine and playfully threw a pillow at her. That was his reaction. Rumsfeld said he lost twenty or thirty million votes. He was really angry. But the next day was the tough day, because I went to bed after watching the show thinking, isn't this wonderful? Isn't this terrific? I'm so happy, what a nice anniversary present for Edward and me.

Smith: You were vindicated.

Weidenfeld: We had the worst trip in our life. Nobody was talking to me and I was afraid to go near the press. I didn't know what to say. What Mrs. Ford said was totally, totally misinterpreted. I thought it was a wonderful thing for families to understand that you should talk to your kids. You should be honest. It was all hypothetical. She was wonderful after everybody left. We worked on a letter. I'm sure you've talked to Billy Zeoli, who I haven't seen in a thousand years.

Smith: Not yet; he's on the short list that we're trying to get to.

Weidenfeld: He's on the short list? Well, he was a character, and they did have a number of characters around them. But Billy was a good person. I always worried about what he might say that could backfire, the same way that this thing backfired on me. So why should I have been worried? But at any rate, I thought the only thing we can do is to write what I called the perfect letter. And Edward and I started it and then I gave it to her. I'd worked on that the entire trip. Really, I thought, somebody could call me, somebody could yell at me, do something, just don't ignore me. I don't want to hear from everybody how awful this is. Ron was difficult. Ron sent me an apology note years later. Ron was always difficult. He refused all requests to help get my office in tune with the West Wing – so we could be supportive. Aren't we there to be helpful, to be helpful to the country? Can't a wife be an attribute? Yes, she should be an attribute, not a neutral person sitting there.

He was so accusatory. We had such a small staff, because we came out of the Nixon White House. They didn't want press, so I had really no staff, and yet she had to make speeches. She had to. I couldn't do all of that – there were so many things going on. She was in demand. Whether she did things or not, I still had to have more than one aide.

Smith: The irony of this is that there's no shortage of people who believe that Ron Nessen, by going on *Saturday Night Live*, ill-served the President's interests.

Weidenfeld: I told him not to. Yup. I told him absolutely not to, I didn't think it served the President's interests then, and I don't think so now. When we talked about sense of humor, let us put it in a context. Let's see what the consequences may be. And there were just no good consequences for that as far as I was concerned. There were other ways to show Ford affable, and that, to me, was just ridiculous. I tried, but Ron didn't listen to me on that one, either. But we were talking about the *Sixty Minutes*, and there was so much to the *Sixty Minutes* because that really did have the impact that it should have had.

Smith: Was it rough on Susan?

Weidenfeld: Was it hard on Susan? Well, the most wonderful thing of all was that years later, when I asked Susan about it she didn't even know at that time what an

affair was. It had been so twisted. It was a big learning experience for me. I was aware how you could take something and twist it and turn it and make it into something else.

Smith: But I sense that it was also a learning experience for the West Wing in the sense that it marked – everyone fights the last war.

Weidenfeld: Well, can we just get to the end of this experience?

Smith: Yeah, sure.

Weidenfeld: I wrote the letter, what I always called the perfect letter because if people would understand that it was hypothetical, people would understand that Susan didn't have an affair, that Mrs. Ford was being realistic, that these things do happen, that conversation with children should be open. I know Billy added a few things that I thought made the letter. That's when she felt really good about it, and we got the letter right off. I didn't tell anybody in the press about it. I think action speaks louder than words – and someone who received the letter would come forward and the misunderstandings would finally be corrected.

We sent the letter out. At the same time we had an overwhelming number of negative letters. I thought that by keeping journalists up to date and the public up to date on how many negatives and positives were coming in it would generate positive letters. And not only that, somebody would get this wonderful, perfect, letter, and talk about it. And by God, it happened from a woman in Texas. And I'll never forget her name, and I don't even know her. Her name is Lorena Chevalier. Because that's what changed everything. She got the letter, she went to Associated Press. Associated Press printed it, everybody talked about it. And we were inundated with positive letters. And that really changed everything.

Smith: That's a perfect lead in because my sense is that you just had a bunch of middle-aged or older, white men, accustomed to their own kind of tunnel vision about society and culture and gender roles. "This is the way it's been, and presumably that means that this is the way it is and will always be." They certainly did not anticipate the changes that were beneath the surface, and in

many ways, she, maybe unknowingly, sort of opened the door for a lot of those changes to come...

Weidenfeld: Well, let me put it differently. Because I was her press secretary and that's how people do know her. How do you know anybody? And how do you know that you really know them? Hilary Clinton – everybody – even Betty Ford said, "They don't know the real me." Nobody knows the real you. They know you as you are publicly presented. And sometimes it's one little thing that symbolizes your whole life which might be totally irrelevant to your life.

So, no, I would say that I knew that we had to use this position. I couldn't have taken the job if I didn't believe that. On my way home from my one time with Mrs. Ford I kept thinking, "what can be done that's beyond the traditional women's things" I'm not saying that volunteerism is not important - it should be done, and it's good when it's done. But there has got to be something more that talks to people, that deals with their values, that deals with what's going on. I was out of TV. I was one of the first women producers. I knew the fights that were going on.

I also was quite aware of the fact that the role of women was changing. They didn't know that at the White House. Whoever the First Lady is, you're going to have controversy. Expectations can be so polar opposite - no matter what it is, you're not going to make everybody happy. You can never make everybody happy. For the West Wing, the First Lady position was always fairly traditional. The smiling wife at the podium, beaming at the comments of her man. We've had that since Betty Ford. But she walked that fine line.

I remember asking Mrs. Ford after we'd finished the ERA legislation, that is trying to amend the Constitution: "What do you consider a liberated woman?" And I might be paraphrasing a little bit, but she said, "I would consider a liberated woman any woman who feels confident in herself and happy in what she is doing. It's a general feeling of positiveness and being able to live with yourself" She really walked this line where she loved being a mother, she loved being a wife, But she also was all for the woman who wanted to work.

Smith: She's a transitional figure in a lot of ways.

Weidenfeld: And we still need that transitional figure because that debate has ensued.

Smith: But, she literally has a foot in both camps. On the one hand, there's a traditionalist figure there.

Weidenfeld: She absolutely was a wife of the Fifties.

Smith: And yet there is also a woman who is comfortable with this emerging – as undefined in some ways, and to some people, frightening – sense of potential change. Comfortable with the prospect of change.

Weidenfeld: Yes.

Smith: Which, for a lot of people is difficult.

Weidenfeld: And still is.

Smith: True.

Weidenfeld: And I'm not saying that that mentality doesn't still rear its ugly head. Even at the White House today I think that that's the way the East Wing-West Wing define turf. My heart/head theory did that for me – which I presented in a memo to Rumsfeld, who paid no attention to it whatsoever.

Smith: One of the themes between the White House wings under Rumsfeld, for example...

Weidenfeld: He didn't think we were capable of doing anything. So everything we did pretty much went over his head, unless he heard we were doing something. And he'd call on the phone on those occasion and scream.

Smith: Would he really?

Weidenfeld: And he'd tell me what I had to say and that I had to follow it.

Smith: Was there a sense, with ERA evolving into a controversy, and the looming Reagan challenge - did people connect these and say, "Oh my God, she's lost us votes at a time when we're worried about Reagan."

Weidenfeld: I told you nobody knew about it. These were phone calls. Then they'd get out. And I did go to the President's lawyer Phil Buchen and find out if it was okay.

While it was a national amendment, it was an amendment to the Constitution, and still a states' issue. So it was okay to get involved. That was as far as I went. I didn't go, "Guess what we're doing!" No, we didn't bring any attention to it. Everything was prepared. She was ready for the conversation with talking points. She had her own style and she was wonderful. I was always there for the phone calls. I was always the scribe. I took notes on every word she ever said while I was present.....on little pieces of paper, a notebook, whatever.

Smith: What did she enjoy about the job? We've heard, for example, that she put a lot of time, a lot of effort into the hostess role, that aspect of the job.

Weidenfeld: She loved that, too.

Smith: She did?

Weidenfeld: Well, she loved to dress. She did love that part; but she also loved I think the various introductions she had, the exposure she had. I think it was a very difficult adjustment, but when she got the adoration, she loved it. Then she started to feel comfortable.

Smith: The performer came out.

Weidenfeld: Yes. The Gridiron is a good example. She was the first First Lady to perform at one. Some people like to say it was Nancy Reagan, but it was Betty Ford.

Smith: What did she do?

Weidenfeld: She danced - it's all in my book. Too bad, I don't think it's at the Library, but if you need a copy, I'll send you one. She rehearsed by dancing down the halls of the White House. She enjoyed it. She loved dancing. A lot of what you learn when you are there is how human this White House is. The tragedies that take place – with the Galubins, for example. There are all sorts of little things where you go, "Gosh, this can't happen at the White House," but this is a very human institution.

- Smith: It's interesting because we've heard from a number of people that he established, and I sensed the family generally, established a more informal, more personal relationship with a lot of the permanent staff.
- Weidenfeld: Ah, yes. The Nixons were very formal with the staff. They didn't acknowledge them. The staff told me how much they loved the Fords - that they would always say good morning, and they would always talk to them. The Fords always treated them like people, not servants, and it made all the difference in the world in terms of their happiness. That was very important for the Fords because that's how they are. They are informal and enjoy people.
- Smith: The story was that she, very early on I think, went to the Usher and said, "Is there something wrong? I say good morning and they don't respond. Is it us, are we doing something wrong?" And he explained that the Nixons had a different climate.
- Weidenfeld: Yes, that's true. I can verify that.
- Smith: You were talking earlier - the family dining room on the second floor that had that Revolutionary War paper that I think Jackie Kennedy...
- Weidenfeld: That Jackie Kennedy put up.
- Smith: What was the story?
- Weidenfeld: Mrs. Ford couldn't stand being in there. She said she didn't want to be sitting in a room that's filled with war pictures. So she said, "I've got to paint it yellow." I think that was it. And she didn't like the room that Pat Nixon did where they greeted people because it was so formal. You know, the one right next to the Treaty Room - the Diplomatic Room.
- Smith: Oh, yeah. The Diplomatic Reception Room.
- Weidenfeld: Not downstairs, upstairs.
- Smith: Upstairs - the oval room.
- Weidenfeld: Yes, there was a name for it.

Smith: It earlier had been a study and it had been lots of things. But it leads out onto the balcony.

Weidenfeld: Pat Nixon came in and she redid it and it was very, very formal. Mrs. Ford could not sit in that room comfortably and enjoy herself with guests. How would she get to know them? So that room she changed as well. She changed a lot on that floor. You know the story about the reaction she got when she said she sleeps with the President? There were people who thought this was horrible. How could she do that? That they have one bedroom, not two. She laughed about that. She thought that was very funny. And it is. It's like pillow talk. I used to say to people, well, what if you went into the White House overnight like Mrs. Ford? Would you not talk to your husband again? The President always puts his own team together; is she not part of this team? Didn't they talk before? Didn't they go over things before? Give an opinion. I don't know if Pat Nixon did with her husband. But that's usually what happens in a marriage.

Smith: We heard about her trying to get a woman on the Supreme Court.

Weidenfeld: Yes, she did. And she lobbied and that was her pillow talk. It didn't happen, but fortunately he chose a really good person. It's a shame that he's on his way out. But we'll at least have somebody else good.

Smith: And she said, at one point, she got a woman in the Cabinet, by which I assume she meant Carla Hills.

Weidenfeld: I guess that must have been Carla Hills.

Smith: Was Ford amiable to that way of thinking?

Weidenfeld: It was hard to tell if he'd act on what she said. He'd sort of smile and appear to take some of those things in. It was like a "Yes, dear"... "of course, dear" reaction.

Smith: What was your sense of the President?

Weidenfeld: My sense was that he was basically a genuinely decent person, easy going and cheerful, who loved his wife and family, was loyal to his friends, and truly enjoyed the political game.

Smith: Did you ever see his temper?

Weidenfeld: I never saw his temper, but I'm sure he had one. I had heard about it on several occasions, but fortunately never witnessed it - not even when he threw the pillow at her after the "60 Minutes" interview - he laughed. Rumsfeld didn't, but he did.

Smith: Did she have a temper as opposed to temperament, if you know what I mean?

Weidenfeld: I know what you mean. She would tend to be more withdrawn than to lose her temper. I never really saw her angry - no, I never saw that. I almost wish she had, it would have been easier to deal with than with withdrawing. I just want something in my face and I can deal with it.

Smith: You saw much of the kids?

Weidenfeld: It depended on the kids, but I knew them all. Jack was the one who we became most close to. He even worked in Ed's office. Susan was there all the time. Part of the job as press secretary is being a window on the First Family.

Smith: Right.

Weidenfeld: But not the President, as Rumsfeld told me in my little memo to him. When I said we're a window on the First Lady and the family, he said, "And *not* the President." Of course not, I was not going to do anything that was going to be...who knows. But Susan - can you imagine what it's like to grow up under a spotlight? Can you imagine what it's like for the press to ask you if you are a virgin when you are eighteen or nineteen? Or to share your thoughts about marriage when you're seventeen, or if you are getting married, or who is this boy in your life? And then having to talk and sound intelligent.

Smith: But one of the poignant images is when Mrs. Ford had her surgery and Susan stood in for her. The first time she ever wore gloves. There was a diplomatic reception or something.

Weidenfeld: Susan was definitely daddy's girl. She knew she could get anything she wanted from him, and did. As for the other Ford Children, Steven was away for most of his father's presidency. He came in at the very end for campaigning. Jack came back and lived there for a while and wanted to work. He worked out of my husband's office for a while. We tried to find him things to do. He needed to work, wanted it, and then decided to go on the campaign trail. Susan was a teenager. But I do remember reporters asking questions like do you bit your nails? You had to be very careful. Susan had a series of boyfriends and I remember when she said all she wanted to do was be a mother and have seven children.

Smith: After *Sixty Minutes*, and as time went by and there began to be a realization – perhaps to the astonishment of those in the West Wing – that hey, this woman is an asset. While you are worrying about losing 20 million votes, you may not have taken into consideration the country is changing.

Weidenfeld: No, no, no. That's not how they thought.

Smith: They didn't?

Weidenfeld: No. They didn't see that. What they saw was that she'd made three covers over New Year's – *Time* magazine Person of the Year, *People* magazine and one other. She made three covers at one time.

Smith: So they saw her news value.

Weidenfeld: There were pins out saying, "Vote Betty."

Smith: "Betty's Husband for President."

Weidenfeld: "Betty for President." There were very positive stories about her.

Smith: There was no evolution?

Weidenfeld: They saw her usefulness. That's when she became Mrs. Gerald Ford, doing his thing in his way. And it really did her in because she was no longer Betty Ford. If she had just been herself and gone out and not been over used giving messages, recorded messages, going everywhere - she couldn't take it. She's fragile; you know that. You've spent enough time with her. She's no different

today than she was then. Everybody thought how frail she looked at the funeral.

Smith: Campaigning was not her forte.

Weidenfeld: Oh my no. And not only wasn't it her forte - was it in Maine or New Hampshire? Maybe in both she slurred her words. It happened a number of times. She was no longer comfortable in her own skin. It was too much for her and physically difficult. It was physically and mentally bad for her. It was a balancing act to some degree.

Smith: In her zone, she's a superstar. But being asked to do things that didn't come naturally...

Weidenfeld: She was over used and they didn't get that. If she'd been paced... When they left office, I told the people who were handling her that they had to be quite sensitive to her physical - to her and what they had her do. The next thing I knew she was in Russia. I heard when they got back it was embarrassing. But at that point, her drug/alcohol addiction had not been talked about. I wasn't going to talk about anything other than her osteoarthritis.

Smith: Do you think he didn't want to believe what he was seeing?

Weidenfeld: Maybe that's the answer. I just don't think he was aware. Some friends of the kids were aware she had a problem before he became vice president and was Minority Leader.

Smith: Right.

Weidenfeld: They were aware of some problems, and surprised at how well she had done once she got there.

Smith: At the end of the campaign they'd caught up, essentially. Did they think, did you think that you were going to win?

Weidenfeld: No. I knew we weren't going to win. I really wanted us to win, but we needed credibility. Why must you stop being president to run for president. If they knew they only had thirty days, or sixty days left, what would be the one thing that they would like to get done? I thought that should be their campaign

strategy.” Also it struck me during the primary that Betty Ford seemed more like someone running for First Lady than someone who was First Lady. The President was no longer president, he was running.

Smith: Were you at the convention?

Weidenfeld: Of course I was, are you kidding?

Smith: And I still remember the images; the dueling entries. How choreographed was that?

Weidenfeld: Well, I wasn't part of the campaign. I think it was probably choreographed by the media as well as the campaign. While there was really not a lot of love lost between Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Reagan, it was really hyped. To my knowledge, it wasn't staged.

Smith: We talked to Stan Anderson, who was the convention manager.

Weidenfeld: Yes, I haven't seen him in years.

Smith: And he told us a story about Cary Grant.

Weidenfeld: Yes, I had to take Cary Grant around.

Smith: Where did that come from? There was Tony Orlando and Dawn, and Cary Grant.

Weidenfeld: We had met him in California, and the only thing I can tell you about Cary Grant - because I was the one who escorted him at the convention and had to ease his nerves. He was a nervous wreck. He didn't know what to do, how he was going to do it in this huge room of people, this stadium of people. And he said, "I just do movies. I can take one take after another. I don't do this kind of thing." He was as nervous as anybody I've ever seen.

Smith: Really?

Weidenfeld: He liked Betty Ford. They had met before, and they clicked.

Smith: Were there other people that maybe we don't know about? Celebrities or entertainers?

Weidenfeld: Vikki Carr. The President liked Vikki Carr.

Smith: That's right.

Weidenfeld: And Betty Ford was jealous, maybe envious, not jealous, would be the word.

Smith: There were entertainers at the State Dinners, and of course, all those Bicentennial dinners.

Weidenfeld: You kidding? She loved Pearl Bailey. We had the best time with Peter Sellers.

Smith: Really?

Weidenfeld: Peter Sellers was in Vail, Colorado after the *Sixty Minutes* interview and after the President had left.

Smith: That seems like an odd mix.

Weidenfeld: It was perfect timing. They just hit it off. We were with David Steinberg, his manager, who still handles Robin Williams and various others. Recently I found out my son Daniel knows his son Mason and that we each had the pictures of ourselves with Mrs. Ford and Peter Sellers on each other's walls, all of us wearing funny hats. She loved to ham it up. It was great. That's when she was in her element. That's when she was comfortable.

Smith: And yet – I guess getting up to give a speech was...

Weidenfeld: She gave some very good speeches. But she had to feel prepared, grounded, confident, and not on medication. If she were really pained, then she might take the medication that Lukash would dole out to her. I had talked with Lukash about giving her valium and other pills. I was really concerned about her popping pills. I almost felt like the child watching the parent. I took that to heart. I wanted her to do well, but when she slurred the words, it was really hard. If she didn't feel prepared, if she didn't have the words, if she didn't feel comfortable she would not do well.

Smith: Jumping ahead – you may take that back. When you did the book, was that a problem? Did that cause problems?

Weidenfeld: The aftermath surprised me. I took steps to confirm Mrs. Ford's approval and feel I was betrayed by a man I thought of as a family friend, Nat Lefkowitz, president of the William Morris Agency, then the most important agency in Hollywood. Because of the friendship, I introduced the Fords to Nat Lefkowitz and the William Morris office and encouraged the Fords to listen to their advice. The Fords agreed to let Norman Brokow of William Morris, represent the family. I wrote about this in my book.

After leaving the White House, Norman Brokow contacted me and suggested and encouraged me to write a book. Initially I declined because I was eager to get back to TV and writing a book was something I would not have considered.

Brokow persisted, and I finally agreed on two conditions – one that Mrs. Ford approve of my doing it and two that he would read the book with a critical eye as agent for the Fords and alert me to anything that might be troubling to them. Owen Laster, who Brokow brought in as literary agent for both Betty Ford and me, promised to read it in installments as I was writing it. With each installment I asked if there were anything that might be troubling to the Fords. Mrs. Ford, who by then was writing her own book, personally gave me her blessing to write the book

Owen was enthusiastic about each installment and when it was finished told me he “loved it” and knew the Fords would, too.... Before the Fords had a chance to read my book, the air was poisoned by misrepresentation of my book. I was even called a traitor and the book was labeled “kiss and tell.” I was shocked that neither Lefkowitz, Brokow nor Laster urged the Fords to read the book before reacting. I was pleased when Shirley Elder, a well-known journalist in Detroit, Michigan (the Ford's home state) headlined her review of the book with “Read it Betty. You'll like it.” For me, the ultimate irony was that the consummate insider, Henry Kissinger, told a group of reporters: “I basically think books like that are a pain in the neck; but when I started reading First Lady's Lady to see if my name was mentioned, I ended up thinking it's outstanding and one of the most perceptive books I had ever read about the White House.”

The whole experience was very difficult for me because I genuinely treasured my relationship with Mrs. Ford and had the greatest respect for President Ford and firmly believe they were the right people at the right time.

Smith: Historically, it's almost as if her life after the White House is more important in terms of the impact that she's had on how real people live real lives. Lots of presidents don't have that.

Weidenfeld: Most presidents don't, and that's a real shame.

Smith: How do you think she should be remembered?

Weidenfeld: It's not just for drug addiction, and it's not just for cancer. I remember her saying, "if you've got a problem, deal with it. Just don't let it be. Deal with it." That's true for all the different areas that she's been in. You say she couldn't have done what she did if she hadn't really been a success in the White House as First Lady. She had a lot of fans. She was very popular. She was candid at a time when her predecessors – there was no such thing as candor. She was compassionate, as was Ford. I don't know how many of the press people you've talked to or covered (that's probably a good thing to do) they loved being with Ford. She really was a strong First Lady, in the sense that she made a name for herself. And I think that that really worked for her when she came out later and did this.

Smith: That's interesting. One other quick thing. We know took him a little bit of time after the election to get over it. He went around in private complaining, "I can't believe I lost to a peanut farmer."

Weidenfeld: Yes.

Smith: It took a little while to bounce back. One senses that while she could hurt for him, that she was in some ways more prepared to get on with the new life.

Weidenfeld: She was always prepared to get on with the new life. She thought they were getting on with a new life before they went into the White House, because he had said, "This is it. We're moving on." And then this all happened.

Smith: This was a detour to a new life.

Weidenfeld: This was an absolute detour. It was totally thrust on her. She was not prepared for it. She didn't expect it. Of course, he didn't either, but it was different. It was an extension of his career and not hers. And she just wanted to get to know her husband again and be with him and enjoy him. And be with the family and all those things that she had looked forward to that she didn't have as the wife of a congressman. So she felt awful that he lost, but she wasn't sorry about herself moving on. So I think that's absolutely accurate.

Smith: And there was never any doubt about their going to California?

Weidenfeld: They thought about Naples. She looked at a few places in Naples, Florida.

Smith: Really?

Weidenfeld: And she looked at a few other places. But I think they decided because of friends. Oh, you asked about the celebrities before – they really liked celebrities. Liza Minnelli and Frank Sinatra. In California there were lots of people. And so that was fun for her.

Smith: And then at the end. At the very end of the administration, you hear the most moving parts of all this are when the First Family says goodbye to the staff – the permanent staff, who become almost family. Was that difficult for them? Saying goodbye, leaving Washington?

Weidenfeld: Of course. Especially for him. Just put yourself in his shoes. It was the end of his career; it was over. He ran hard. He campaigned hard, he really wanted to continue.

Smith: Some say his great frustration was that he felt he had just mastered the job, when he lost it.

Weidenfeld: Yes. Put very well. And she cared more about him than how she felt about leaving and taking care of her own feelings and interests. So it was difficult in that sense, too, as it was for the kids.

Smith: Isn't it interesting: this family that thinks, oh my God, we're going to live in the White House, we're going to live in the goldfish bowl, Susan saying, "I'm not going to give up my jeans." Mrs. Ford saying, "You can't teach an old

dog new tricks.” And it didn’t take very long, once they got there, to discover this is not so bad.

Weidenfeld: It’s a pretty nice life. But you’re also on public display. I remember when she took off to New York to go shopping on Seventh Avenue with Nancy Howe. I got a call from a White House reporter who asked, “What is she doing in New York?” I said, “Mrs. Ford is not in New York. She’s upstairs in her bedroom.” He said, “No, she’s not. She was spotted on Seventh Avenue.” And I said, “All right, let me check.” And lo and behold, she was on Seventh Avenue and had been spotted. She promised me she would never do that again, because I was supposed to know. This is going back to Jerry terHorst. That’s his story, I’ve got mine.

Smith: One of my favorites, I think Penny told the story. This was after they left office. She loved New York. And he liked New York. They would go to the theater and she liked to shop. Penny tells the story that one time she went to Studio 54. Now that’s culture shock. To see Betty Ford in Studio 54...

Weidenfeld: She loved to dance.

Smith: She did, and he did, too, didn’t he?

Weidenfeld: Yes.

Smith: In later years, I’ve often wondered, everyone knew about the ERA and abortion and issues like that. As the Republican Party moved further and further to the right, every four years they would go to the convention and they were all but marooned - this island of moderation. He is the only president to sign a gay rights petition. And the question arises, how much of that was her influence on him? How much of it was that they didn’t change, but the party did? Most people get more conservative as they get older and they seemed, in some ways, the opposite.

Weidenfeld: I don’t know what camp you are out of, but moderate Republicans felt very similar to how they were thinking, so I think the party has moved. To be Nelson Rockefeller, for example.

Smith: Did you have contact with him?

Weidenfeld: Absolutely. My father was very close to Cabot Lodge, and a big supporter of Rockefeller's.

Smith: My first book was about Tom Dewey.

Weidenfeld: We're from Boston and when I think about my father and the Republicans he admired, worked with and respected----like Cabot Lodge, Jake Javits, Edward Brooke \_\_\_\_\_ --- where would they be today? What party they would join. I don't know where you are. I don't know where I am. But I certainly can't relate to anything that's going on in the Republican Party today - that's for sure.

Smith: Did you like Rocky?

Weidenfeld: Oh, of course. He was charming and lovely and very nice though we had no substantive conversations.

Smith: I was going to say, you didn't sense his unhappiness?

Smith: You didn't sense, or pick up, that he was not a happy vice president.

Weidenfeld: He felt he was doing nothing. I would agree with that.

Smith: He went to his grave believing that Rumsfeld did him in.

Weidenfeld: I think a lot of people go to their graves thinking Rumsfeld did them in.

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