

**Gerald R. Ford Oral History Project**  
**Shelli Archibald**  
**Interviewed by**  
**Richard Norton Smith**  
**December 5, 2008**

Smith: How did your paths first cross?

Archibald: I worked at the McCallum and the lady that had the job before me worked there with me for several years and then when she got ready to leave, she asked me if I would be interested in taking the job, so I told her I'd come over and talk to him.

Smith: What was that like, the interview?

Archibald: Oh my God, I was scared to death. I was just a wreck, because, first of all, I got here to the gate and the agent stopped me and wanted to look in my purse. I didn't even fathom the idea of what it was like to have the Secret Service and all of that. I came in and he was so nice. I think the thing, too, was, he always had you just sit there next to the desk instead of across from him which always made it a little more personable, instead of that formal type of thing. I was nervous for the first two weeks, too, that I worked here - to come in here and talk to him by myself. We always had our little routine, around a certain time I'd have all the financial stuff ready and show it to him and [say] "I don't want to go in there by myself!" But, yeah, he was so nice.

Smith: When did you start work?

Archibald: About thirteen years ago. In May, so I only worked with him about a month before they went to Vail for my first summer here.

Smith: You didn't go with them up to Vail?

Archibald: No, never went up there. I went and saw their place. I'd been here a couple of years, and my husband being with the Secret Service, Lee, he was doing one of the trips to take the car, so I rode up with him and got to see their residence up there and stuff. So that was nice.

Smith: What was your daily schedule like?

Archibald: He would come over the same time every day and, mainly, I would just get all of his financial information together. I had a little report. And usually around mid-morning, he would have me come in and we would go over different things and we would interact during the day on different things. If he wanted to purchase securities, he would have me get information from the stock broker and stuff.

Smith: So you say financial information meaning, pertaining basically to personal finance?

Archibald: It was all, yes, personal finances. Totally. I just did that part and still do for Mrs. Ford now. So that's what we would do and I loved working with him that way. I guess we were the same in that he wasn't a procrastinator at all. He would just get things done like that and I loved that. I'd set the checkbook register on his desk because he would go through it every month and go through every check that was written and put his little notes and things. I would set it there and he would be, "Well, I'm pretty busy today. I don't think I'll be able to get back to you on that for a couple of days," and in an hour, it'd be back on my desk and everything would be done and he'd be, "Okay, do you have anything else for me?" I loved that - that he was quick, got everything done.

Smith: And was that the bulk of what you did for him?

Archibald: Yes, we did that and, after Lee retired, I would help him with the autographing, we would do that. He would always set aside at least an hour every day and sign autographs. That was the thing that blew me away the most when I came to work here - how much autographing was on that table. That conference room table would be stacked and I was like, "Oh my gosh, I can't believe it," and all the letters and the people who would just lie and tell you all kinds of different things to get an autograph from him. I couldn't believe that.

At first, I was very sympathetic to their needs, but we did a thing called a repeater's list, so after awhile you would see that it was the same person. But

then maybe they would have cancer, and then maybe they would have a child that was dying and you're like, "Okay, I'm starting to recognize this name." Then I got very jaded, "Don't sign an autograph for them!" But he always wanted to take at least an hour, especially at first, because he was so busy and he was away constantly. And when he was here he would want to catch up with that. Always a public servant in that way.

Smith: Isn't that funny, people have no idea of what unique demands are placed on a former president.

Archibald: Yeah, I had no idea about that. I was just like, "Oh my gosh, what is this stack of stuff?" and it would be footballs and baseballs. Everything you could imagine, they would send in. That and the Boy Scout letters, we'd do a letter for every Eagle Scout, so we'd do about 1100 a month. There would be about 1100 Eagle Scouts.

Smith: That's extraordinary.

Archibald: Yeah, but he always liked keeping on top of that kind of stuff.

Smith: I assume he was still getting lots of invitations, speaking invitations and the like?

Archibald: Oh yeah, yes, that was Judy's. She would take care of all of that. I would say maybe 20-30 requests a day from opening the mail...that people wanted him to do it. And he'd look at all of them.

Smith: Part of him really loved to be on the road.

Archibald: Absolutely, yes. I remember writing to him when he had his stroke in Philadelphia, I sent it fax so he would see it, and he was like an inspiration. I always said that. Him and Mrs. Ford both, I think, were very inspirational to be as motivated and driven as they were at that age. I didn't come here until he was in his 80's and I thought, "Oh my gosh, he wasn't even president before he was 60," and people half the time are like, "I'm practically in the grave at 60 years old and he was just starting." So, yeah, he liked keeping busy, very much so.

Smith: Was he on the phone much?

Archibald: Yes, I would say yes. At first definitely, when I first came here, he would talk to people quite a bit.

Smith: He was pretty accessible?

Archibald: Oh yeah. Are you kidding? On a Saturday, or if the phone wasn't picked up, he would answer the phone himself walking through the office out there. He would, "Hello." I think it was my daughter called on a Saturday and he grabs the phone up and he's like, "Hello," and she's like, "Uh, is Shelli there?" But he didn't know how to do the hold thing.

Smith: I'm told he was not mechanically inclined.

Archibald: I know, and Penny, I'm sure she'll tell you about sitting with him and working on the computer with Hearts. He loved to play Hearts on the computer. But that was pretty much pushing it right there.

Smith: Did he do email?

Archibald: He had email, but I don't think that he emailed. People, his kids especially, that's mainly who would send him emails, but he wouldn't email back. But yeah, the phone, since my office was right next door, you could hear him yell out and you knew he was having a frustrating moment with the telephone, so we would come in and help him out. He was funny that way.

Smith: Would he ever have lunch here?

Archibald: No, always go to the house exactly on time, because you could set your watch to it. And I think that was the thing, too, with Lee being with the Secret Service, if he was scheduled for taking a trip and flying out of LA, four o'clock would be departure, he would be, "Let's go ten minutes early." So I would say he was always early unless Mrs. Ford was going, then she'd make him always a little bit late.

Smith: You say he would always leave at the same time.

- Archibald: 1:30 every day, back at 2:30 on the dot. You could pretty much count on it and there would be nothing that would delay that. Same thing in the mornings, he usually came around nine, then he would push that to maybe 9:30 as he got older, and then he'd stay here until 5 o'clock and then go home and take the dog for a walk.
- Smith: And he was in here on Saturdays, I'm told.
- Archibald: Oh yes, every Saturday. Yes, we had a Saturday schedule until, I would say, about the last couple of years before he died. About the last year, maybe, we didn't come in on Saturdays. Pretty much until noon, we would be here, come and get the mail and do a little autographing and different things.
- Smith: Maybe it was Lee who told us - must've been Lee, who said, "You know, it's a holiday tomorrow." And the president would say, "I didn't vote for it."
- Archibald: He did, he was like, "I didn't vote for that one." So, "Okay." He didn't let you really have any vacation or holidays off or anything. If he was here, he expected one of us to be here with him, which was fine. He was funny on that, too.
- Smith: They were both very visible in the desert. They were very involved in a lot of charities and other activities.
- Archibald: Yes, yes. Yes, definitely. And they would participate in the Eisenhower events, the Classic, different balls. They would always go to the Carousel of Hope and go out to dinner. At Quito's, there's an actual booth there called the Presidential Booth and it sort of looks like a shower curtain, but they would pull that around the booth and give him some privacy, because everybody's walking up and asking him...
- Smith: How did they deal with that?
- Archibald: I think well. I never was out with them, but just from agents' stories and different things like when Lee would be with him, I think that they were always, to a point, he was very patient with that. My husband was with him at a lot of the Bob Hope Classic golf tournaments and he said that he was okay for a bit, but then it's like still we're on that schedule thing, like "Okay, I'm

signing autographs, but at a certain point, we need to get moving, here.” Lee told me a funny story about they were riding in the car and he had this schedule and he said, “Who’s this Van Halen guy?” I think he was in his foursome. And Lee said, “He’s a famous rock star.” And he thought his first name was Van and his last name was Halen, and so they got to the Classic and there’s these people lined up with the white guitars for Eddie Van Halen to sign and President Ford says, “Wow, he must be really popular!” but he had no idea.

Smith: Was popular culture sort of something that he didn’t know much about?

Archibald: No, I would say not, because I think when he read, he enjoyed reading, obviously history, and different things of the past. Very little non-fiction. I remember, though, right towards the end, he read *Marley and Me*. I was like, “Oh, that’s such a sad story.” But he did, he read that and in fact that’s probably the only non-fiction book I remember seeing him read. I thought that that was kind of a sad story. But keeping up with that kind of stuff, no, I would say, no, he didn’t keep up with the pop culture and all that kind of stuff too much. But he was exposed to it a lot, too, though. He’d go to the Carousel of Hope and there’s tons and tons of people there of more modern genre, I guess.

Smith: I wonder whether, too, children and grandchildren bring some of that into your life?

Archibald: Oh, they would have to, yeah. I never, I guess, witnessed them interacting together and stuff, because when they were over here at the office, they were probably a little bit more formal with him instead of the “Oh, there’s Grandpa!”

Smith: He spent a lot of time with Steve in the last few years, didn’t he?

Archibald: He did, yeah. He really, truly – and I hate to say that he had a favorite, but I’m –

Smith: I’m not suggesting that, but it just seemed like everything just came together.

- Archibald: Oh yeah, when Steve would come, you could just see a change in him. He was just excited and, I guess because they shared golf and so many things together. Yeah, and Steve's a lot like his dad now, more as he grows older. I see so much President Ford in him it's amazing.
- Smith: They're a dead ringer.
- Archibald: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, the way they look and, I think, characteristics. He truly would enjoy spending time with Steve and I think it really frustrated him, too, as he got older and when he got incapacitated and couldn't play golf and stuff. I think that was really hard for him.
- Smith: I also wonder whether, in a larger sense, and he said as much, that there was a certain element – I don't know if guilt is the word – but he was certainly well aware of the fact that, when the kids were small, he was out on the road. And he really left it to Mrs. Ford to raise the family and one of the things he was going to try to compensate for was that fact that he spent a lot of time with the kids and grandchildren. How was he as a grandfather?
- Archibald: Like I said, I didn't witness that very often, but he was totally different. You could just see a change in him when they were here, when they would come. I remember Jonathan and Christian came, it was on a Thanksgiving, I think, yeah, it must have been Thanksgiving. And he was out there playing, they had their little golf set and they were out here on the lawn hitting the ball around and stuff. And in the swimming pool, because obviously he was a fish, loved to be in that pool, and with the kids. Lots of good pictures of them swimming and playing in the pool and that kind of thing. So I think that he really enjoyed that and that's really good for him, too, get out there and take time off of work.
- Smith: I think it was Jim who just said, he knew the last few months that he must not be well because he wasn't in the pool.
- Archibald: Oh, he hated that, too. He came back from Beaver Creek and that pool had needed to be re-plastered. They resurfaced the whole pool. And it was not ready when he got back here and he was like, "I want my swimming pool" because he did that every day. And then he got to the point, I would see him

later in the morning and would say, “Did you have your swim?” He goes, “I really wouldn’t call it swimming anymore. It’s more like I was wading out there.” And we’re like, “Okay.” But you could see that that was kind of frustrating for him, too. And when he wasn’t in the pool, you knew that there was something wrong.

Smith: A number of people have said we were so lucky, up until the time of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday or so, he seemed much younger than his age would suggest.

Archibald: Oh, absolutely.

Smith: And then, one of the things that must’ve really frustrated him was to be told, presumably by the doctors, he had to really cut back on his travel.

Archibald: That was terrible. You could just see the clench of the jaw when, after he had had his stroke, they said, “You need to cut it in half.” I think he tried as much as he could, but he didn’t want to be held back at all. You could just see it, he was frustrated about it and a little angry. I never asked, but I wanted to say, “Does this really make you upset?” but I could see it.

Smith: Were you in Philadelphia?

Archibald: No, I wasn’t, but I just remember watching TV...

Smith: What was that, I mean, it must’ve been...?

Archibald: Oh, yeah, it was horrid. I remember seeing that and just the phone calls and the people that...it wouldn’t let up, the press and everything. It was a little hard to tell, because I had talked to him on the phone a couple of days before he had left Beaver Creek and he sounded funny. And I said to Penny afterwards, “He sounds to me like that he’s had a stroke” and she said, “Well, he has this thing on his tongue.” But I think that was kind of the beginning of that whole scenario. He came back here after Philadelphia for two weeks and then went back to Beaver Creek and he stayed exactly two weeks and the doctor said, “You have to come back to the desert for two weeks and not go to the altitude.” So, he did that and then he went back up there for the rest of the summer. And then, the last summer they went to Beaver Creek, he goes, “I’m going up there against doctors’ orders.” He told him not to go.

Smith: But he goes anyway because he's frustrated and he's a very stubborn guy, stubborn! A very stubborn guy.

Archibald: Oh, very much so. Yes, very stubborn.

Smith: I'm sure lots of people had this conversation with him. But, I remember the conversation with Mrs. Ford and she said, "At this point, we've had quantity of life, we're interested in quality."

Archibald: Absolutely.

Smith: They obviously loved the place.

Archibald: Oh, they did and I think that he relaxed more there. Here was more like the work environment. I think he got up there and it was more, "This is where I can kick back a little bit." He would allow himself to do that during that time. I think the last summer that they went, we had that huge fire here and my place where we lived was engulfed in that and my husband was there. The first thing, I tried to get home because Lee called me and said, "The fire has started back up. You'd better come home now or you won't be able to get home. They'll close off the roads." I had the staff car, I took off as fast as I could to get home and try to get into the place, but they already had the roads closed. So, my daughter and I came down and we stayed in a hotel down here and I was supposed to take Jan and the chef to the airport the next day for them to fly out. I walked in over to the house the next morning and the very first thing President Ford said to me was, "How's Lee?" and "Is everything okay?" He was so worried and I didn't even know he knew there was a fire or what was going on, but he was very concerned about that. So, I reassured him everything was okay and so he flew off and that was the summer he went to the Mayo and has his surgery and stuff up there. But, yeah, he was always thinking about those kind of things.

Smith: What was the relationship like with the Secret Service?

Archibald: Lee worked for him for 21 years and so he was there for a long, long time. Saw it from when he was really, really busy to seeing it fade. He was such a macho man – so things like helping him, there was no helping him at first,

like trying to grab his elbow. Lee went on a cruise with them and they were getting on the cruise ship onto the little dinghy boats to take you to shore or whatever they're called and he said, "The ocean's going like this and the boats are two, three feet apart," and they tried to grab President Ford's elbow to help him down into the raft and he's like, "I don't need any help!"

Smith: An old Navy man, too.

Archibald: Oh, absolutely, but he said those were some his best memories, of watching President Ford swimming in the open ocean out there, just having a heyday. You could tell he was just in his element and loving this. He said they would go out for swims and just loved that. So, he was not protective of them, but he enjoyed their protection. I mean, he didn't want them to be supportive of him in that type of way, physically, but he'd like to have that. And that's good, I think, that barrier, because I don't think that people realize how forceful the crowds and outsiders and strangers can be.

Smith: Plus this is a man who had been the target of two assassination attempts.

Archibald: Exactly, yes. And I remember one day we were autographing in the conference room and the gardener was mowing the lawn out here and he hit a rock and it hit the window. And President Ford, down, went to cover! And I thought, "Wow, you must do that because of experience." And that frightened him a little bit, but I think he was very courteous to them, to the Secret Service. And, to Lee, he always was, he was so nice. They talked a lot and enjoyed each other.

Smith: How difficult were the last couple of years?

Archibald: It was hard.

Smith: For one thing, it must've been, on the staff, let's face it. There was this death watch that the media had going, because I got sucked into it and it was *really* off-putting on every level, but you were in the middle of it.

Archibald: Well, it is. That and the constant calls we always heard. I think the hardest part for me, and I'm sure when you talk to Penny, she will agree, is that, here's a man that was over here every day and just so vital and never seemed,

like you said, even when he was 90 years old, he seemed like he was 75, 80 years old, and then all of a sudden it snowballed and he was, then, 92 years old. And then, he didn't come over to the office anymore and you would see him at the house and he was obviously very aware, but physically could not perform. And that was hard. It was like a heartbreaker, because it's hard to watch. I've never had to see one of my grandparents even go through that.

Smith: Plus, he was proud and fastidious and all those qualities, and it must have been internally, just terribly difficult to be going through.

Archibald: I think so, oh yeah. And that's like I said, I would like to have asked him, "What is it like at this point?" because I think we all wonder what is it going to be like for us when you get to that age. And, one thing, it just broke my heart one day, it was maybe close to the end and I went over. He always liked to hold your hand, by now he was in the hospital bed, so you would hold his hand and talk to him and I said something – I don't remember exactly – and he goes, "I hate to go." And I went, "Where are you going?" I was not thinking. And I didn't realize he was talking about he hated to go, you know, to die. I had to leave. There was no way I could deal with that. That was really hard, because he was always here and such a presence here.

Smith: How long would you say it was before he passed that he stopped coming over here? Was it a matter of months?

Archibald: Yeah, it was probably, just maybe 6 months? But he would come over for certain things because I remember he had a visit from – I cannot think of the man's name now – he writes *The Leaders* publication? What's his name? Anyway, he came and he had a watch for President Ford. He wanted to present him with this watch and he came over, got in his chair, got his hair all fixed and stuff, and he was able - he could be on for that. And remember things, the long-term memory would just be great. But I would say a few months before – about 6 – that he stopped coming over and we wouldn't see him, just over at the house. But we would go every day and try to see him every day over there.

Smith: And that obviously must have imposed huge burdens on Mrs. Ford.

- Archibald: It was, she felt very protective of him. She wanted to protect him from everything, obviously at this point, his condition and people coming in.
- Smith: It's funny, because we talked to a couple of people – Penny and I used to talk about this – it bordered on cruel and unusual punishment. Whoever was responsible – we won't speculate about it – whoever dragged poor Bob Hope around the last few years of his life did not do him a service.
- Archibald: No, that's terrible.
- Smith: And I'm wondering whether that memory sank in.
- Archibald: Oh, I absolutely think so. I think that is something that, to me, for anybody in their position, you don't want to have people see you out like that and about. And, no way, he would have liked that at all. He didn't even want to use a cane and, finally, it was one day it was like, "You have to start using the cane." But he didn't want to do that and he never wanted to be in a wheelchair and have people see him like that. He was just too proud. Yeah, he was funny that way.
- Smith: For some people, I guess, when he died, it was an education to lots of people. I was wearing two hats. I was with ABC during the first part of the week, and I can tell you, the media were taken aback at the public response and how it just seemed to build as the week went on. And I think a lot of that was, particularly young people who'd never seen him before, were being introduced to him and they were comparing him with what they're seeing around today and he looked awfully good. One of the things that surprised a lot of the folks was the number of young people who were in the crowds.
- Archibald: I was blown away when we went to Michigan and we were riding in the motorcade from Grace Church and the streets, lined, as you remember, they were just lined with kids and young people. It was amazing, because I think that, like my daughter, she talked to him on several occasions, she would come into the office and he was always so nice to her. Another thing that, I guess, kind of blew me away about him was that former President Carter and Bush, Newt Gingrich - these are the three I can really remember off the top of my head that came to the office – he would take them around and introduce

each one of us to them. That was great. So, when Jordan would come in to the office, he would always be always so nice to her and drag her into conversation, ask her about school and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, I think they probably did see him and think, wow, with what's going on in the country, he was pretty solid.

Smith: He and President Carter really did become great friends, didn't they?

Archibald: I think so, yeah. Just reading, because he would never really talk a lot about those type of things when we would be sitting around doing autographing or whatever. I do know one thing that really made him mad, thought, and he said it right up until the last couple of weeks before he died, is that he was very upset with Clinton and Bush for not including him in the relief for the tsunami. Remember the tsunami that hit? Yeah, he was mad about that. So, I think, Carter, you know, he always said favorable things about him, compared to. He was mad at them about that.

Smith: But he couldn't take an active role?

Archibald: Oh no, yeah, he was just hurt, "Why didn't they ask me?" So, that was kind of weird. But I worked with the special letters that he got, so we have a collection of those that we keep, they went way, clear back to notes from Kennedy, when he was in Congress, and the relationships that he had with the other presidents. I remember a really nice note that he got from former President Bush when they had, before one of the elections, they were out together in a car and it was nice, it was like they were talking like two buddies, you know. And I guess you don't think of them like that, that they're human that way.

Smith: I only heard him disparage two people and the worst thing he could say about someone was, "He's a *bad* man." That was the worst he could come up with, you know? It's so, almost Andy Hardy, you know? One was John Dean and the other was Gordon Liddy. And if you stop and think, from his perspective, you could understand how he felt that way.

Archibald: Oh, absolutely. No, I can never remember him saying a bad, degrading or talk down about anybody.

Smith: I do remember, I can remember this vividly because I was involved in it with Penny, at the time, the whole craziness about Monica Lewinsky and I worked with him on the Op-Ed piece which basically pulled the rug out from under the impeachment forces which was a very gutsy thing for him to do and a very statesman-like thing for him to do. And, I take it, he took a lot of heat for doing it. I remember this story about Tom DeLay wrote him a six page letter, a constitutional lecture about all the reasons why he couldn't do all the things he was proposing and so on and so on. But I know for a fact afterwards both people in the White House and the Republicans in Congress wished they had put aside their partisan feelings long enough to embrace the idea because for the country's sake it would have been much better than what transpired.

Archibald: Absolutely. Yeah, he said very little about that to me especially, he wouldn't talk about it too much, but I think that he knew he had to, he did the right thing. As usual.

Smith: It's interesting, too, because I remember saying in my eulogy. You know, most of us get more conservative or high bound or whatever you want to call it the older we get. And with the Fords, both of them, they became increasingly almost marooned in the Republican Party. I mean, they were outspoken with pro-choice, pro-gay rights, things that were surprising to a lot of folks and were not terribly popular. And I wondered they changed or whether the party just went off in this direction, and how much she influenced him in his views, and... It just intrigues me what the dynamics were.

Archibald: I think so, because I've always thought that. That they seemed, like we were talking about, he wasn't all up on the technology and everything like that, but at the same time very open-minded. I think Mrs. Ford obviously, I was telling Erik before you came in, that she was much more risqué thinking than President Ford was, at times make him even blush. My husband had grown a moustache – I was also telling Erik this – that he drove Mrs. Ford for maybe about nine years constantly and he grew a moustache after we got together. We got together on this job which was a little gossipy thing, but she got all over Lee. She was like, "Lee, why did you grow that moustache? It looks terrible on you! You have such a handsome face. Why would you do that?"

Well, I guess that President and Mrs. Ford were having dinner and about 8 o'clock that night our phone rang at home and it's Mrs. Ford. And I said to Lee, "Lee, it's Mrs. Ford." And I'm like, oh my gosh, what does she want? And she apologized to him because she was telling President Ford this story and he said, "You can't tell him that! He can grow a moustache!" Lee also has tattoos everywhere and some visible when he was still on the job, but they never ever talked down to him about that. The only thing Mrs. Ford said to him one day we were visiting and he stopped in and saw her and she said to him, "You always walked to the beat of a different drummer, Lee." But I think at the same time, they didn't judge that way. I like that. I think open-minded and that's probably why they did get a little more alienated.

Other: [inaudible]

Archibald: Oh, yeah, Lee was driving and the right front seat guy and Mrs. Ford was in back and she was always renting movies. And she said to the guys, she said, "Have you seen any good movies lately?" The right front seat guy said, "*Goodfellas*, I just watched it. It's really good." And so they rented it and the next day she said, "Oh my gosh, the language!" But I think they enjoyed it and ended up watching it, but she was like, "That is the worst language I've ever heard!" I was like, "Oh gosh, I don't think I would've suggested that."

Smith: Were they big movie fans?

Archibald: Oh yeah. When I worked here, to go out to a movie, only a few times. I remember they went in to see the *Titanic* and one that he loved, and I was really surprised, was *First Wives Club*. He says, "You gotta go see it. It's kind of a chick flick." And I was like, "A chick flick?" And so he was like, "It's really good." And I was like, "Okay." And they would go I think it was to the Frank Sinatra estate, I think he had a – no, it must have been the Annenberg's – they had a theater and they would go watch. I think they watched *Absolute Power* and they'd see these first run, you know, these different movies.

Smith: Did they like *Titanic*?

Archibald: Mrs. Ford left before the end because she thought it was depressing. The agents were like all into it and, like, an hour before it's over, she's like, "We're going to go." And they thought she needed to go to the restroom, but she ended up just walking around out there. And she goes, "I don't want to watch any more of it. It's depressing." And they're like, "Oh, okay. We want to stay!" She's like, "No, I don't want to see anymore." I don't know how President Ford felt about that, but that was kind of funny.

Smith: They seemed to enjoy visits to New York.

Archibald: Oh, yes. Yes.

Smith: And they'd go to the theater.

Archibald: I know, yes.

Smith: I remember hearing they saw *The Lion King* and I guess they both enjoyed it.

Archibald: Yes. And *The Producers*. They would make a trip usually around this time of year, I think, and they would spend a couple of weeks or a week and see some theater and different things. Yeah, I think they liked it there.

Smith: And they'd all stay at the Waldorf?

Archibald: I think so, yes, always at the Waldorf.

Smith: They had good taste.

Archibald: Oh, absolutely. And people treated them nice, gave them nice accommodations and all the little extras.

Smith: Did they have restaurants here that they were particularly fond of?

Archibald: Jillian's was his favorite, they would go there. And the whitefish, I think they actually call it that. I was talking to a friend of theirs the other day and she said that on the menu it's the presidential white fish, it's something like that. I'm not exactly sure the name of it, but he would eat that constantly there. Yeah, they would go out occasionally but not so much towards the end of his life, they wouldn't go out much.

Smith: You tell me, people who never knew him, what would surprise people about him? One thing, and I'm not trying to answer for you but, I saw him with numbers and anyone who ever questioned his IQ or intelligence, I mean, he has this steel trap mind when it came to numbers.

Archibald: Absolutely. I would sit down with him every day when he would get his Smith-Barney statement he would have his pencil from the thing over here and he would sit and he would hand write out every comparison from month to month. He'd have all his papers laid out. Very meticulous and very good at it. Yes, because I would be talking with him and he would go over differences from day to day and he could pop out the differences mathematically quicker than (snaps fingers). And I would go, "Oh, let me go get the calculator." And he's like, "No, I've got that." But yes, very good about that.

But I think, just his graciousness. He was just accessible, I guess. You know, talk to you about anything. When Lee and I got together, he said one day, because he didn't talk personally, I mean, he wouldn't –

Smith: He wasn't a gossip, either. I mean, because most politicians love to gossip. And I noticed, when I was around him, whenever it would veer, he would very sort of deftly find a way to change the subject, but he just wasn't a gossip.

Archibald: That's something I was told when I very first came to work in the office. You have four or five women working here, you're going to have the women stuff happening and he didn't like it. There would be none of that. "And I don't want to hear about you saying this about them," or whatever. And so, when Lee and I got together, the only thing he said to me, one day he said, we were sitting here and just out of the blue, "Is Lee going to marry you?" And I went, "I think so." And he goes, "Well, he'd better and he'd better not get a transfer because you're not leaving." And I was like, "Okay." But he, yes, not a gossip but didn't pry into your personal life, not at all. It would never ever be that way. But also at the same time just enough, you know, always ask you about your daughter, you know and that type of thing "What is she doing in

school?” and so that was nice. So I think they wouldn't have realized he was as personable as he is.

Smith: Did you see his temper?

Archibald: Oh my gosh, yes.

Smith: Lifelong, it was something he struggled to control.

Archibald: Yes, and it would flare up. It was, I think, still during my two week training, he had been to Texas to a board meeting and the door flies open... Because I'd asked the lady that I took her place, she was still here, I was like, “Is he nice?” because when you come in and interview, of course he's on his best behavior, as we all are, but she goes, “Oh, no, he's great.” And the door flies open and he is, you know the famous two words, and he came through the office. I tried to escape out my window because I'm like, “Oh my gosh!” because the roof is coming off. I'm like, “This is crazy!” And he went in to Judy because they did not give him the right pillow at the hotel in Texas – he liked this certain pillow – and they knew it and he didn't have it. And I was like, “Oh my gosh, he is, he's angry.” Yes, when we went through the anthrax scare here – the main thing for President Ford is the mail, if the mail was running, there'd better be someone there to get the mail and have the mail done.

Smith: Don't you think that is the old congressman?

Archibald: Oh, absolutely, and it's just this schedule. And when the anthrax thing happened, they took all of our mail at the post office and put it in a big trash bin in the back. They didn't even want to get our mail for the fear there might be something in there contaminated. So at this post office, they have this trash bin and they're putting all of our mail in it and we left it for about four or five days before the Secret Service could figure out what we needed to do with it. And then, about the fifth day, President Ford was like, “That's it. I've had enough.” So it was like, “Okay, let's get the mail done.”

And so then we had to open it in anti-c suits and we just got it three days a week, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, because it was just such an ordeal

to put all that stuff on and open up the mail. And we had to seal the garage off. We had the hazmat team come and had to tell us everything of how to do it to just be sure. And he was very impatient about that. He wanted the mail every day. So, every other day that we didn't have the mail, "Did you get the mail today?" "No, this is a Tuesday, we're not doing the mail today." So, yes, I did see his temper. I think that was probably the most impatient I'd ever seen him. It flared on quite a few occasions.

Smith: But it sounds like it flared and then it –

Archibald: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, just instantly. And then he'd have kind of this little sheepish little on his face and never say, "I'm sorry about going off like I did." But you could tell that he was like, "Oh."

Smith: Do you remember 9/11?

Archibald: Yes, he was in Beaver Creek during that. Yes, that was very bad. I didn't experience what he felt or went through with it, but from what I understand from Penny and the other girls, he was in tune to watching.

Smith: And they went back to Washington for the service at the cathedral, which I think must've been one of the last times he was back in D.C. I know he was there for his ninetieth birthday. The Bush's had an event at the White House. And I think the Foundation did something about that time.

Archibald: Was Reagan's funeral after that?

Smith: Reagan's? Yes.

Archibald: So that would've been probably about the last time was Reagan's funeral. I was trying to think. I think that was the last time he was in Washington. Because they didn't do another Foundation dinner there after that, right?

Smith: Yeah.

Archibald: Yeah, I can't remember exactly.

Smith: I remember there was a wonderful, I think the next year they did – I think maybe it was in Vail or maybe it was out here -

Archibald: It was here.

Smith: It was here. It was the occasion where he announced that he was Deep Throat.

Archibald: Oh, I know that was so funny. That was excellent! My only experience from that was, during the party, someone slipped up to him and slipped a coin into his hand. And so, the next Monday at work, I come in to do my deal with him and he has this coin and he hands it to me and he goes, "Shelli, what is this?" And I look at it and I go, "That's a Krugerrand." And he goes, "A what?" "That's, like, about a solid piece of gold." And he goes, "Oh my gosh!" He couldn't remember who had slipped it into his hand, he was at this party, you know. And I thought, it's not everybody who walks up to you and goes, "What is this?" and it's a Kruggerand. I'm like, "Okay." But yeah, they had it there and then I think the next year they went back to Washington, but I don't think he went. They just had the tape for him and Mrs. Ford.

The thing he wanted to do the most, though, was the School of Public Policy opening. Every day, "I'm going to that", "I'm going", "I'm going", "I'm going". And I think that was really hard, that he didn't get to go. I wish he could've been around to be there. He had the pictures and he was so excited about that opening.

Smith: The University of Michigan had a special place in his heart.

Archibald: It did, yes, very much so. That and, I guess what he would talk to me a lot about and usually if we were autographing, we would have a lot of time was, instead of just the business stuff, he would reminisce about things. And I think things we got to would remind him of different stories, but if he was watching a football game, there was no interrupting. It didn't matter what happened. It's like we could have this TV on and he would be sitting right here in his chair and would still have all his paperwork and stuff on his lap, but he was glued in to the TV. Yeah, the University of Michigan was his baby, I guess, for sure. That was a very touching thing to me I think was when they did the, they did the flyover, right? And then they had the band there in Grand Rapids when the plane came in. Yeah, that was nice.

Smith: Were you surprised at all? I mean, Mrs. Ford was extraordinary that last week at the beginning, even at St. Margaret's. At ABC, we'd been told, "Don't be surprised if she's in a wheelchair." But of course she wasn't. And then at that last, she walked all the way down to the gravesite. And someone, I was told later on, remarked to her when she got back how impressed they were and she said, "That's what my husband would have wanted."

Archibald: I know. He was her motivator, I would say. He would have this end of the table covered with autographing, she'd have this little section, and a lot of people were writing for her autograph also, and it would get stacked up and stacked up and stacked up. Then it would be like, "Betty, you need to get to work on that autographing." And she'd come over and do it. And I think that's probably been the hardest part since he's been gone is that she doesn't have that motivator to get her going and stuff. But for such a small, little, frail-looking lady that she is, she's tenacious. As you know, knowing her, that she has that tenacity, that was that pure will that pushed her through that with the funeral.

Smith: The funeral planning, how uncomfortable was that?

Archibald: It was terrible. He said the day they were asking him to pick out his casket, he's like, "Do I have to do this?" and I'm like, "I really wouldn't think you would have to. Let's have somebody else do it." Yeah, I would think that had to be very hard. I wouldn't want to deal with that at all, picking the songs and...

Smith: It was so revealing, the very first meeting we had with him years before, and I talked about it at the eulogy but, he was adamant that there be no caisson down the streets of Washington which I think is so characteristic.

Archibald: Exactly, yes. Yes, I think so, too. He doesn't want that hoopla, I guess, or whatever you would call it. He was low-key.

Smith: But you know what's interesting, since that funeral, I know for a fact that – well, the Johnson girls went back to Texas and redid their mother's plans and the Carters have redone their plans to make it more like the Ford funeral, to make it more family, a family event.

- Archibald: I think so, yeah. I mean, I obviously haven't attended any other presidential funerals or anything, but I was amazed at how warm, because with the family, too, I didn't know how they would be. But I thought they were so gracious and nice and just everything was on a more, I guess, like a normal person instead of like a president level.
- Smith: Do you think he would have been touched by the outpouring?
- Archibald: Oh my gosh, yes. Yes, I definitely think so because even though...that was important to him. Like when the autographing, if it would wane, you could tell he wanted to still be favorable, always be favorable in the public eye. That was important to him. And aware that "I'm still out there" and that type of thing. I think he would've been way blown away about the outpour. But all the planning and this here and there and that at this time, that would've drove him crazy. He would've been like, "No, I don't want to do that."
- Smith: Is she still grieving?
- Archibald: I would say yes. I don't think there's any way that she couldn't.
- Smith: I was going to say, I think one of the things people didn't realize and they saw that week was how incredibly close they were.
- Archibald: Well, don't you think that has to happen when you are like they are in the public eye like that? And when you need to turn to somebody that just knows you and you just know them, that's how their unit was – just the two of them. I mean, even without the children, it was just that they had each other to rely on when they had to get away from the masses. And so now she doesn't have that. I think he would've done terrible if it would have been the other way around.
- Smith: Oh, I couldn't imagine him lasting.
- Archibald: No, he seemed like all tough and everything, but she was, that was his baby. He took good care of her, always. Forcing her to, if she was sick, "You get home. Sit down," you know, "Take good care of yourself," or "Get to the doctor." So, yeah, I truly think that, yes, she's still grieving.

Smith: She must have satisfaction knowing, though, that the Center that she created has been passed on to Susan and it's very rare that a succession is successful. When you've invested so much of yourself in something, it has to be a source of real reassurance to know that it's in trusted hands.

Archibald: I think she totally feels that way about Susan, that's she's very capable. But I think that was hard for her, too, to give up the handling. She was so involved and when I first came to work here, she was there all the time, always going over there, always giving little talks to the patients. The Betty Ford Center was huge for her and I think it was very hard for her to give that up and to cut those strings and give them to Susan.

Smith: Last. Do you miss him?

Archibald: Oh my God, yes. It's like so weird around here now. Well, I started missing him when he stopped coming over, that just wasn't right. Yeah, I do, I miss him a lot. He was such a – I guess you would call it a force. Now he's not here and that is weird.

Smith: How does it feel to be in this room?

Archibald: I hate coming in here without him here. I just would rather stay out, because this is his place. When he would have all of his pens and pencils lined up on the desk and stuff, so yeah, it was hard.

Smith: My hope is that this will be preserved and recreated, absolutely created as it was so that people will have a chance to see it for themselves.

Archibald: Yeah, I think that would be nice. He would like that, too.

Smith: The museum and the library meant a lot to him, didn't they?

Archibald: Oh my gosh, yes. He was very proud, very, very proud of that. He told me once after I'd seen his home in Beaver Creek, "Well, you've been now to my home here and my home in Beaver Creek, you need to go to my first home in Michigan." I didn't get to go until he died, but the whole town, the whole Grand Rapids is President Ford, you know. Yeah, you couldn't get away from it.

Smith: I certainly can't thank you enough. It's been great.

Archibald: Well, I hope that it wasn't terrible.

Smith: No, it was wonderful!

## INDEX

### B

Betty Ford Center, 23

### F

Ford, Betty

    Betty Ford Center, 23

    funeral, 21

Ford, Gerald R.

    autographs, 2–3

    charity work, 5

    funeral, reactions to, 12–13, 22

    funeral plans, 21–22

    grandchildren, 7

    health issues, 8–9

    latter years, 10–12

    post-presidency schedule, 4–5

    remembrance, 17

    School of Public Policy, 20

    technology, 4

    temper, 18–19

    University of Michigan, 20–21

Ford, Steve, 6–7

Ford, Susan, 23