Smith: First of all, thank you very much for doing this.

Morus: It's my pleasure.

Smith: I have to ask you what your reaction is on being back in this room.

Morus: It's completely in tears, actually, and really of joy that I've been here with the man, that I know him for so long and I just can’t believe it. It’s still the same. The only thing, that chair, I always sat right there and he sat over there.

Smith: When did you first meet?

Morus: Probably ’68. He was a Congressman. In Vail, Colorado. He was staying at the Manor Vail, Manor Vail condominiums. You can stay there for the skiing. We had a grocery store in Vail, Colorado and he came there. I was an owner, not a working guy. He knew I was there and he came down to the meat counter and said, “What kind of meat shall I buy today?” And I showed him, because I’m a butcher by trade, and I did and that’s the first time I saw him.

Smith: So you were a butcher and he was a Congressman?

Morus: I owned supermarkets. I had a chain of supermarkets going and I was in the store, just visiting to see because I had an operation manager partner. I wasn’t working, I didn’t work in the store, but I was there checking on them and he was there and he kind of knew that I was in there. And said, “What kind of piece of meat should I get?” I showed him the steaks and he got some meat, and they went. That’s the first time, so a couple times probably, until occasionally even socializing or whatever. Just not really much until he became vice president. When he became vice president – no, no – he bought a condominium in the lodge in Vail.

Smith: And what was that like?
Morus: It was, I think, a two-bedroom condominium on the second floor. But across the street from it, in ’69, I built a lodge of about 75-80 rooms, with a penthouse on the top and a restaurant and shops on the bottom and underground parking. So, he bought the condominium across the street. So the only thing – he was on the second floor, I am on the fourth floor, I’m looking right into his living room – you could wave from the distance and whatever. And still, at the time, just “hello” and “how are you?” All of a sudden he became vice president. But in the meantime he was coming, I owned the Left Bank Restaurant, which is across the street, I’m sure you’ve been in it.

Smith: I’ve heard of it. I’ve never been to Vail.

Morus: You’ve never been to Vail?

Smith: You’ll have to describe it for us.

Morus: The Left Bank Restaurant was a restaurant – I got a Frenchman - his wife was British from South Africa – and I put him in business just to run a restaurant in the place that became vacant from people who went broke. I was looking for somebody and he didn’t have money to buy something, so I put him in business and gave him an interest in the business. So it was a very popular restaurant, so the Fords came there for dinner when they were in town.

Then, all of a sudden he became vice president, and he was across the street from me and they [Secret Service] came down and in front of my lodge they parked this god-awful, what do you call it – trailer? What is it – the one you drive instead of being a trailer? RV. And they put this huge big RV, and then the Secret Service were there and everybody was there and then I find out that’s when he became vice president. He’s driven there and that was the command post.

So we got to know the Secret Service people. There were some events that happened in his honor and we were there for the celebrations and whatever. One day, I remember talking to one of the Secret Service people and I said, “You guys are stupid.” They got to know me - they said, “What do you mean stupid?” I said, “Well, you know, here I am, he’s the vice president, and I’m up there in my room. I could just aim at him anytime I want to, and I could
see him and whatever, and you guys never even bother to check me – whatever it is.” He said, “What do you want to know about yourself? He said, “We know everything, all about you and we know every move you’re making” and so on and so forth. So, that’s the relationship.

So naturally when he became president, he was completely moved out of there and rented a place and they put him there – the Bass house, which was on the east side of Vail, right by – almost Manor Vail where he used to rent when he used to come to the Vail area. And the rest of it – when he became president – was history. And I got to know him really, really well.

Smith: Now how, when he became first vice president, and then president, how did that impact Vail?

Morus: Oh, tremendously. It was a tremendous, tremendous thing. It was the whole thing. When he became president I was building another lodge, which turned out to be a big resort 400-500 room resort-hotel. And they needed, the Secret Service, they became very much all of the entourage, I think when he became president – was it in ’74? And that fall, ’74, happened in the summer, and what’s his name – his detail guy that used to be there? Bald-headed guy, God love him. He said, “Kaiser, we need to book your hotel for the Secret Service.” I said, “Well, I am building it now. I just broke ground a couple or three months ago.” He said, “Well, I’m sure you are going to get it.” I said, “Well, okay, I’m going to get it done in December, for Christmas.” It was the biggest tool in my hands, ever for the general contractors and everybody to get the place ready for Jerry Ford, the President of the United States, the Secret Service coming to the town. I was able to deliver it on time, and have all of the Secret Service and we became the headquarters for them, all throughout the times.

So what happened with the president, as far as impact, when he became, when he went for re-election and he was campaigning with Bob Dole, I threw a benefit for him in the resort in Vail, Colorado. I probably raised $150,000 those days because everybody in Vail showed up and put money just to come to shake their hands and everything else. I still have all of the pictures and everything with Elizabeth Dole and Bob Dole and the president and all the
rest of them. So we became kind of a more and more – even when he was president – I had the great privilege and honor and the scared you-know-what about playing golf with him when he was the president of the United States.

Smith: And where did you play golf?

Morus: We played at Eagle Vail golf course. There must have been several thousand people there and whatever, and helicopters hovering and every policeman in the county came over just to be there, and Secret Service galore. Here we are and I stand on the first tee and I’m trying to hit the ball and I’m shaking, shaking, like this. And I said to myself, “What will my mother say if she knew I was here – I’m an immigrant from Lebanon. I came from Lebanon in 1956 – and to be with the President of the United States.” To play golf with him and all of these people, it was phenomenal.

Then I am riding in the golf cart with him, with two other people. So we get to play golf, so I went there and I’m shaking and I hit the ball and I’ll be darned if it didn’t go over 225 yards – right down the middle of the straight – which I don’t usually do that. And it took the pressure off until we got to the fourth or fifth hole, and we are playing golf and the Secret Service is just kind of moving around, moving around the golf course with him as he rotates. They were all sheltering him, all a shield, and on the fourth hole I saw a golf cart coming with a canvas. I went to the Secret Service guy who I knew – I got to know them all because they are all staying in my resort, eating in my resort, spending money in my resort, and I came to know them.

So I said, “What’s in that cart?” He said, “You don’t want to know.” I went there about ten, fifteen minutes later and said, “You going to tell me what’s in that cart?” He said, “You don’t want to know.” I said, “Well, tell me.” He said, “Well, there is enough stuff in there to burn this area in two mile squares. You understand now? Get off my back.” And naturally, and I am riding with him, I was so scared the rest of the day the golf game went to hell. That was fun and that was a tough golf course. So, anyway, that’s the story and we finished playing golf and then it was later on that I gave him, I think, the campaigning and everything else, and unfortunately, it didn’t happen.
In the new year, for instance, I remember this one time – it was forty-five below zero – the chill factor in Vail, Colorado. New Year’s Day – Betty was out of town and we were all to be at his house at eight o’clock in the morning on New Year’s Day to go – no, no – at nine o’clock to go there and watch the football games and whatever. And it was he and I, Bob Barrett, John Purcell(?), a few of the gang from there – about four or five of us. I got down to the parking lot, couldn’t start my car – nobody could start a car – it froze. So we walked about the equivalent of two city blocks, and I remember stepping on that snow and it crunching and squeaking like a piece of music, rhythmic. Your nose froze, whatever. So we went over there and we watched the football game all the time and that evening we had dinner there at the house and after the football game – like seven-eight-nine o’clock, we decided to go on the town and he wanted to go with us. We went to the bar – a Mexican restaurant, Los Amigos, ordered drinks, and he says, “I want to buy for this.” You know, that’s the kind of a guy he was. I wouldn’t have paid for this, because nobody was going to pay for this, because the owner of the restaurant was with us walking over there. So we spent the night – we went to a couple of bars and those times he was having a drink or so, and we ended up going home. It was the New Year – I think ’75 or ’76, then the election was after that.

So we spent a lot of times in Vail, golf when he was president, I played golf with him that one time, which was an honor and fear at the same time. It was something else.

Smith: What was he like to watch a football game with? Very focused on the game?

Morus: Oh, very, very intense, especially if it was a Michigan. I watched the games many times with him later on, because the story comes later – we became next door neighbors in Beaver Creek and all of that stuff. So, he was very intense and he liked to bet five dollars on a game or something like that.

Smith: But I assume you didn’t chit chat during the game.

Morus: Oh, no – he was seriously involved with the game. He was really seriously involved with the game and, naturally, with commercials and stuff and we’d
talk or whatever. It was different because when we watched the games, Betty wasn’t around so it was a freewheeling bunch of guys and it got loud.

Smith: Now, you got to know Mrs. Ford.

Morus: Oh, very well. Yeah.

Smith: Tell me about her in those days.

Morus: She was everything – she was the greatest for us, with us. We became comfortable and got to know her really well when we all moved to Beaver Creek. Before we really didn’t get to know her that much, other than “hi” and “how are you?” and knew who we were. Until we moved to Beaver Creek, my relationship was, all of that time, with the president. With Mrs. Ford at several events, naturally she was there and we talked and just the normal things would be, until we decided actually one day, he and I were talking and he said, “Well, I’d like to go to Beaver Creek. I want to build a home in Beaver Creek.” And I said, “Okay.”

Then we got with Leonard Firestone and Dee Keaton, Darius Keaton his name was. Dee Keaton and myself and we just put the deal together and got four lots. His lot was – the Vail Associates were very much receptive to the idea – he had to get the lot just to get in there, and we got one architect and we got one contractor and we got four interior designers, each one had their own interior designer, and we started designing our homes. We found out the wives were kind of talking with each other and all of a sudden, I have four bathrooms, no I have five bathrooms, no I have six bathrooms, and the sizes of the houses ended up being – his house was eleven or twelve thousand, my house was eleven thousand square feet, Dee Keaton was at ten-five, and the richest man of us all, Leonard Firestone, the smart-alec was at eight thousand square feet because he had the common sense of controlling whatever, just to show you.

So anyway, we got to know each other naturally, with my wife and her and after we moved in. I had the privilege and the honor to host New Year’s Eve in Vail, Colorado for a number of years – maybe fifteen, twenty years, and I would say most New Year’s the president and Betty were there. Sometimes,
maybe once or twice, she wasn’t feeling good or something, but we had it all done. Especially when we moved to Beaver Creek, every New Year they were there and Christmases and kids and whatever. Just like next door neighbors.

Smith: One difference, most next door neighbors don’t have Secret Service agents hanging around. I’m trying to visualize how remote or accessible this area was. Did you have tourists or rubbernecking people?

Morcus: There was a command post with an area where the Secret Service – there was no gate – there was a cul-de-sac, there were four homes, before the cul-de-sac ends on the left hand side, there was a house. On the other side there were two or three empty lots, so there was no…there were the four homes, really, that you consider next to each other. So the Secret Service would know who is coming and whatever. The tourists would come in and circle and go. If somebody stops, then the Secret Service…there was very, very much control. It was very comfortable, and naturally for us, it was so safe for us that the Secret Service…

Smith: Were there often tourists?

Morcus: There was. It wasn’t really overly done. But, it was a lot of people came and gone to his house. And whenever he had guests – that overflow from the house ended up being in my house.

Smith: Really?

Morcus: Oh, yeah.

Smith: Didn’t they entertain President Clinton at one point? Didn’t they play golf?

Morcus: I wasn’t there. I was gone, I think, after that. I left Vail in 1989-90. The Clintons were after that. My days were Macmillan.

Smith: Really? Harold Macmillan?

Morcus: Macmillan used to come a couple, three times to the symposium that the president sponsored.

Morus: The World Form, right. And it was always done at my resort because it had the biggest meeting facilities and all of that stuff. And then Macmillan was staying at the president’s house and he and his wife used to come for tea every afternoon to our house because my house manager was a very, very delightfully New Zealand-British kind of speaking girl - that kind of really with pizzazz and everything else - and she put the tea and all of that service which took us – she knew more about it than we did.

Smith: Now let me ask you – was that Macmillan or was that Callaghan?

Morus: Callaghan. I’m sorry. Callaghan and his wife and then Giscard d’Estaing was there, too. Frazier from Australia was our houseguest for a couple of times – stayed in the house for all the time. And many other people. All of them from Greenspan to Scowcroft, who were just like out partying every night, practically, they would end up. Because I had a lot of stuff happening in Vail, and I had one of the most famous nightclub and resort and dining rooms - complete resort – and everybody in town went there one way or another. We used to have a lot of parties over there.

Smith: Let me ask you because I’m trying to get the chronology: Mrs. Ford, of course, had her intervention in 1978, I believe it was.

Morus: Right. That was before we built the homes – after the intervention, I’m sorry to interrupt – in ’79 the planning of the houses was done. Around ’80 when we start construction, and we moved in ’81.

Smith: Okay. Were you aware of her problem?

Morus: Absolutely.

Smith: How apparent was it?

Morus: Well, not really too much apparent, but you know, like if she didn’t show up for a reason or another, we kind of…we never talked about it, never said anything about it. I was very close to Leonard Firestone, as well. Leonard Firestone was very – I spent a lot of months and days with him, with Leonard Firestone.
Smith: And he had a serious problem?

Morus: He had a serious problem, and I remember one day when he came over to the restaurant, we had a golf tournament and we were having dinner or something in one of my restaurants in there, and he took the glass of wine and he said, “Screw it,” more or less, and he takes a drink – a couple of sips out of it. But the man controlled it. After that he didn’t touch it. He said, “I’m not going to worry about it, I know how to _____________ it,” because we all looked at him – how could you do that? This is before Mrs. Ford was intervened with. And after that, after the intervention, it wasn’t something to talk about, other than to know what’s going on and hope and pray that things will work out, which it did work out.

Smith: But in later years, did they talk about it? She obviously, and Leonard Firestone…

Morus: Oh, she talked about it very openly. She even was very influential for one of my own children. I have my number three son who was having problems and unbeknown to me, he goes to her and asks to see her and talk to her at the house in Beaver Creek. And without her discussing it with me, or with my wife, or with anybody, she helped him arrange for, not here at the Betty Ford Center, but someplace in Aspen, Colorado, and she got him down in there and he’s been sober for twenty-one, twenty-two years, and he is still sober. She helped him with everything and she never said when I confronted her, not confronted, but she said, “That’s none of your business, this is the way we do business.” And she helped him out and that’s the way it was.

Smith: She saved a lot of lives.

Morus: A lot. And she was very open about it, and unashamed, and she saved a lot of lives and helped a lot of people. Maybe at times she was overly anxious to help people, too, sometimes. Some people say, well, maybe _____________, but very few people didn’t appreciate it.

Smith: I take it they were very visible around Vail.
Morcus: Oh, absolutely. Very visible around Vail. They were very visible around here. Many, many, many a time, we’d go out and play golf. I mean, golf was like once or twice a week, even after he retired. He is the reason I am in this area, because after he lost the election and I called here and talked to Bob Barrett, and he said, “Well, come on.” At that time I knew Penny fairly well and everything. No – that time Penny wasn’t around. Bob Barrett. Penny didn’t come until ’76.

I came here and we went out and played golf at Indian Wells Country Club, and I came here and I loved the area and across the street called the Springs Club. It was a brand new club, one of the best new country clubs in the area. I walked across the street, I picked up a lot that was under construction. I bought it sight unseen, signed for it and I bought a house across the street – only because I knew, even though I had a home in Newport Beach, I said, well, this is going to be less crowded because at that time there was nobody here. Nobody here.

Smith: Really? How was it different then?

Morcus: Well, it was just a small town. You go five miles to go find a restaurant. There was nothing. This, across street area, Morningside over here, was all sand. The Morning Springs was under construction. The hospital was one-third of what it is today, maybe one-fourth. All of the buildings – you want to go to a restaurant, probably go three or four miles to find a restaurant. It’s all vacant land and quiet and I used to have a second home because I got sick of the snow and cold weather and in the mud season I got out of town for a month or two and go enjoy myself. And Newport Beach got so crowded, and here was so pleasantly whatever.

I kept the house in Newport Beach, after ten years I go there only once or twice a year. I ended up selling and started living here completely. So I was here. He is the reason I came to visit, see and play golf with he and I and Bob and whatever, and I became a part-time resident here, and eventually a full time resident. It’s a very interesting story.
Smith: I know their names are attached to places at Vail. The amphitheater and the garden.

Morus: Oh, sure. I remember when we had the grand opening for the amphitheater. I was there. Was there when it was starting [to be] built. The amphitheater, as well. There is the Jerry Ford Street, the Jerry Ford Elementary School and on and on.

Smith: Since 1968, I assume Vail has exploded.

Morus: Maybe eight times more. I haven’t been in Vail since, when was it? Sometimes in the 90s, when they had their 85th birthday or whatever. There was a big party in Vail, Colorado, and we were invited and we flew from over in Carmel, because I had a home in Pebble Beach. We flew there to that event for about three or four days and it was held at the lodge in Vail.

That was the last time I was in Vail because that trip I was there for three days, four days and three nights, I think I slept two and half hours because of the high altitude, and I’d been gone for a long time. And without dropping any names, we flew with Clint Eastwood and his wife, and Dee Keaton and his wife and myself from Carmel. Clint got his jet and we flew over there with them, and then we came back to Carmel. When we arrived in Carmel I knew I’d never come back to Vail, so I went and bought a place in Pebble Beach. The same thing, I bought a place here because I knew I’d never go back to Vail because of the altitude.

Smith: That’s interesting you say that because, certainly the last summer of his life, and maybe before that…

Morus: And I have a couple of stories about that, go ahead, please.

Smith: I was going to say, all of their friends were urging them not to come back, for that exact reason. And, of course, Mrs. Ford would say, “At our point in life, we’ve had the quantity of life, we want the quality of life.” And they obviously loved Beaver Creek - to the point where they would be willing to risk their health to come back.

Morus: May I give you a couple of stories about that?
Smith: Yes.

Morus: Before that, I’m trying to put a parallel into people’s lives and how it works. I was having dinner one night with Dee Keaton, with the wife, with the neighborhood, and Firestone and myself. It was in June. Leonard Firestone was leaving for Vail, Colorado that following morning. The three of us sitting in a corner in one of my restaurants here in Palm Desert, having dinner and I said to Leonard Firestone, “Leonard, I wish you would come to your senses and not to go to Vail because that climate, that weather, is going to hurt you. Is going to kill you.” And he unloaded on me so bad. That really was hard. “Why don’t you mind your own business and telling people what to do,” and Leonard is a lot older than me. And I said, “Okay, I’m sorry. I am sorry. I should have minded my own business. Let’s enjoy our dinner. Have fun.”

That fall, actually in September, or maybe even in August, Leonard was forced to come back, because of his health. And he came here to Palm Springs. He called me and I came to see him. And then Leonard Firestone apologized, he said, “I am sorry that I jumped down your throat. You were right.” Leonard Firestone passed on that year. On December 23rd.

Now, two years ago I said the same thing to Jerry. I said, “Mr. President, you know, it’s getting…” and he said, “Mind your own business.” Because I lost a lot of friends. Another dear friend in Colorado Springs ended up the same thing with the high altitude, so I know how I felt when I went to Vail. I’m not a wise man, but you care about your friends and you start the conversation, but he put me in my place.” He said, “It’s none of your business.” I said, “Okay, Mr. President.” And he told that to everybody that told him, because I know a lot of people who told him. He didn’t want to hear it. I think the last couple of years, Mrs. Ford was on the oxygen when they went to Vail.

Smith: Don’t you think, in part, he didn’t want to hear it because he didn’t want to acknowledge to himself that he shouldn’t be there?

Morus: Probably.

Smith: That he’d gotten to the point physically that…
Morus: It could be that he doesn’t want to admit that, and it could be a part of his independent way of doing things. You don’t tell him anything, you don’t tell him anything.

Smith: He was a stubborn man.

Morus: Oh, tell me about it. Oh, yeah. Oh, how well I knew that, and, I went through, for some reason my life with him wasn’t a politician with politician. Someone that needed to accomplish anything – my relationship was together, whatever it is at the moment, and there was no demands on it whatsoever. There was no demands, whatsoever. I didn’t expect anything and I lived for the moment and whatever it is.

And that is why, like when he had his knee surgery, the first knee surgery. I came here to see him after he got out of the hospital. __________________________. And then we went to Vail in the summer. He comes to Vail on July 4th, he calls me next door. He says, “I feel like I’m going to be able to play golf.” “Okay,” that’s wonderful. He said, “Well, we’ll pick you up, we’ll all go in my car. The Secret Service will drive us.” So we loaded the clubs and we go to the Country Club in the Rockies, which I’m a member there. And we go to the range and take the bags to the range, he lifts up the club and we go to hit balls. Instead of my going to hit balls, I was standing there - I want to watch him. I figure he might collapse, his knee is going to collapse. I just wanted to be there. I don’t want to be involved with my golf game. He pulls the four iron out of his bag and he hits it 225-250 yards right down the middle. And we go play nine holes of golf, just he and I.

Ironic enough, the second time, when he had the second surgery with his leg, a few years later was here in Palm Springs when he called me and said, “Let’s go play golf. Steve is here, my son.” I told him I’d bring my son, so his son and my son and he and I went to play golf because most of the golf courses were closed – it was in the fall. And we went to Mission Hills and we played a round of golf, his first round after his second knee surgery. And he and I took on the boys and we kicked their butts. That’s the competitive – he was so damn competitive.
Smith: Was he very competitive?

Morus: He wanted to beat the hell out of you, man. He wanted to win everything. He doesn’t want to lose, he hated to lose. And you know, this is the kind of relationship – and this is the simplicity of the man was so unbelievable – the simplicity and his being a commoner. One Christmas, Christmas morning about eight, nine o’clock, we’re still in pajamas and somebody at the door. So I come down to the door and it’s him. He, himself, coming in, “Here, we got you this one in here, for…” I looked at him and I said, “Mr. President,” it was almost a quart or a half of gallon of caviar, Beluga caviar. Beluga caviar – that’s a thousand dollars! “Mr. President…” “Oh, yeah, we have some more, but we thought you would enjoy it.”

We went and ate caviar. But that’s the way – to be honest with you – he didn’t even probably know the value. And if he did, it didn’t matter, because that’s the kind of a man he was. And we had all kinds of stories. We could go on and on and on. And my life was very fulfilled. I never asked him to do anything for me, nor did he ask me. We’d all go down for dinner, we’d go out, we’d entertained, we’d play golf.

Smith: You were probably one of the few people who didn’t ask him for things.

Morus: I would just have to say, probably, yes.

Smith: Let’s face it. He was surrounded by people who, often with good intentions, and I assume you must have seen, one of the things that probably drove him up the wall after a while were the autograph seekers. People who wanted autographs.

Morus: Oh, yeah. Oh my God. We used to kind of protect him. Like in the restaurants, keep people away and stuff when he’d come over to the restaurants. Just say, keep them away from him, whatever. Sometimes he was annoyed. Other times he was just whatever, he’ll do it. I had the same problems with Clint Eastwood. I spent a lot of years around him and he was one time stampeded at Indian Wells country club – and to the point that they probably would have run over him because the autograph seekers can take it and sell it for $25 a shot.
But yeah, we protected him without him knowing. Without him knowing as far as around the public, and naturally there was always the Secret Service. Especially when he was president, every time there was an event you had to submit your name and get a clearance, no matter whether you were cleared before or not. You got to get your clearance again. You go to the party, and there is fifty people or sixty people in the party, there is twenty Secret Service and everybody, no matter where he is, piercing you with their eyes. Watching every move you make. It was to the point of almost uncomfortable. But the Secret Service were to protect him.

Smith: And as someone who had been the target of two assassination attempts, he had to be conscious of security.

Morus: Oh, yes. Two assassinations that didn’t succeed. Did she get – she was going to be pardoned, Fromme, whatever, but I think they refused her.

Smith: That’s right. They have refused.

Morus: Just recently, a few months ago.

Smith: Did he talk politics?

Morus: Oh, we talked politics for what’s happening in the day. The Republican Party – what’s going to happen, what’s happening in the Middle East, we shared a lot of conversation because he knew I was from Lebanon and all of that stuff. But not really deeply in politics. As I said, my relationship with him was purely – it didn’t matter – whatever is comfortable. You want to come for dinner? The office would call, the president is coming for dinner. Fine, we’ll make arrangements. And every time he came to the restaurant, I’d try to leave him alone and there is ninety-nine times out of a hundred, “Sit down and talk to us.” He wanted to sit down and catch up with all of the stuff. We talked a lot about other things. Politics – only when elections – opinions – what’s happening, but never deeply enough that he…Maybe he’d tell some stories about certain things that happened that’s not secret or whatever at the White House. I miss him, really miss him.

Smith: Do you remember the last time you saw him?
Morus: Yeah, I came to see him here in the office, probably nine months ago. Nine months before…

Smith: So he was still in the office?

Morus: Could be a year I came here to see him – over a year. Maybe longer, I don’t know. When he took ill and I knew he was ill, I stayed away. I communicated stuff with Penny and with Richard Casenbach(?). When he became ill, no, I didn’t see him. I saw him before. I came down here to visit. He was sitting there and I was sitting here. No, I think I came once to the house, too, after that. I’m trying to remember. I don’t know. Probably.

Smith: But you never saw him ill?

Morus: No, not really ill, no. I did not see him ill. And thank God I didn’t.

Smith: He was a workaholic, wasn’t he?

Morus: Oh my God. Never stops. Never stops – always on the go. I told him one time, I said, “Mr. President, when you going to slow down?” This is a few years back. He said, “Why slow down? I’m feeling good, I’m enjoying myself and I’m making money.”

Smith: He took some grief about making money.

Morus: He took a lot of grief, unfairly so. Unlike Clinton, he made hundreds of millions of dollars and they criticized him, but not to the extreme that they criticized him.

Smith: Because he did a lot of charity work – President Ford. And of course, he had to raise that money to build that library-museum back in Michigan, which seemed like an awful lot of money.

Morus: I was there for the grand opening. I was there when they had the whole dignitaries. As a matter of fact, we were his personal guests. We went there and spent about three or four days. It was raining like – whatever.

Smith: What do you remember from the funeral? Because you were in Grand Rapids for the funeral?
Morus: No, no, no. I’m sorry. I wasn’t in Grand Rapids, I was in Washington. I didn’t go to Grand Rapids. I saw you speaking someplace else.

Smith: Were you surprised when you heard of his death?

Morus: Not really. We thought we knew it was coming. I was constantly communicating and knowing what’s happening all the time.

Smith: For someone who never knew him like you did – it’s a name in a textbook, or an old film clip – what should people know about Gerald Ford that maybe they don’t know?

Morus: That he was probably the truest human being that’s ever lived. The most honest man that ever lived. His honesty and integrity was so unbelievable that he was unwavering and he treated everybody the same. He was so phenomenally that way – at least this is my experience with him all along. He didn’t have to pretend. He didn’t have whatever – he was truly the man that he was. He was right there with the humility, with a really simplistic way of doing things – he wasn’t pretentious, he was all of the above. He was truly a great man because he was a great man.

Smith: Do you miss him?

Morus: Oh, yeah. Often times I think about it. We talk about it and I say many times, I’m the only one left out of the crowd. Seriously, because there was Jerry Ford, there was Leonard Firestone, Dee Keaton, the foursome. We were there all the time, we done a lot of things together, we used to bring a golf teacher together, the four of us and go play and take lessons for a couple, three days. And I say, all my friends are gone. I am the only one still.

Smith: But how lucky you are to have had those experiences.

Morus: How could you describe that? How could you describe that, especially a kid that came from the old country that was penniless and homeless and couldn’t even speak hardly any English? To come to this country and ended up being to that level, is beyond…and for me to be there and to continue to be there, is something that I cannot – I can’t describe the feeling about it. It was
unbelievable. How did I do that? Why did I do that? Why did it happen to me? Why did I have that experience? Lucky, I guess.

Smith: I don’t think it was just luck. That’s perfect, that’s a perfect rap. Thank you.