Smith: Thank you so much for doing this. I want to get into your pre-Ford history, but I’d like to ask you first, something that I ask a lot of people upfront. Can you tell us something about Gerald Ford that might surprise people?

Keiser: I don’t know people’s perception of President Ford. I found him to be very gregarious, pleasant. My contacts with him led me to believe that he was very self-confident. He was very happy with who he was, and I’ll tell you why. I think that getting into the stories a little earlier, when Mrs. Ford had her surgery at Bethesda, cancer surgery, there was a photograph of President Ford and I coming out of Bethesda Hospital and it was just us – the two of us. Some reporters looked at that – “Look how Keiser looks like Jerry Ford. Keiser’s a decoy.” Obviously the Secret Service has assigned a decoy to Jerry Ford. I was there before he came and stayed after he left, but nonetheless that came out in the Washington Post.

And I remember vividly when I read it in the paper we were at Camp David and I thought, uh-oh, this is going to be a problem because most politicians, most famous people would not want someone around them who was getting some publicity as well. Especially an outside staff-type person who they did not necessarily hire or choose. And so I really thought this was going to be a problem for myself and the Secret Service. I heard on the radio that he was out taking a walk in Camp David. So I purposely went out to encounter him – I knew where he was. I said, “Good morning sir.” He said, “You seen the papers?” I said, “Yes, sir. I have.” He said, “Well, what did you think?” I said, “More importantly, sir, what did you think?” He said, “I thought it was funny.” Didn’t bother him a bit. He was so self-confident and happy with himself that it didn’t threaten him in any way and it was lost between he and I.

Through the months there were times when it could have become an issue. I remember in Japan, we arrived and I got off Air Force One first and you could
hear the cameras clicking, clicking, clicking. Threatening, but it was just something that didn’t bother him a bit, and I think it would have other people who were less secure, or something about their personality would not have accepted that. I always respected him a great deal; still do.

Smith: Did you ever see his temper?

Keiser: Yes.

Smith: It’s been described to us as akin to a summer thunderstorm. Something that would erupt out of nowhere and very quickly subside.

Keiser: The only place I would see it is on the golf course.

Smith: Was it verbal?

Keiser: Yeah.

Smith: He never wrapped a club around a tree or anything?

Keiser: No, not the times that I remember. But you knew it was coming. The back of his neck would get red, and the more senior staff members would suddenly disappear. And all of a sudden, it starts. Yeah, I remember vividly several times at Burning Tree. We had a little caddy one time; it was a neighborhood boy who was very aggressive about clubbing for the President, he was going to be a good caddy. And he [Ford] was having a bad round – I think he was in the sand probably about seven out of the first eight or nine holes, and he hit a shot that was obviously going in the sand again, and he exploded. And you had to push this little caddy up to him, “Go, go, go.” He said, “No, he’s mad.” I said, “Well, no idea. Yeah, I saw it. In my mind, it would have been inappropriate.

Smith: It was directed as much against himself rather than other people.

Keiser: Oh, yes. Right.
Smith: Penny Circle tells wonderful stories about how out in Rancho Mirage they could tell if it was a three “God damn it” day, or a four “God damn it.” That was the worst.

Keiser: My experience with President Ford was just the White House – just his two years in the White House. When he left for California, I stayed in the White House and moved on in my job to President Carter.

Smith: Let’s back up. Tell us about the world that led you to cross paths with Gerald Ford. Because obviously, you’d been in this very responsible position before he ever showed up.

Keiser: Yes. I was assigned to widow Jackie Kennedy in 1963. She moved to Georgetown after ten months. Then she moved to New York. I didn’t have to go to New York. I went over to the White House, LBJ’s time, as a very junior agent. I spent two and half years traveling at that time with Lynda Bird Johnson, the eldest daughter. Then I moved off of that assignment.

Smith: That was before she was married to Chuck Robb?

Keiser: Indeed, yes.

Smith: That must pose unique challenges.

Keiser: Historically, well, that’s when she was dating.

Smith: Her and George Hamilton.

Keiser: You’ve done a lot of research, haven’t you? Not fair. And, yes, went on their honeymoon – she and Chuck. Still friends. And I moved off of that assignment and to President Johnson. Moved through several promotions within the Secret Service at the Presidential Protective Division. And President Nixon came in – I continued to move through several positions, without being specific on what they are, because of my seniority. And in 1973, I think it was, I was promoted to Special Agent in charge of the Presidential Protective Division. That was under President Nixon, and in terms of that assignment, it was just about a year before he resigned. And so I
held that position all through the height of Watergate and saw pretty vividly the impact that it was having on President Nixon.

Smith: Did the wheels of government, at least at that level, grind to a halt:

Keiser: I’m going to say the contrary. I was impressed. I saw the continuity so close that I remember the day that President Nixon resigned. I came to work that day, to protect the President. I saw him get on the helicopter, I heard his speech, I saw him get on the helicopter and fly out. I went to the Oval Office to see President Ford sworn in. I’m still protecting the President of the United States – it’s just a different president. The transition to me, within the White House, is remarkable. You come to work in the morning and there are people in the West Wing; phones are ringing, people are sitting at their desks that you are familiar with. You come in the next morning, the phones are still ringing, the desks are there, but there are all different people. It literally happens that quickly.

Smith: Let me ask you because on that morning, you had these two extraordinary, historic events. Each took place in the East Room a couple of hours apart. One was the farewell; the other was the swearing in. What was the mood?

Keiser: My personal mood was very emotional. When it’s happening, it’s just happening today. That is what today is bringing. Now, you reflect on history – it’s amazing what happened that day. I felt what you were seeing was one man’s life and career crashing, and another man’s life and career changing completely, beyond perhaps what he even imagined. But for me, it’s just – you’ve got to keep them safe.

Smith: Because of the incredibly emotional feelings around the country, the polarization, the animosity, the crowds outside the gate and all that – did Watergate and particularly the end of the Nixon presidency pose unique challenges in terms of protecting the President?

Keiser: It’s hard for me to say. More reclusive, less public - in that sense it made it easier. At times I feel as though he was willing to take greater chances security-wise than I was totally comfortable with.
Smith: The trip to Egypt – were you on that?

Keiser: I was, indeed. He and I had words about that. The way those things happen is – I knew it was going to happen. My advance agent in Egypt told me it was going to happen, so we’re trying to fight it back at this level, back in Washington. At that time General Haig was the chief of staff and was my main point of contact, day to day. You don’t go to the president every time, you just don’t do that for a lot of reasons – staff reasons. You start to threaten the staff – who was this guy – we didn’t hire him. So there was a sense of relationship you have within the staff. If you let the staff think that you think you are staff, then you’ve made a mistake in my impression – because you are not. And for them to accept you – they can push you aside, you could miss meetings, you could miss information you were going to get. You want them to accept you, but not as a peer. I don’t think I’m a staff member, he didn’t pick me.

But anyway, I had several discussions with General Haig and literally, on the flight over there, again – I went to General Haig and said, “You know, this is really a very bad situation for us to be in. There are going to be a million people – this is going to be an open car. It’s going to be like we’re sitting in the inside of a beehive, and there is something that we consider – he is sitting side by side with President Sadat – and it may not be our president who is the target.” He said, “I agree with you, Dick, I agree with you. But the President is the court of last resort.” So General Haig and I went in and we talked to President Nixon. And my best recollection of some thirty years is, “You’ve got to understand this,” he said, “This trip is good for your president. And I’ll do anything, I’ll do anything, to make it a success.” And your comment is, “Yes, sir.” And you do the best you can, and we came through it. That whole trip was one of great concern. So much so, that he sensed our tension so that we didn’t have words beyond the other stops.

But on the plane coming back, returning home, he came back to the section where we sat and made a point to say, “Gentlemen, thank you very much. I
appreciate what you did for your president. And I appreciate how you felt and I felt very safe and I thank you very much.”

Smith: That was Haig or Nixon?

Keiser: No, that was Nixon who came back to our area. So it was obvious he knew it was tense between us. And I think, knowing President Nixon, I think that was the best he could do on an apology.

Smith: Do you think he was a shy man?

Keiser: Yes.

Smith: He once said, famously, that he was an introvert in an extrovert’s profession. Which suggests a degree of self-knowledge that is not universal among politicians. I’ve often thought the most remarkable thing about the Nixon presidency, given that temperament, was not how it ended, but that it happened at all. There are those who think he really was a closet intellectual who didn’t want people to think of him in those terms. But the whole retreat to Camp David, even the funeral…his hero was Charles De Gaulle. And I thought in so many ways he patterned himself after De Gaulle. Vietnamization was Algeria, Camp David was Colombay. Even the funeral with limited official participation, replicated De Gaulle’s.

Keiser: I’m not a professional analyst, but during the height of Watergate, the last several months, he spent a lot of time in San Clemente or Key Biscayne. And an interesting relationship that I saw was between he and Beebe Rebozo. Beebe could play President Nixon like a piano. I’m not comfortable putting this out, but what would be normal – President Nixon would call for a car. He’d say, “Bring the car around, Beebe and I are going to take a ride.” We’d bring the car around and I’d say, “Where would you like to go?” He’d say, “I just want to be back in an hour.” Which meant he didn’t care – about thirty minutes wandering, turn around and come back. Now, there would be times in that car when he and Beebe would sit there for an hour and wouldn’t say a word. There would be other times and they would sit and talk continuously. I don’t know how Beebe knew that – how to do that. On the houseboat that
Beebe had, on Key Biscayne, the same thing. They’d go for a cruise, President Nixon sometimes would go up on the flying bridge and sit by himself and Beebe would be down. Other times, they would be together. I don’t know how Beebe was able to sense that relationship. It was mysterious to me.

Again, it would not be uncommon for the President to say, “Keiser,” President Nixon never called anybody that I remember by first name. Haldeman, Erlichman, more privately he may call him Bob, something like that. But always out, it was, “Hey, Bull.” And he’d say, “Get the music on the radio, you know what I like, see what you can find.” And we’d say, “Yes, sir.” We find something. “That’s fine, that’s great. I like that a lot. That’s good music. Now, listen you, when the news comes on, you turn that radio off. Do you hear me?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “I mean it, not one word.” “Yes, sir.” So therefore, I think he had isolated himself from the news.

Smith: Let me ask you - the portrait, and particularly the one Woodward and Bernstein created in The Final Days – I don’t know if you ever saw the Oliver Stone movie, which was over the top, even by Oliver Stone standards. The caricature of the barely functioning and semi-alcoholic president - is that, in fact, a caricature?

Keiser: I’m not sure what their caricature was, to be honest with you, Richard. The only movie I allowed myself to see was Nixon-Frost. I wanted to see just how they portrayed him, and I thought they did a fairly good job. They picked up some aspects of his personality that I thought were unique to him. He appeared uncomfortable with people, okay? And I think the way he tried to make himself friendly to people is small talk.

Smith: And he really didn’t excel at small talk.

Keiser: No, that’s right. And sometimes it was inappropriate. But that’s the way he dealt with people, and I sensed they picked that up in that film. The fact that he was trying to make himself –

Smith: One of the boys –
Keiser: With Frost.

Smith: Exactly. Trying to make an instant connection.

Keiser: That’s it. And bring himself into his world. And I think, frankly – we’re getting way beyond President Ford – but I think frankly, that explains some of the profanity. “Expletives deleted.” My memory is that he did talk like that, but it was not hardcore. Never in public. I thought well maybe that’s the way he thinks men talk to each other.

Smith: Exactly.

Keiser: And he’s trying to do that. That was my analysis of it, and as I say, I have no training and no right to say that other than just observing it.

Smith: Did you see him happy? I mean, he doesn’t seem to be someone who…

Keiser: No, I don’t know how to assess that. The thing that amazed me is that the relationship between he and Mrs. Nixon; very respectful of each other, but I don’t remember seeing a great deal of emotion between the two. And yet he broke up at her funeral. He just couldn’t handle it. I was sorry to see it, but I was glad to see it. Because they obviously did have a relationship.

Smith: Let me ask you, in those final months [of the Nixon presidency], Gerald Ford is in this situation, an almost impossible situation where he’s walking a tightrope, wanting to defend the president, and yet not totally sacrifice his own reputation in the process. He can’t overtly prepare for what he hopes won’t happen. Informally, was there speculation? When you go off duty and you see what’s going on, do you allow yourselves to imagine where this may be going?

Keiser: That’s an individual thing. I did. There is an inevitability about it. You knew it was going to happen; you just didn’t know when or how. The one thing I do remember is during the hearings, some of the staff members, Mr. Haldeman – I never had any problem with Mr. Haldeman or Mr. Erlichman – but they were not warm and fuzzy. And my dealings with them were - I never had a problem. But during the hearings – and you understand, the agents are
standing outside these office doors in the West Wing – the doors are closed, but you can hear behind the doors – so all the TV sets were on and you could get a sense of if the hearing, if Mr. Haldeman was doing well – “Hey, that’s it, this is great.” Cheering.

Smith: Almost like an athletic event.

Keiser: And so our people were starting to get involved in that. And I had a meeting – I remember vividly – I said, “Hey, gentlemen, we don’t have a dog in this fight. We don’t care how it’s going. Our responsibility is to protect the president. These people behind these doors are now very, very sensitive, and the world is dividing us as who is with us and who is against us? And we are neither. So you keep any comments you have to yourselves.”

Smith: That raises a huge issue that obviously affects every agent at some point. How do you define and maintain that relationship? To outsiders, you appear to be almost part of the family – but you are not part of the family. And that’s important.

Keiser: Yes it is.

Smith: But you have this unique bond that is developed. Yet there are lines that you do not overstep. Is that something taught? Is it something you are trained in? Is it just a question of judgment and experience?

Keiser: That would be my answer. There is no manual.

Smith: And presumably, it is somewhat different with each president.

Keiser: It is.

Smith: Depending on their temperament.

Keiser: What I touched upon earlier, what I was trying to say is – first of all, you don’t want to be their friend. You want their respect. And how you get that is just by being professional because they don’t select you. Interesting – one time I was a very young agent and I was being criticized very harshly by someone that I was protecting, and my boss, at that time, heard the same
discussion. I had made a decision that they didn’t approve of. And after it was all over, my boss came to me and he said, “Dick, here’s the situation. You work for me, not them. And I say you made the right decisions. That’s all you have to worry about. And if you are going to be in this business for very long, you just have to understand that. And there will be times when you may think you are being criticized harshly or unfairly – that’s the job. That’s the job – protect them.”

President Ford, when he became president, he had vice presidential detail agents with him, and when the transition was made, they stayed with the new vice president, Rockefeller, and the Nixon people just went around President Ford. That’s just the way it happened. No one even asked why it’s happening, it just happened. When President Carter came in it was the same thing. Now it might be perceived publicly to be more critical because there was a political – there was the Republican-Democrat issue. That’s not an issue to the Secret Service. That is no issue at all. It should never be. And that’s the reason they make the transitions the way they try to make them, so you are not identified with an individual or a party.

Smith: Let me ask you: you are right, once he became vice president he had agents, but he was unique in not having spent a life trying to become president. with Did it take time for the family to get used to this relatively new transforming presence in their lives?

Keiser: I don’t know. You’d have to ask them. I didn’t sense any friction or tension between he and I, or he and the Secret Service. He was the sort of individual, I think, that handled our presence. And you have to understand, the presence of the Secret Service is sometimes relatively negative. We’re the last people who see him at night, and the first people to see him in the morning, other than the house staff. And obviously, our presence could be considered morbid. “The only reason they are here is because someone is going to try to hurt me today.” And that’s a perhaps “morbid” reminder. But if you are going around perhaps “apologizing” for that presence, that’s not good either.
Smith: Let’s face it, having been on the Warren Commission, he had a keen appreciation…

Keiser: Oh, he and I…

Smith: Did he talk about…?

Keiser: Yeah, we got along very well. I liked President Ford a great deal; very easy to get along with.

Smith: I was going to say: what did you like about him?

Keiser: I’m not saying I disliked the others – he was just a gregarious fellow. And I think he was very easy to meet and a lot of people were intimidated by the fact that he was president. But if he was in a room with one person who he didn’t know – one agent, he would walk up to the agent and say, “I’m Jerry Ford.” I think that is his way of dealing with people’s presence. I feel it made him uncomfortable to be in someone’s presence he didn’t know. Just a simple handshaking. Other people could deal with our presence more abstractly. Nixon – he didn’t do that.

Smith: He liked people.

Keiser: Oh, he did, and he showed it very, very visibly. And therefore, you like him – you felt very comfortable in his presence, beyond the relationship of agent/president. Yeah, several times we’d be out on the road or something like this, and the Secret Service would get in his way, or something we were doing he didn’t like, and I’d say, “Mr. President, that’s a recommendation of the Warren Commission.” And he’d say, “Really?” And I’d say, “Yes, sir. That’s our bible.” When I did that – I mentioned that about two or three times one day and he said, “Dick, are you sure?” He said, “I don’t remember that.” I said, “I dipped into that well.” That was the end of it.

My great memory of President Ford – you know, we had the two assassination attempts – I was not there, at either one of them. The first one, Squeaky Fromme, I was on annual leave. Came back and he went to Sacramento, and at that time I was at the Federal Executive Institute, going
through a schooling. I felt very bad I was not there. The Secret Service – nobody ever understood that – to this day. Why President Ford? He was the good guy, he was vanilla ice cream, an Eagle Scout, going to make us feel better about ourselves. Why women; why President Ford; why California?

Smith: Well, maybe, in retrospect, it was just the radical climate of the times and a couple of kooks, who, if it hadn’t been him, then it might have been someone else.

Keiser: Well, you don’t know. But why he became a focal point, comparing his image to President Nixon’s, you wonder why President Ford became the focal point. No one can ever explain that to my satisfaction. I remember – you have a lot of conversations with the president – and I remember the inaugural day, an interesting thing – the right rear seat of the limousine is the seat of protocol. That’s where the president always sits. I don’t know who decided that, I don’t know why, but that’s the way it is. It could be changed if anyone wanted to, but it doesn’t seem as though it ever has. And so you know how the ceremony takes place; the incoming president comes to the White House around eleven, eleven-thirty, they have tea, coffee, this sort of thing and then they come out the front – the North Portico – which is the formal entrance.

And by this time the press and everybody are there and the two presidents and their ladies walk to the limousine, where the limousine is sitting with its door open, agents standing there. There are these two presidents, the outgoing and the incoming, and President Ford turned to me and he says, “Dick, where do I sit?” And I said, “You’re still president, you sit here.” And he said, “That’s right. Jimmy, you walk around.” I thought, I’m glad I came up with that answer – that is the answer, but there is nothing that trains you for that.

Smith: We’ve been told one of the most emotional moments in any presidency is on the morning of the 20th – or in some cases, it may be the day before – when the president and first lady say goodbye to the permanent staff. Did you witness that?

Keiser: Oh yes. I rode in the limousine with the two to the Capitol.
Smith: Did they talk?

Keiser: Yeah, nothing…

Smith: Small talk?

Keiser: Yeah, I don’t remember anything significant. It was only a five or ten minute drive up there. I walked. I made a point to walk with President Ford to the helicopter, knowing full well that I was going to go back to President Carter and make the inaugural. But I made a point to walk with him and tell him goodbye and wish him well and thank him for everything. He did not like losing, and from what I remember, from the outside on election day, the anticipation was that he would win. That seemed to be the way the emotion was going.

Smith: He had all the momentum.

Keiser: At least in his presence. Because you know he voted in Grand Rapids and flew back. So I sensed that the emotion with everybody was, this is going to be great. And I’m not saying he was a bad loser, I’m saying he did not like to lose. And if you look through his life pattern, he did not lose that much.

Smith: We’ve been told by more than one person that he said afterwards, “I can’t believe I lost to a peanut farmer.”

Keiser: I don’t know that, I don’t remember hearing that.

Smith: It’s been suggested that it took him a while to bounce back.

Keiser: I think that – that’s my impression – although I didn’t see him. I don’t think I saw President Ford after that day, from my memory. Mrs. Ford I saw some time later. But President Ford – oh, I’m sorry – I saw him when he came out to the Crosby Golf Tournament in California. I did come out there a time or two to see him play golf and renew the friendship.

Smith: But the period between the election and the inauguration, you were with him, just as you had been. Was that a rough time? We sensed that it was harder for him than it was for her.
Keiser: I was not with him as intensely as I was before the election. The day after the election, myself and the director of the Secret Service flew down to Plains to meet President Carter. And the transition, as far as the Secret Service was concerned, took place that day. “This is Dick Keiser. From now on, he and his people will be responsible for your protection. He will start to move his people into your detail.” In essence, he has to share his people between President Ford – the transition was not made – everybody moved to Carter – we moved in slowly and filled in from the top down. And the presidential White House people would move in for short periods of time and go home. So, in that time, to answer your question, my mind was focused on President Carter, still watching President Ford – but I mean, it was not as intense. But it was very emotional telling him goodbye. It really was.

Smith: And how did he acknowledge that?

Keiser: He just said thank you for everything. But he is very sensitive. My wife could tell you – shortly before he did leave, he said, “Dick, I would like to meet your family. Would you bring them in? I took you away on a lot of holidays and I’d like to say thank you.” And so, yes, the family came in and he spent a very nice time with them and gave me a football that his boys had had and gave it to my boys. So, yeah, very personable fellow.

Smith: We were told that the Fords on holidays and especially Christmas time, when they’d go out to Vail, would try to be as sensitive as possible to the fact that their agents had lives of their own and families, and would try to minimize the demands.

Keiser: That’s true. As a matter of fact, every president that I remember had a similar sort of concerns. The last thing I felt we could do is to show in any way that we felt that way, too. We are here because we want to be, it’s our assignment, and you don’t owe us that. But you try to be humble and say thank you very much. I’ll tell you a famous story about President Ford skiing. The first trip we made to Vail as president we were en route flying to Colorado and he calls me up to his compartment, and he says, “Dick, I really like skiing.” I said, “Yes, sir, I understand that.” He said, “I’ve skied there for a lot of years and I
really, really enjoy it.” Now I know what is coming. And I said, “Yes, sir, I understand that.” And I said the agents have a ski team and they are all agents who can ski, better than you. They will be around you, we’re going to ski patrol every morning. Every morning the agents in the ski patrol are going to go out and they are going to choose the lift and they are going to choose the run. There will be a different one every day; we’ll choose it, you just go.

“Fine. Oh, that’s a good idea.” And I said, “Another thing I would like you to do, if you can, if you have the chance, change your outfit. Don’t wear the same clothing every day. Change with the boys – jackets and all that.” “Oh, that’s a good idea. Good idea.” So Larry Buendorf was the skier – very good skier – and he had bought a brand new ski outfit. I’ll never forget, it was a bright yellow jacket – canary - and he wore that every day. So on the way back, we were flying home after vacation and President Ford called me up to the compartment and he said, “Dick, I really, really enjoyed skiing. I felt very safe. I thought the guys did a great job. I really appreciate that. It was just great.” He said, “I do have one question.” “What’s that?” “Well, you know, Larry wore this yellow coat.” And I said, “Yes, sir.” And he said, “Well, it was a good idea that I change mind periodically, but all you had to do was see the guy in the yellow jacket and you’d know I was the guy next to him.” And I said, “Yes, sir.”

My point is, they are watching. They are sensitive to what you are doing.

Smith: We heard there were lots of agents who really liked Vail. Vail was a popular destination.

Keiser: Oh, sure. Just like Key Biscayne or San Clemente. I would say that Plains…

Smith: Had its shortcomings.

Keiser: But, yeah, every place has its charm.

Smith: Did you know about the pardon before it happened?

Keiser: No, I don’t think I did. I don’t remember that I did. You kind of tune out. That’s one way to make your presence acceptable is this fact that you are not
listening. You are not hearing a lot of things in the back of the car and this sort of thing. I don’t remember hearing stuff like that or thinking it was significant or anything of it. It didn’t affect my ability to perform my job.

Smith: And the reaction?

Keiser: I don’t remember there was one. I just don’t remember. You know, the people around him were so professional – I really liked Mr. Jim Baker and Dick Cheney. Dick Cheney is still one of my favorite, favorite people. And I’ll say that to anybody at any time and defend it.

Smith: And when you think he was only thirty-four.

Keiser: I know.

Smith: When he became chief of staff.

Keiser: Oh, yes. But very bright and very self-confident. Again, as I said, he was my daily point of contact for any issues that I had, and despite the youth, Dick, we won’t do it that way, or Dick, we won’t do it this way, or that’s not a good idea. “Okay.” Now you have to understand, there are times, there are ways that I can get alone with the president, very easily. Very easily I can walk him home at night to the colonnade to his room. You’ve got him alone there, to his apartment, you can pick him up in the morning, walk him to the office, you’ve got him one on one there, you’ve got him in the car – nine times out of the ten, you’re pretty much alone unless he’s got a staff member with him. If the staff perceives that you are taking advantage of that time alone, then it threatens them because there is a system that they want to impose for their way for you to deal with them.

Smith: What about the other side of the coin though? Some people are just kind of, as you say, gregarious. And “good morning” and chit chat on the way to the office. If he initiates – and again, I don’t know whether he did or didn’t…

Keiser: I remember vividly with President Ford, he was living in Alexandria and it was several weeks before he actually moved into the White House. And the first couple of nights that he was in the White House, I walked purposely, to
make myself present - if there were any issues that he was having, make myself available - I’d walk with him to the living quarters, that short distance. And I remember several times when he said, “Dick, come upstairs, let’s have a drink.” And I said, “No, sir. Thank you very much, but I’ve got to get home,” or something, and after several times the invitations stopped. But that, in my perception, would have been improper. That’s too close. That’s closer than I want to be with him. And that’s closer than I want other people to see me with him.

Smith: Interesting. Because we’ve been told on weekends he’d tell the butlers to come on in and watch the football game. That kind of thing. He was just that way.

Keiser: That’s right. And I’m sure had I gone upstairs it wouldn’t have meant anything at all between he and I. But to the people who were aware of it – that’s not normal. That’s not the relationship that the agents had with the people they protect.

Smith: What do you think is the largest public misconception about the relationship between agents and those that they protect?

Keiser: I’m not sure I know.

Smith: I think the public is fascinated by the Secret Service.

Keiser: I think probably the biggest perception is, in thirty years I’ve made talks, I talk about going to Lynda’s wedding. You see an awful lot and you hear an awful lot. And you become aware of these people’s warts, so to speak. But that’s yours. And I think sometimes agents coming out and talking about presidents who are dead, they’ve still got children, they’ve still got grandchildren. I do not want to be part of that. I don’t know of any warts. But I think the biggest perception that the public may have is that the Secret Service is a violation of their privacy. How could these people…

Smith: Particularly teenage children.
Keiser: But when you are part of that circle and you see how Americans treat their politicians and their famous people, if it were not for the Secret Service, beyond the safety thing, there is the fact of privacy. You ensure by your presence that the president is going to be handled in a certain way. He is not available for just every Tom, Dick, and Harry to come up and shake hands with him. If he wants to, fine; we can control that. But I think we are a privacy fence, if nothing else, around him.

Smith: That’s fascinating. The trip in Sacramento, he was given the option that it was a nice day, do you want to walk through the park? And he did.

Keiser: He started it.

Smith: Exactly. After the second attempt, I’m curious as to what, if any, changes were made – would they have been less likely to give him that option?

Keiser: Yeah, right. And he became…

Smith: Did he become more conscious of…

Keiser: Not outwardly. We were in Ohio during the campaign at a university which I don’t remember, but it was a gymnasium with seating up above the gymnasium floor. And after the talk the students just kind of crowded around him. Suddenly I remember some of the coeds jumped up on their boyfriend’s shoulders and were taking pictures. He standing at the podium, very casual, and all of a sudden – POP – and something hit me in the face and I saw him kind of flinch. And I turned my body in front of him and pushed him down. He went down relatively easy. In the meantime, someone said on the radio, “It’s okay, it’s okay. It was not a shot.” So I said, “Mr. President, it’s okay. There’s no problem but we want to leave right now.” He said, “Okay.”

What it was is some girl had a camera, these magic cubes, this plastic thing had exploded and some of it had caught me in the face and caught him, but it was a very sharp “POP,” and I do remember that. Every day you are concerned, you want to bring him home. I remember that. But I don’t
remember that he ever, ever showed any sense that he didn’t trust us and that we weren’t doing our best. He was not fearful.

Smith: We’ve been told that he would sometimes, not uniformly, wear a bulletproof vest.

Keiser: Sometimes. This was before the magnetometer and some of the aids that we have now.

Smith: But in terms of the agency, were there any changes implemented as a result of…or was there just a kind of general ratcheting up one’s sensitivity, for lack of a better word?

Keiser: I think, internally, we had to do some things because there was a Congressional investigation, [Peter] Rodino. You had to say you were doing something, I’m sure from the active White House division, where I was, there was not a great deal that we had to change. We might have worked closer, we might have kept him out of the crowd more often. At campaign times they get hyper. If you’re behind you try harder, and therefore are willing to take more chances. And that part of the relationship - no, they reviewed their intelligence gathering, they reviewed their intelligence analysis.

Smith: I guess Sara Jane Moore’s name was at least in somebody’s file.

Keiser: Yeah. She was interviewed by an agent the night before, who decided she was not of interest. Which was determined by the Secret Service at that time; not of interest, not of protective interest. And you look at the profile – she was in her fifties, married to a doctor – externally, she didn’t fit the profile. However, after she acted, then you say, well, wait a minute, she does have some problems that we didn’t know about. And that’s the pattern of the people we dealt with through those years. They are the grey people, the people that you walk by in the street and don’t notice.

Smith: Yeah, exactly.

Keiser: And they function marginally in society. But you can’t go around arresting everybody who is like that. And after they’ve done something – there’s the
pattern right there – this is obvious. But no, I found in my relationships with all the presidents, I don’t know whether they know this, but you need to test the temperature of the relationship between you and he. How do you do that? I don’t know. Again, there’s no manual. I know how I did it; he would ask to do something and I would, in some cases, say, “No, sir.” Now, you have to understand the environment when you are out in public. You’ve got the president, you’ve got the White House staff, you’ve got the White House press. If you’re out in public, you’ve got the local press, you’ve got the VIPs, the people that he’s greeting, you’ve got the police, you’ve got the agents.

So if he says, “Dick, I want to go over and shake hands with those people.” And I say, “No,” and he acquiesces, he can’t do that – I mean, the press knows he’s weak. The White House staff is going to say, “What is he doing?” The locals say, “They let the Secret Service push this guy around.” So, no, you don’t do that. You try to set it up to where he asks you to do that. “Dick, can I go do this, can I go do that?” And if it is extemporaneous, that’s what you want. I don’t remember any time where I wasn’t asked. And it’s not “Can I?” It’s, “Dick, that’s a nice looking crowd over there, some nice people over there.” “Yes, sir,” or you say, “Well, no sir, Mr. President,” this is where I’m trying to apply my test of the relationship. “No, sir, we’re behind schedule,” or, “This is a very small police department and we don’t really have enough security there with that crowd.” It’s giving him any reason to acquiesce to my request and still save face and not appear weak. It’s “Okay, Dick, I understand.”

Smith: It’s diplomacy, it’s tact. Let me ask you just to make sure. I think I know what the answer it, but is it accurate to say that Larry Buendorf, at the very least, prevented Squeaky Fromme from getting off a volley?

Keiser: Oh, indeed. I was leader of that detail at that time, but I was not present. But I will tell you this, in both cases, the agents reacted exactly the way they should have. If you look at Sara Jane Moore, in San Francisco, they got him down in the armored car. The agents that were with him didn’t leave. They didn’t go across the street and attack her. That’s somebody else’s responsibility. The
agents with him, cover and evacuate, evacuate, evacuate. Get out. So you look at him standing on the car and as soon as he was in, they were gone.

Smith: And then, is it safe to say, that the bystander who saw Sara Jane Moore, saw the gun, in some ways played the role of Larry Buendorf in deflecting – I mean, he got to her physically?

Keiser: Yeah, you can say that. That’s the way it happened. But in terms of the agents who were with the President, the inner circle, that’s another issue. That’s for someone else, very frankly, to deal with. Their responsibility is the body; cover and evacuate. Get him in and go with him. And they reacted just as they should have. The question I think can’t be answered is why was Squeaky Fromme in that area with this gun? Did she have an idea of his itinerary, and she was going to attack him in front of the statehouse when he got out of the car? Was that her intention? Or did she hang out in that park and always had that gun and she had no intention? Or did we smoke her out by him walking, changing his schedule and surprising her to where she couldn’t react as she wanted to?

Smith: It’s the classic coincidence versus conspiracy.

Keiser: And of course, she’s not going to say. No one knows the answer to that.

Smith: I remember seeing Sara Jane Moore on the Today Show. I guess she is harmless at this stage in life – but I was struck that no one ever asked about the Ford family. The questions were all about her and where she was coming from. And no one ever asked, “Have you ever written to the Ford family?” or “What would you say to the Ford family?”

Keiser: Yeah, I don’t think – it’s been so long that I was out – I don’t look for a pound of flesh. I’m sorry, I don’t understand why those women did that to President Ford. There’s nothing in my knowledge of President Ford’s life or conduct that would have…

Smith: And that’s it. I think it was just that randomness. And to try to construct a logical theory…
Keiser: There is none.

Smith: Let’s back up. Let me ask you: I take it that it’s safe to say that he was a pretty even tempered guy.

Keiser: Oh, my daily contact with him? Oh, he never lost his temper to me.

Smith: But I mean in terms of highs and lows. I would think Lyndon Johnson would be a very mercurial figure.

Keiser: What would make you say that?

Smith: And I would think they would be very different temperaments.

Keiser: President Ford from my aspect – I’m sure he had good days and bad days – and I know that politically there were issues he was dealing with that were emotional to him and very difficult.

Smith: The fall of Saigon – that must have permeated the White House.

Keiser: Yeah.

Smith: Do you have general memories of that period?

Keiser: What I remember more is him flying out to – where was it, someplace – meeting an airplane of orphans that they brought back.

Smith: In San Francisco.

Keiser: Oh, gosh. Yeah, stuff like that, even as an outsider, is very emotional to me.

Smith: Was it for him?

Keiser: Yeah, I’m sure it was. Things like that I remember more than anything.

Smith: Remember, after Saigon fell, Congress wanted to pull the plug. I think everyone wanted to try to forget that we’d ever been there. And he put together this crazy quilt coalition and said we have a moral obligation, as a nation of immigrants and refugees, to open our arms. And they brought out
the first wave of 100,000 or so of Vietnam refugees. And part of that was Operation Baby Lift, I think it was called.

Keiser: Oh, yeah, I remember that. I remember getting on that plane. I didn’t involve myself with politics that much in that sense of what he was doing. It was just another day that I came to work in that sense. Do you understand what I mean? You’re not in all those meetings that were taking place. In that sense, anything you hear about that you might have heard in the car, or picked up from talking to staff members, or something like that. But you are not in those meetings where that’s really taking place.

Smith: You must have observed that because he was a jock and really enjoyed being around athletes - meeting athletes, that sort of thing.

Keiser: His old teammates – he’d have them back. And I think that’s one thing – I had through the years, I think, overheard some conversation – things that did bother him. Number one: I think that there were inferences made publicly that he wasn’t very smart, and that he was clumsy. And his retort, not publicly, but around his ________, he said, “I’m a graduate from Yale. I’ve got a law degree from Yale. And I was an all-American football player.” The criticism that he was getting, he obviously thought was unfair. But he was not going to come out publicly and say that. He was too great for that.

Smith: The whole Chevy Chase caricature – the stumbling, and all that kind of thing. Were you with him in, I think it was Austria, where he…

Keiser: Yes.

Smith: Can you describe that? It was raining, wasn’t it?

Keiser: Right. I do remember it. Larry Buendorf, Larry was the advance agent in Austria, so I got off the plane first. Got down and I’m talking to Larry – what’s going on, what do you have going, this sort of thing. Right at the base of the steps – and we’re talking. And all of a sudden I could tell that Larry’s not looking at me, he’s looking over my shoulder, and he goes, “Holy, Christ.” And I turn around and there’s President Ford, and he got up. What
happened was he tore the heel off his shoe, kind of stepped down on the step and the heel came off. So he tried to maintain some dignity, and we’re all kind of thinking, this didn’t happen….And he went through reviewing the troops with his heel. And the thing I do remember is trying not to make a big deal about this thing. We get him in the limousine and we start to move and this German police officer comes up to me with his heel – his shoe heel. Awwwwww – and I said, “Get out! Get out of here. We don’t need it.” This thing will just go away. But that’s the memory of it. I don’t understand it.

Smith: Well, part of it was he was holding an umbrella over Mrs. Ford.

Keiser: Right, yeah. He just mis-stepped, which we’ve all done and the steel caught the heel and literally tore the heel off his shoe. But I felt bad that I didn’t see it and wasn’t there. He probably would have knocked us both down. But it was just one of those awkward, awkward situations that you wish didn’t happen. Yeah, I do remember Larry going “Ohhhh.” He couldn’t believe his eyes. It was not funny at the time.

Smith: Was he grim? Was his mood affected in the immediate aftermath of that?

Keiser: We didn’t have words about it. We never talked about it, and nobody else did.

Smith: I’m sure. Did you have much contact with Mrs. Ford?

Keiser: Then? Well, just daily – well, not daily, but when they were together. She had her own detail of agents and I supervised – those people reported to me.

Smith: They gave her a flag for a car – the Bloomer flag?

Keiser: Oh, I don’t remember that.

Smith: She had once, joshingly, complained, “How come he gets a flag and I don’t?”

Keiser: She was a very lovely person, and I respect her to this day and I wish everyday that she does well and feels well. And the whole family; Michael and Jack and Steve and Susan were nice people. Maybe it’s the Midwestern in them. I’m Midwestern.
Smith: And you had the sense—if he was ever tempted to forget where he came from, he was surrounded by people to remind him.

Keiser: Very nice people and pleasant to be around. I don’t remember—he and I never had words, angry words. And he’s a very humble man, I think—Midwestern, I guess.

Smith: Would you accompany them to church?

Keiser: Yeah, if I was working. I didn’t work every day. You talk about flags—President Carter—you went through his campaign. He did not like the imperial presidency; didn’t like big black limousines. President Ford never questioned anything about that environment. On Air Force One he just took it in, accepted it. But the inaugural night—I’d been with him [Carter] eight-ten hours, personally. And in those days we had a little Lincoln street car that was armored. But we brought that up for the limousine—no big black Lincolns or Cadillacs—and had the flags on the fender. We hadn’t even left the south grounds yet. “Mr. President, I need your guidance on the flags.” “What do you mean?” “Well,” I said, “they are symbols of your authority and your office, but it’s your option whether or not you fly them. I just need your intent, your desires.” What did President Ford do? “President Ford flew those flags every time he left the White House.” He said, “I won’t need them after tonight.” “Fine.”

So the first trip we make out of town some weeks later, he’s got a local politician with him—I don’t remember who—but it was the first time as president that he’d been out. We got in the same car, were driving it, we got a motorcade, no flags. Schools were coming out, intersections, and it’s in crowds and shopping centers, and this politician says, “____________“ I said, “Mr. President, they’re not waving at you. They’re waving at the police car and the Secret Service car,” and he said, “But they aren’t waving at you.” And President Carter said, “You know, that’s a shame. I bet some of those people have been out here an hour to see their president go by, and I’ve disappointed them.” He said, “Dick, they don’t seem to see me in this car.” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “Well, what can I do?” I said, “Well, let’s try the flags, sir.” So,
we used the flags every time after that. It was never discussed, but I have an idea in my memory of President Carter; President Carter flew those out of humility. “I don’t really want to do it, but the president _____. President Ford might have flown his out of arrogance.” Nothing was ever said, but that was my analysis.

Smith: Well, that’s the way it was done.

Keiser: That was my analysis of the situation – that’s how he rationalized doing something that President Ford had done.

Smith: That’s funny. A couple things and we’ll wrap up. The ’76 campaign - were you at the convention?

Keiser: Oh, yes.

Smith: I realize you aren’t political, but going into that convention, they were not sure that they had it nailed down.

Keiser: My memory was that it was one state, wasn’t it? If one state went one way…

Smith: I know Mississippi became very important.

Keiser: One thing I remember; one night, one of the first nights, I remember Governor Reagan coming to meet – they met, they had a meeting.

Smith: That’s right - that was after the nomination.

Keiser: Was it? Okay. They had a meeting and my memory of it was kind of intense. I think President Ford’s staff was a little bit edgy. I don’t know – but my feeling was that it was not all that good old boy feeling. But it all took place in a room out of my presence.

Smith: I think that is a very accurate rendition. Reagan’s people had made it absolutely clear that the condition of meeting was that he not be offered the vice presidency.

Keiser: Oh really? That’s not a dimension that I was aware of. But I just sensed that between the two staffs and that sort of thing – you stand back.
Smith: That was a bitter convention. A hard-fought convention.

Keiser: Yes it was – I guess. I guess it was – from the outside. I’d been through several other conventions and you don’t pick up on that.

Smith: So you really are divorced from the political currents.

Keiser: You try to be. And as a matter of fact, when I met President Carter the first time, we were told that from then on – he said, “I know Dick. Oh, I know you from the debates.” He knew I had been with Ford. He knew that. And the debates were kind of an interesting thing because you’ve got Ford coming and his staff, and you’ve got Carter coming and his staff. But both of them have Secret Service agents who all know each other. We’re friends – “Hi, how you doing?” Our rooms are down the same hall. These two staff are really staring down the aisle and the agents are saying, “How you doing? Good to see you. How’s it going?” And I think sometimes that through the years the Secret Service was accused of passing on the schedules and that sort of thing. I guess it’s not a good idea to be too friendly with guys you see.

Smith: That’s interesting.

Keiser: Again, an interesting environment.

Smith: It was the second debate, of course, where the famous Polish gaffe occurred.

Keiser: I do remember that, and I remember afterwards, even amongst his staff he was trying to explain what he meant.

Smith: I want to get your reaction to this, because instantly there were some people, Brent Scowcroft, Jim Baker, and others who knew “we had a problem.”

Keiser: Yeah.

Smith: But Kissinger called him and told him he was wonderful, just kind of laid it on thick. And I’m sure that’s what you want to hear. But a week went by with this increasingly strenuous effort on the part of – Cheney became involved. He told us, “I was thrown out of the compartment of Air Force One.” Stu
Spencer from the campaign was trying. There was that stubborn streak in Ford’s makeup. What is your memory of that period?

Keiser: From an outsider, I was of the impression that he really didn’t think he had made that big a mistake. In other words, in his own mind, what he was trying to say – he might have said it poorly, but from his point of view, it was not that wrong.

Smith: He knew what he intended through those words.

Keiser: Yeah, exactly. And the frustration was that it was misunderstood. But in the time – from the memory of hearing him say that – that was his impression. I understand, this is what I was trying to say.

Smith: Could you see that stubbornness in his makeup?

Keiser: Yeah. But he had a very professional staff. He really did. There were some people that were superstars, yeah. Still are.

Smith: And he had a particularly impressive Cabinet.

Keiser: He did, I think, as an outsider. You talked about this transition – there was a time in our history when we had three presidents in two years. Transitions in terms of our constitution and the United States of America, never once during those transitions were we considered weak or disorganized, or worthy of attack. It just happens. It’s a marvelous thing to see.

Smith: The Bicentennial takes place the summer of ’76. He was incredibly busy around the Fourth and all that. He went to New York, went to Monticello or a ceremony…

Keiser: And he started in Boston at the church, then he went up to – I forget, but he made a speech…

Smith: Well, actually, it was ’75 because I actually was there. He went to the Old North Church and then Concord. It sort of kicked off the whole celebration. Did he enjoy that?
Keiser: I think so. I don’t know, but I think so. Those were long days. I have something I want to say – way out of context. Including President Ford, people at that level, at that degree of professional politics, feed on crowds. The campaigns, be it when Nixon was campaigning or be it when President Ford was campaigning or Johnson – those are long, long days. And sometimes, as an agent, you get caught up to where you were there the whole day. And we are exhausted at the end of the day. But if they have a good rally at night, they feed off of it. They are ready to go. It is amazing to me where they find that.

Smith: You have the classic definition of an extrovert who feeds off of others; wherein an introvert feels that they are being drained by others.

Keiser: That’s one thing unique about President Ford – he could catnap.

Smith: Really?

Keiser: Oh, yeah. In the back of the car, he could catnap five-ten minutes.

Smith: That’s a blessing.

Keiser: Oh, I think so, yeah. He could do that and be awake. You’d look in the rearview mirror something like that. He usually brought papers with him or autographs, pictures to sign. He was always doing something. Yeah, he’d catnap very easily.

Smith: We’ve been told a semi-famous story where he was down in Texas and I think they had the Kilgore Rangerettes, or whatever, all lined up – all these pretty girls. And he got kissed by all these pretty girls. And I think he sent flowers to Mrs. Ford that day. Because he said, “Betty is going to see this in the news.”

Keiser: Well, the only thing I remember in Texas was eating the tamale.

Smith: Tell us.

Keiser: I never thought it was a big deal. It was Mexican food and he ate a tamale. And I guess he didn’t take the shell – they made a big deal about that. Again,
that’s just clumsy stuff. God, give the guy a break. Things like that I felt were very unfair. I felt sorry for him.

Erik: Were you with him on the day - Donald Rumsfeld told the story about being in the limo driving somewhere, and some kids crashed through a barrier and hit the presidential car?

Keiser: No.

Smith: That’s right, that was up in Boston.


Smith: Hartford, that’s right.

Keiser: Again, I was in school.

Erik: He had to go face down on the floor with somebody on top of him. It was a funny story when he told it.

Keiser: My deputy was with him. No, those things happen.

Smith: Those things seem to happen to President Ford.

Keiser: Indeed. It’s not funny. To the Service, it was a very serious thing. Yeah, it crashed through, came through an intersection.

Erik: He said they were kids, and when you looked out the window, he said you were face to face with these kids and their eyes were big as saucers when they realized what they’d done.

Keiser: This is not good. To the Secret Service it’s why have they done it and what’s next?

Smith: Oh, sure. Can you imagine in today’s security climate?

Keiser: Well, strategically, the Service made some changes. The limousine that was behind him as a spare was moved up in front, as a result of that accident. Had they needed the spare car, it could not have gotten around the curb.
Smith: He had a sense of humor?

Keiser: Oh, yeah, I think so. Not that he went around telling jokes, but he was just a gregarious fellow that would think it impolite if he didn’t laugh. But he met my father one time at Notre Dame and was so, so gracious to my dad. My dad was a Mason and my home town is near Notre Dame, and I called and said there might be a chance to meet President Ford. So he was telling my mom, “I’m going to give him the secret handshake, Masonic handshake.” My mom says, “Don’t do that. He may not remember, or you may get it wrong. Just don’t do that.” But he spent a good thirty minutes with my folks that were just priceless. And my father is Midwestern, and my father, every summer, they own a cabin up on a lake in Michigan – President Ford’s Michigan. “Do you know such and such lake?” Of course, Ford, being a politician, “Yeah, I know that Mr. Keiser, great lake.” At any rate, they got along well. And so the parting comment to my dad was, “If you are ever in Washington visiting Dick, come by and see me.” Now, that is very President Ford.

And so several months later my folks are visiting. I’m getting dressed and I’m at the breakfast table going to work, and my dad says, “You going to work today?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “I may go upstairs and put on a tie. I may go downtown with you and see the President.” I said, “Well, Dad, you have to understand, their schedule is all organized weeks in advance.” And he said, “Well, he told me to.” And I said, “I understand that, and he meant it. But it takes some time.” And finally my mother said, “Leave Dick alone. You stay here.” That’s the way he felt comfortable with President Ford, in just that thirty minutes they were together.

Smith: Next to last question. Maybe one way of beginning to know Jerry Ford is, above all, as a Midwesterner. What does that mean, in your mind? What it is about the Midwest that is distinctive, defining?

Keiser: That you are gracious to people, you’re glad to meet people, you have basically simple needs. Simple things are important to you – church, family. And all the things that he did – the football, the college, Boy Scouts – those are things that I grew up with and that’s important. That’s not to say that
President Nixon was not that sort of thing. But I do think that where you come from does change you a little bit. President Carter was southern. That was pointed out to me; I was very comfortable with him.

Smith: I’ve often thought there is an unspoken bias on the part of people against Midwesterners. Because talk slow it’s assumed that they think slow. Whereas, in fact, they are being deliberate.

Keiser: And we’re simple people that don’t really, really know what the real world is like. And we need to be told.

Smith: I think he suffered from some of that bias.

Keiser: Well, that’s what I said. I think, in his own mind, it bothered him, the fact that: hey, I got a law degree from Yale. Now he wouldn’t say that publicly, but I heard him say it. “I was an all-American football player.” A pretty superior individual in every respect.

Smith: Last thing: how do you think he should be remembered?

Keiser: As a good man, as a good president, a good American. And the right man at the right time. I think he was perfect for that time. I’m personally sorry that it only lasted a short period of time, but I think that’s part of fate, too. I think he came and did what he had to offer, and I think he’d have been a good president if he’d won. That’s not the point, but I think it would have been a different presidency. I think he would be remembered for some really great things, decisions that he made. Hard decisions.

Smith: I have to ask you because there are some famous stories grown up around it, and that is the night when Queen Elizabeth came and the dinner at the White House, and the Marine Band played The Lady is a Tramp when they went out to dance. And I think there were repercussions afterwards. And again, counter to this image – because I think she suffered from it worse than he did. Initially there was this patronizing view - this Cub Scout den mother from Grand Rapids, a Sunday schoolteacher - and all of a sudden she is welcoming the world for the Bicentennial. And by all accounts, she rose to the challenge
admiredly. But when you saw them in that role, did they seem perfectly comfortable?

Keiser: Yeah. And I think if that were the case, they had strong staff members that were giving them day to day good advice. That’s beyond my mandate. But by appearance they were a very good couple, a very loving couple, got along very well.

Smith: You mentioned at the very beginning, about at the time of her cancer surgery.

Keiser: Oh that bothered him. He was frightened. Oh yeah. In those days, what I remember – it may still be – but in those days, if you had that type of surgery, you didn’t know if you were going to wake up in the morning with a mastectomy or not.

Smith: And it was a subject that wasn’t discussed.

Keiser: But he was very attentive and very concerned. Oh, yes, from what I remember.

Erik: Were you in the helicopter coming back when he had to speak at the Economic Summit?

Keiser: I don’t remember the incident. That photograph, I told you, with he and I, we’re coming out of Bethesda just after he had visited with her. So, I remember those times, I don’t remember a particular helicopter incident, no. Oh, I know he was very concerned, as was the whole family. The kids showed up.

Smith: It’s been great.
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