

## “Gnawing Away at Your Guts”

**Date:** November 29, 1982

**Participant:** Jimmy Carter

**Project:** Jimmy Carter Oral History

SCROLLER TITLE: “Gnawing Away at Your Guts”

SCENE SETTER: President Jimmy Carter reflected on the underlying feeling of dread that stayed with him throughout the 14-month Iranian hostage crisis. He likened it to a period in the 1950s when he had come home to run the family farm after his father’s death—a hard time filled with constant financial worries.

**President Carter:** I don’t know if any of you have ever been in financial trouble, but there were a couple of years when I first came home when I thought I was going to have to go into bankruptcy and be embarrassed and go back in the Navy or the Electric Boat Company or somewhere and get me a job. And no matter what happened, if it was a beautiful day or if my older son made all A’s on his report card or if Rosalynn [Carter] was especially nice to me or something, underneath it was gnawing away because I owed twelve thousand dollars and didn’t know how I was going to pay it. If I couldn’t collect my bills that month, I couldn’t pay for the fertilizer I’d already sold. It was a gnawing away at your guts no matter what good, other things were going on.

Well, that’s the way the hostage thing was for me for fourteen months. No matter what else happened, it was always there. It was painful because I was failing to accomplish what seemed to be a simple task to get those hostages home, and the personal responsibility I felt for them was there. But I couldn’t ignore them and didn’t ignore all the other routine jobs of the presidency. So there was no way to separate the two. It was just an overlaying of feeling, distraught, or ill at ease, or uncomfortable. Even when we’d go to Camp David and I had a fairly relaxed weekend, I was always thinking about the hostages and getting them home.

*End of excerpt.*

CITATION: Interview with President Carter, November 29, 1982, Jimmy Carter Oral History Project, Presidential Oral History Program, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia.

URL: <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-oral-histories/jimmy-carteroral-history>