



1-12-1972

Marygene M. Wright (January 12, 1972)

C. Richard Arena
Whittier College

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Oral History Interview

with

MRS. MARYGENE M. WRIGHT

January 12, 1972
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

- ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mrs. Marygene Wright. Middle initial M stands for Marshburn, Whittier, California. Today's date is January 12, 1972, Arena interviewing. Would you mind stating the year of your birth and the place?
- WRIGHT: I was born in 1927 in Whittier [California].
- ARENA: And could I ask you to narrow it down even more, possibly this home?
- WRIGHT: No, I was born at Murphy Hospital.
- ARENA: And of course this interview is taking place in the home. The exact address is 13542 Starbuck Street, and this is the home that was built by your grandfather, Franklin Milhous.
- WRIGHT: That's right and, of course, at the time it was built, the house was up on Whittier Boulevard.
- ARENA: And you recall it, of course, mainly from that period or you recall THAT period very well, the home as it was located there.
- WRIGHT: Yes, because I lived here all through that time.

ARENA: Before we go into detail about your recollection of this home, President Nixon's grandfather also, of course, and your personal recollection of your grandparents, I'd like to have a kind of summary statement as to your overall direct contact with the President. Obviously, he is older than you, but nevertheless there were opportunities for you to come into contact. From your best recollection, when were you in direct contact with the President, for example, during Christmas annual get-togethers. Did he ever actually live here for any reason? Did you ever visit with his parents for any reason and live with them? Was there a kind of constant visiting back and forth between your family and President Nixon's family and so forth? And you need not go into detail about these questions now, but just summarize them, and then we can always go back and go into detail, but I'd like to get the overall picture first, and then as time goes on, zero in, so to speak.

WRIGHT: Well, I was raised in this house, and my grandmother [Almira Milhous] was living here. Of course, my grandfather died before I was born, so I don't remember him. The Nixons lived about three miles away, and there was a lot of visiting back and forth but, of course, especially on Christmas and I remember Fourths of July. I can't remember why that was a big holiday. But because my grandmother lived here, we always had our family Christmas parties here, and the families all came here.

ARENA: Was there contact with him in a formal way in church? Did you attend the same church?

WRIGHT: No, we didn't attend the same church. The Nixons attended the East Whittier Friends Church, and we've always attended the church up in Whittier [California].

ARENA: Were there ever any joint services or some particular occasions, such as the annual meeting, possibly, where there might have been some joint services or meetings conducted?

WRIGHT: Not really any that I would know of.

ARENA: Anything in the way of Sunday School or choir get-togethers?

WRIGHT: No.

ARENA: Did the President, to your recollection, live here at any time for any purpose?

WRIGHT: The only thing that I can remember is that after he graduated from Duke University Law School, when he was studying for the bar examination, he spent quite a bit of time here studying. And I can't remember why. I can't imagine that our house was any quieter than theirs, but I do remember that he studied here.

ARENA: Do you recall that he actually slept here as well? Did he have a room during that period?

WRIGHT: I don't remember.

ARENA: You would have been, of course, at that time, ten years old. Is there any other direct contact such as that that comes to mind?

WRIGHT: Well, when he was at Whittier College we often had a cousin living here going to Whittier College, and I do feel that when he was at Whittier College, he would stop and pick up a cousin, and I think it must have been Edith Gibbons Nunes, who was staying here, and give her a ride up to school.

ARENA: And that period would have been 1930 through 1934 at Whittier College.

WRIGHT: Yes, in that time.

ARENA: And, of course, she would be the daughter of your aunt . . .

WRIGHT: Martha.

ARENA: Excuse me, Martha Gibbons, and if I'm not mistaken, she was a nurse.

WRIGHT: Yes.

ARENA: I have had the pleasure of meeting her daughter who is in Lindsay [California], Mrs. [Mildred Gibbons] Fink.

WRIGHT: Yes, that's right.

ARENA: Then that appeared when he was attending Whittier College, would have afforded him also the opportunity to stop by,

and you recall that. Now the post-law school period, that would be 1937 through 1942. It is in 1942, of course, that he leaves to go to Washington, first OPA (Office of Price Administration) and then wartime service. Do you recall anything there in the way of, we'll say, sustained direct contact with him personally?

WRIGHT: At that time the Nixons lived up on Worsham Drive [Whittier, California] and I remember being up there as a visitor. I remember that when they bought the house it had a tower room--one room that was up a flight--and this was Richard's study. This is what this was used for. And I remember being up there for a day or two when Uncle Frank was sick, but I don't remember, really, very much direct contact with Richard.

ARENA: Do you recall that during that period, when he was living right in Whittier proper, rather than East Whittier, that you and he attended religious services together, or choir, or meetings or anything like that?

WRIGHT: No.

ARENA: You don't recall one way or the other, for example, if he kept his contact with the East Whittier Friends Church during that time.

WRIGHT: I really don't remember anything specific at that time.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you to give a summary of your own educational background, the schools you attended here and outside of the area?

WRIGHT: I attended East Whittier Elementary School for eight years.

ARENA: At that time it did go all through the eight years?

WRIGHT: It went eight years. And then I went to Whittier High School for one year. The next two years I went to Friends Boarding School in Barnesville, Ohio.

ARENA: Thank you.

WRIGHT: This is a Quaker boarding school in Ohio, and I came back to Whittier High School for my senior year and graduated from Whittier High School. And then I went to Whittier

College for one year before I was married. And I've taken a few classes since then at Whittier College, but that's it.

ARENA: Do you recall that you might have had some of the same teachers that President Nixon had, and I might remind you of some of them: Dr. Upton, Dr. Paul Smith.

WRIGHT: Dr. [Albert] Upton and Dr. [Paul S.] Smith, I had classes from both of them. Charles Cooper--I don't know. . . .

ARENA: He has written, of course, about the history of the college.

WRIGHT: Yes.

ARENA: And he is still living.

WRIGHT: Oh, yes, in Santa Barbara. Harry Nerhood, I guess he wasn't there then, was he? Well, yes, I had classes from Harry Nerhood, but I guess he wasn't there earlier.

ARENA: Well, that answers that. I was wondering if you did happen to have some of the same gentlemen, because . . .

WRIGHT: I had a class from Louis Jones at Whittier High School.

ARENA: What was his subject on the high school level?

WRIGHT: I had Senior Problems, a Civics class, from him.

ARENA: Do you recall attending any extracurricular activities involving President Nixon, for example, when he was either on the high school or college level, his participation in debates? Do you recall ever attending any of those debates?

WRIGHT: I don't think I ever did.

ARENA: Were you aware of it though?

WRIGHT: I do remember when he was in college. I remember hearing about it. I'm sure I never attended any.

ARENA: How about football games? Do you recall seeing him in uniform? He didn't play much on the actual field during

the actual games, I understand, but I was wondering if there was anything about that period that comes to mind?

WRIGHT: I don't think I ever went to any of the college games at that time.

ARENA: Do you recall, and would you mind summarizing your direct contact with the President since 1945? 1945, by the way, is the cutoff date, in that this project is not interested in politics per se. But, nevertheless, from the standpoint of your contact with him, it would be good, I think, to have it on the record for future reference, if someone does want to go into detail.

WRIGHT: You mean what contact I've actually had with him?

ARENA: Yes, since 1945, which is the cutoff date for this project of oral history.

WRIGHT: This has been very little. I think that I did babysit with Tricia [Nixon] once or twice when she was a baby, when they were here and Dick was running for Congress, I think. But I think that this was something very brief, but I can remember staying with her, I believe at Aunt Hannah's [Hannah Milhous Nixon] house on Whittier Boulevard. Incidentally, I have the bassinet that was bought for Tricia, that all my children have used.

ARENA: Is there possibly any other situation where, not only the bassinet but other items of the family, say possibly President Nixon's high chair, would there be any other items like that which you know about and their existence? I'm thinking again for purposes of the museum, and those who will be looking to collect and preserve these items that deal with him personally.

WRIGHT: Well, my mother has a high chair that was used by a lot of the grandchildren, my grandmother's grandchildren, my cousins. I don't know that it was his or whether he used it. I'm not really sure, but she has that high chair. I don't know about much of the other pieces.

ARENA: What about written documents? Did you ever have any correspondence with the President while he was in the service, we'll say? Do you recall receiving any letters?

WRIGHT: No, I don't. He wrote to my grandmother though before she died. That was in 1943.

ARENA: Who do you think might have those letters?

WRIGHT: I wouldn't know.

ARENA: As far as you, yourself, are concerned, you don't have them, so we can establish that.

WRIGHT: No, I'm sure of that. Things weren't thrown away in this house. They might be around; I wouldn't know. I also remember having a little bit of contact with him when they lived on Honeysuckle Lane [Whittier, California].

ARENA: Is that the home that's near some country club?

WRIGHT: That's right close to Candlewood Country Club, just off of Telegraph Road. I remember being down there. I think maybe one of the girls had a birthday party. My oldest daughter is just in between the ages of Tricia and Julie [Nixon]. I can remember going down there for a birthday party.

ARENA: Can you recall, possibly, any anniversary events or affairs involving any of the members of the family where the President appeared?

WRIGHT: I think that he was here at Christmastime in 1947 because it was when my oldest daughter was a baby, and we had just come back from Oregon at that Christmastime. Of course, when he was Vice President, he had a big family reunion at his parents' home on Beach Boulevard. I think Don [Francis Donald Nixon] did most of the arrangements. I think it was Richard's idea to have a family get-together. This was when he was Vice President.

ARENA: From your recollection of him--and of course, again, you were quite young and he was the older cousin--thinking back to that period, how would you describe him from the standpoint of personality?

WRIGHT: At which period?

ARENA: This would be from your earliest recollection? In other words, there is this, oh, twelve years difference. He was born in 1913 and you were born in 1927, fourteen years difference. He would be QUITE an older cousin.

WRIGHT: That's kind of difficult, because I really don't have many personal feelings about him. I do remember that he would stop because my grandmother was here and he would stop to see her. I can remember that the feeling about him was that he was successful in school and he was going to be something.

ARENA: Knowing your other cousins--you need not mention any names and so forth--who were about the same age or a little older or a little younger, was that YOUR feeling at the time though, no matter how got it, but was it YOUR feeling that he was doing the best work in school and in other activities, different clubs that he belonged to, serving as president? Is it your conscious recollection that there just weren't any brothers or sisters or cousins that were as successful as he?

WRIGHT: Well, my feelings almost have to be vicarious. Yes, I remember that he was president of this organization and president of the student body, and he was definitely a leader. Now this was, I suppose, his Whittier College years.

ARENA: And how do you think you got that information? Did this come by way of your grandmother mentioning it at the supper table, or your getting it from other students, who would be quite older than you at that time?

WRIGHT: No, it would have been from family members.

ARENA: Do you recall any specific conversation concerning your grandmother's comments, and anything she said concerning this particular grandson?

WRIGHT: No, I don't remember any specific ones. I know there have been some, but I can't really recall any.

ARENA: Could you say that she showed partiality to him, from your own recollections and observation?

WRIGHT: I would say maybe she did, but on the other hand, she was partial to any of her grandchildren that did particularly well in any instance, so I'm not real sure that she made that much more of him than any of the grandchildren that achieved something.

ARENA: Can you think of an occasion where any other grandchild, or any other relative for that matter, was the object of the long trip she made to attend the graduation ceremony as she did at Duke [Law School] in 1937? Had she done anything like that before or since as a matter of fact?

WRIGHT: No. I'm sure that that was a bigger thing for her to do than. . . . But, after all, this was her first grandchild who had gone this far in school.

ARENA: As far as you can recollect, he was the first one who got that type of a degree, including medicine or law?

WRIGHT: Yes, at that time. I think that at that time he was the first one to have gotten that far.

ARENA: Thinking about your other aunts and uncles, who might have been older and might have had children older than the President, there is still no case there that you can think of at that time?

WRIGHT: No, because there were no older cousins that had gotten any advanced degrees yet.

ARENA: Do you recall your grandmother's preparations for that trip? Do you recall talking about it with her, her talking about it with you? This would have been the spring of 1937.

WRIGHT: Yes, I do, because I was here, and I remember her getting ready for the trip, and it was QUITE a trip. In those years, it would have been. Now, of course, after the graduation, she stayed in Indiana to visit friends and the Nixons came on home. And then my grandmother got sick, so the Nixons, Uncle Frank [Francis Anthony Nixon] and Aunt Hannah [Hannah Milhous Nixon] and my mother [Rose Olive Marshburn] and I went back. The Nixons drove and we drove straight to Indiana. I remember that trip. That was quite a trip. And so the trip to North Carolina would have been a little further I guess.

ARENA: Do you recall about how old she was at that time? She certainly was up in years.

WRIGHT: She was eighty-seven.

- ARENA: Do you recall that the trip itself was the cause of her illness?
- WRIGHT: Oh, I don't think it was. In fact, when we received the telegram that she was ill, it sounded like she was dying we thought, from this end, and we got there and she was sick and, of course, she was an older woman, but she got over it, and I suppose it was some type of 'flu. She came home on the train by herself.
- ARENA: In other words, you went with the Nixons to see what was wrong; you say she came back by herself on the train. She didn't come back with you?
- WRIGHT: No, because my mother and I went on East, and the Nixons came back earlier. We stayed and took care of her. I don't remember whether it was a week or two till she was well.
- ARENA: Knowing your aunt and uncle, Frank and Hannah, as you do, correct me if I'm wrong, but from the studies I've made and the interviews I've had so far, I get the impression they had rather different personalities. I was just wondering what was the case between. . . . Well, of course, you wouldn't recall your grandfather in particular, but what was your grandmother's personality like from your own recollection?
- WRIGHT: Well, as I remember my grandmother, my mother took care of the house and the cooking. My grandmother's main interests were, I suppose, first her family, and her yard, her chickens. She spent most of her time in the yard. In the day-time she'd be out in the garden.
- ARENA: Quite a few people bring up the idea of the chickens. Were these something she kept out of a personal need to keep busy, or did she actually have any other purpose you know of in looking after them?
- WRIGHT: I think she felt. . . . We had eggs; we used the eggs. But I think she had her chickens almost as pets, because she liked to let them out of the pen.
- ARENA: Were these always under her complete charge, by the way? Did you help out, or any of your brothers, in looking after them?

WRIGHT: Only when it was necessary. If she'd be gone for a little while, we would, but when she was here, that was what she wanted to do.

ARENA: What kind of an influence, in your own recollection--I realize this will be very difficult to evaluate--but what type of an influence was she on you personally? Do you recall, for example, that she was constantly advising you to attend religious classes, attend religious services, to go on to school? Was she that type of a person who did this, we'll say, in a conscious way like that?

BEGIN SIDE II OF TAPE I

ARENA: We were discussing the question of your grandmother's showing of direct interest in you, and in this case I believe you were mentioning your schoolwork, your homework.

WRIGHT: I don't remember that we ever had very much homework, but my grandmother was always interested in any papers we would bring home, anything from handwriting--and she thought handwriting was pretty important--any school papers we brought home, and particularly if they were very good she was very pleased. I don't remember that she helped us with our studies particularly, but she was interested enough to keep up and want to know what we were doing.

ARENA: Did you ever find this interest on her part annoying or irritating or did she express her interest in you? Obviously she had good motives, as all grandparents do.

WRIGHT: I don't remember that I did, except that she thought my younger brother had much better handwriting than I did.

ARENA: Was she interested in other subjects, such as history, and I'm thinking here on her own. In addition to her checking your work, in a way, or showing an interest in your work, did she have any particular interest in history?

WRIGHT: I don't know.

ARENA: Do you recall if she had books in her room or around the house that were hers and her husband's before that dealt with history, including the history of the Friends?

WRIGHT: Well, she always had books in her room, and she was very active in the Quakers work. I don't really know what the books were though.

ARENA: Do you recall that she used the public library?

WRIGHT: I don't remember. She did read and, of course, she wrote poetry.

ARENA: Would any of this poetry be available, and where, for the sake of historians who would like to . . .

WRIGHT: Well, I suppose that my mother probably has most of it. Shortly after her death, my mother published a small booklet of her poetry, and I have a copy of that.

ARENA: Was that published locally here in California?

WRIGHT: Yes.

ARENA: Do you remember about how many pages?

WRIGHT: Probably not sixty; it was just a small soft-cover book.

ARENA: Do you recall that that might have been publicized or might have been known through the press? Do you recall anyone or your parents ever mentioning that the news of that booklet was carried by the press? Did someone mention it? Or maybe even, did your grandmother ever have any of these published in the newspapers or any magazines?

WRIGHT: I don't think so. No, she liked to write poetry about a special event maybe, or about a new grandchild, or a trip, or something like that.

ARENA: Do you have any idea as to the origin of her interest in poetry?

WRIGHT: Well, she was a school teacher.

ARENA: And on what level, if you recall?

WRIGHT: I don't know.

ARENA: Do you recall her in any way trying to influence you along those lines, by the way, going into teaching?

WRIGHT: No, I don't think so. She, maybe, would use her influence that we should get all the education we could; she was always interested in education. I don't remember that she had any particular field that she was interested in promoting.

ARENA: Evidently several, if not most, of your grandmother's children went through high school and went on to college. I'm thinking of your mother, of course, and also the President's mother. I do not believe, and correct me if I'm wrong, I do not believe that Mrs. Hannah Nixon did graduate from Whittier College, but she was a student for a number of years.

WRIGHT: This was one of the reasons my grandparents made the move to California, because of the education at Whittier Academy which, of course, later developed into Whittier College.

ARENA: How do you recall that coming up? Did she mention that herself? Do you recall your grandmother discussing that this had been, and anything besides that motive that might come to mind from your own personal recollections, as to why your grandparents left Indiana to come to California and, of course, to Whittier in particular?

WRIGHT: I don't know that I can remember her talking about it particularly. She was interested in Whittier College and I think involved in some of the activities that Whittier College had. I really don't think I can remember her talking about why, so I think it would be hearsay.

ARENA: Was she a talkative person from your recollection? Did she like to sit and just talk, either with members of the family or with friends? Did she like to visit to just talk with people, or was she more on the quiet side?

WRIGHT: Well, she liked to be busy. She liked to do things.

ARENA: Did she ever work outside the home, in the sense of being employed with anyone, as far as you recollect?

WRIGHT: I'm sure not.

ARENA: Did she ever appear to you to regret the move that she had made from Indiana to California? Were you conscious that she constantly remarked how wonderful things were back in Indiana, for example?

WRIGHT: I don't think so. She had many friends in Indiana. She kept in contact with friends in Indiana. She wrote many letters, and I can remember that she would get oranges and wash them and package them and send them to the friends in Indiana, boxes of oranges and walnuts, but I didn't ever have the feeling that she had any regrets.

ARENA: Did you have the feeling on the opposite side, that she was a real booster for Whittier and California, for example? Do you recall her bragging, so to speak, about this place?

WRIGHT: Well, I can't remember specifically, but I would have that feeling that she was a California booster, because they often had visitors from Indiana. I heard in the past that people would come and stay a whole winter. Now, in the time that I remember, I don't remember that people stayed that long, but no matter how large our family was, we always had a guest bedroom, and this was quite often filled. And I remember we had guests here for a week or two weeks, and this was not unusual.

ARENA: Speaking about rooms in your home, was there something about a blue room used for punishing, in the sense of little boys and girls?

WRIGHT: That was before my time.

ARENA: Were you aware, and I won't mention his name, were you aware that one of your cousins accidentally loosened the toupe, wig, of your grandfather and that WAS his punishment, to be sent up to the blue room?

WRIGHT: [Laughter] I've heard that story.

ARENA: Did you hear it from a real source, namely, your grandmother?

WRIGHT: No, I didn't hear it from my grandmother. I think I heard it from my cousin.

ARENA: I see. It's probably the same one I'm thinking of. I just wanted to get some more light on that situation. Evidently in your time there was no blue room--this little room at the top somewhere?

WRIGHT: Well, I think it's the smallest bedroom. I can remember hearing my mother talking about this as the blue room, but that's the room that any cousins who were going to college would stay in.

ARENA: What did the blue room contain in the sense of furnishings?

WRIGHT: I don't remember.

ARENA: Even today, is it the same room, by the way, or has it been altered structurally?

WRIGHT: No. It's a bedroom. It's the smallest bedroom.

ARENA: I see. There wouldn't be any running water in the room, and there certainly would not have been any at that time.

WRIGHT: Oh, no.

ARENA: As you know, the Friends are a very distinct part of United States history and, of course, world history. And whether a person is a Friend or not, he has heard of them. I think I can say that safely, regardless of the region of the country he's from and his particular religion. I, myself, as you may or may not know, was brought up in New Jersey and although I'm a Catholic was brought up in the public schools. And I feel as though the first time I heard English somewhere, I heard of William Penn and the Quakers. What I'm getting to is this. You, being aware of that, know many of the stereotyped notions people will have of the Friends, and I'd like to separate from YOUR experience, stereotype myth from fact. Some of the myths are, of course, that the Quaker meetings, religious services, are silent, with no pastor; that Friends use thee and thou in speaking among themselves; that they're pacifists, and so on and so forth. What I wanted to ask you is: How about the thee and thou business? Were you brought up in a home where that was used, say on the part of your grandmother?

WRIGHT: Well, I don't think ANY of these really are myths, because I could show you Friends in different parts of the country

where this would be true. I was not brought up using the plain language, but my aunts and my grandmother used it. They always used it to Grandmother and my mother and my aunts use it among themselves. I'm sure it's unconscious.

ARENA: Is it your opinion, since you know not only those Friends who came from Indiana such as your grandmother, but others who came from other parts of the country, that this was something peculiar to the Indiana branch, whereas others had their own style or their own habits in that category of using the plain language, we'll say?

WRIGHT: No, I don't think it's peculiar to Indiana. I suppose I'm more familiar, maybe, with the Ohio Conservative Friends.

ARENA: Would the person who uses thee and thou, from the standpoint of speech only, of course, would that person be referred to as a Conservative? That would be a traditional and therefore a Conservative approach?

WRIGHT: When I say Conservative Friends, this is a designation of a religious split. I'm really not familiar enough with the background and history of Friends to really get into this.

ARENA: Concerning the question of religious services, and whether or not they were conducted on the silent meeting basis, again depending on the part of the country, they could or could not be, I was wondering what your own experience has been and, of course, that of your grandparents and, if you knew, that of the Nixons themselves, as to whether it was the silent or the use of the pastor. Actually, I do know that it was a question of the use of the pastor, but I was just wondering, was there a blend or was it strictly non-silent meetings, and so forth?

WRIGHT: Well, Whittier and East Whittier meetings belonged to California Yearly Meeting, which is a pastoral yearly meeting, so our churches had pastors. Now, there's another, Pacific Yearly Meeting, which has several groups around here and is non-pastoral. In other parts of the country there are still a lot of groups that have what they call the silent meeting. It isn't necessarily silent, but it's a non-pastoral meeting. Now, I was brought up in Whittier in a pastoral meeting. The two years I spent at Barnesville, Ohio, Boarding School, was under the Ohio Conservative Friends and this was definitely a non-pastoral, silent meeting.

ARENA: And the experience in Whittier, as you say, of course, was the pastoral type. Was there much of a conscious difference on your part? And in thinking of you, I'm also thinking of the President, who I'm sure has experienced both types. Does it call for much adjusting if you go from one to the other, for example? And then it might depend on the age at the time, I'm sure. What might be merely a form at one point might be more serious at another age.

WRIGHT: Well, there are a lot of people from California, California Yearly Meeting, who have NOT experienced the non-pastoral type of Yearly Meeting, and if they are not prepared, if they don't understand what they're going to, it could be quite a shock. They're waiting for something and really what they're waiting for is themselves, their own thoughts.

ARENA: Would you happen to know if your grandmother and possibly also your grandfather, whom you didn't know personally, but would you happen to know if the Indiana branch was the Conservative, and it meant a readjustment for YOUR grandmother to come here? Was she torn between an experience of both herself?

WRIGHT: Well, I believe the meeting in Indiana was non-pastoral. I don't know if there was any conflicts or any problems in coming to California. I'm not aware of any.

ARENA: Do you recall that your grandmother was particularly Bible-conscious--obviously she was conscious of the Bible--but I was just wondering if it was something that you particularly noticed. Were there open readings of the Bible as you grew up in this home? Did your grandmother like to sit and read the Bible, from your recollection, for example?

WRIGHT: Yes, I remember her Bible in her room, on her table by her bed, and I can remember her reading the Bible. As I was growing up, we had Bible reading, usually at breakfast time. I don't know if this was instigated by my grandmother as much as my mother.

ARENA: Do you recall that your grandmother's poetry had some religious themes, or was it heavily religiously oriented or lightly so?

WRIGHT: Only lightly so. I think her subjects were more likely about people or places or events.

ARENA: Was it your impression that your grandmother could keep so many of your cousins, her grandchildren as well as children, straight in her mind? In other words, did you think she was confused by children coming and going, or did she seem to have a clear notion of who was who over the years?

WRIGHT: No, she didn't get confused with her grandchildren. Her family was pretty important to her and she kept track of what people were doing, where they were in school. She was very much aware of all their goings, I think.

ARENA: Do you recall that she participated, your grandmother, in community affairs, besides those related with the First Friends Church?

WRIGHT: She did some. She was a member of the East Whittier Woman's Club and, at least for a time, was quite active with that.

ARENA: Do you know if she ever held any offices?

WRIGHT: I don't know.

ARENA: Do you recall that what I understand was a custom and policy and habit with your grandfather, to invite people for Sunday dinner? This, I understand, was quite common. Was this practice maintained by your grandmother too, whether outsiders in the sense of members of the family (not the immediate family) and people who happened to be visiting in town? Was it common to have these people over as Sunday guests?

WRIGHT: In the time that I remember it? In the time that I remember it we often had Sunday guests, but I don't believe (we had them) on the spur of the moment like my grandfather used to like to do. I can remember my mother even talking about that, "We just never knew how many people we were going to have on Sunday, and we were just always prepared for the most," she would say.

ARENA: How was the work that your grandfather carried on? In other words, he was a nurseryman and the land here, I guess, was devoted to that particular phase of agriculture. Was that kept up by someone after he passed away?

WRIGHT: After he passed away, my mother's older half-brother, Griffith Milhous, as far back as I remember, he managed the orchard.

ARENA: Do you have a clear idea of Griffith Milhous?

WRIGHT: Yes. I even took piano lessons from him for a little while.

ARENA: I was just about to go into that. He did teach music as well, I understand.

WRIGHT: Yes, he did.

ARENA: Is it possible, or would you know, that the President studied under him as well as under Aunt Jane Beeson?

WRIGHT: Well, it's possible, but I don't remember.

ARENA: You don't know for sure.

WRIGHT: No, I really don't remember.

ARENA: Do you happen to recollect that the President might have studied any musical instrument, such as the violin, under Griffith Milhous or anyone else?

WRIGHT: I don't know.

ARENA: Would you happen to know if the decision and the practice of sending a relative--in this case a nephew, President Nixon--sending a relative from Whittier to go up to Lindsay and live with the Beesons and study and learn to play the piano was done for any other relative? For example, was it done for you or done with any of your brothers?

WRIGHT: For the purpose of learning to play the piano, is that what you said?

ARENA: He did that for six months. He lived there and took piano lessons during that period, went up basically with that purpose in mind to really learn to play the piano.

WRIGHT: Well, I don't remember. I remember another cousin that lived in Lindsay for a while, but I think it was because of his health, because he didn't take piano lessons.

ARENA: Since you did not know, I imagine, personally, your great-grandmother [Elizabeth Griffith Milhous] . . .

ARENA: But she did live here for a while I understand in this same home. I have seen pictures of her and very likely your grandmother, but I recall her being pointed out in particular--visiting in Lindsay. I was just wondering if you have any recollections, from your earliest childhood, of this farm where the President studied and played the piano, and what recollections you do have as a youngster visiting that farm area.

WRIGHT: Well, I remember going to Lindsay. I guess it was always in the summertime that I remember because it was always so hot. But there were two or three families that lived in that area. I don't know just which ranch, where they were living at the time, so I'm not sure which specific place they were.

ARENA: Do you recall while you were visiting that area, seeing your Aunt Jane Beeson carrying on her profession of being a music teacher, and possibly even witnessing one of the recitals that she would hold on her ranch house porch with her pupils?

WRIGHT: Oh, yes, I remember being there when she was having lessons. Her pupils, I believe, usually came to the house.

ARENA: Whatever you do recall about this, as the President was one of these pupils, from your observation, would be very helpful.

WRIGHT: Well, I don't remember him as a pupil, but I do remember her giving lessons and I remember being there for recitals, because she really did THOSE up RIGHT!

ARENA: Just to make sure, at that time was she living in the country or in the city of Lindsay?

WRIGHT: She was living in the country.

ARENA: She was still in the country.

WRIGHT: Her recitals were always social, because she had fancy refreshments, always fancy sandwiches, cookies or whatever she had.

ARENA: Did you recall that she ever missed living in the city such as Whittier, or even living in the larger city, where

she could have had more exposure, we'll say, to more professional musicians, such as herself? In other words, do you think she ever expressed a desire, not being fully content living on the ranch, as a music teacher?

WRIGHT: Well, for a while they lived in Long Beach [California] and she gave lessons there. I'm not sure how many years they lived in Long Beach.

ARENA: I imagine you don't recall that earthquake, which I think was in 1930.

WRIGHT: It was in 1933.

ARENA: Oh, well, then you might.

WRIGHT: I remember that because the water heater fell down in this house, and my parents went to Long Beach because the Beesons were at Long Beach then. And I remember how scared I was to stay home with my grandmother that night.

ARENA: How DID your grandmother react to that earthquake from your recollection?

WRIGHT: I don't remember how SHE reacted, but I can remember it and I can remember being frightened, but I guess there was relatively minor damage in Whittier, although to have a water heater fall over, it seemed pretty drastic to me at the time.

ARENA: Mrs. Wright, thank you very much for this interview.