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Jessamyn West (December 5, 1971)

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Oral History Interview

with

MISS JESSAMYN WEST
(Mrs. H. M. McPherson)

December 5, 1971
Napa, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #2 with the cousin of President Nixon, Miss Jessamyn West, Mrs. H. M. McPherson. We are in Napa, California. The date is December 5, 1971, Arena interviewing. Would you like to begin, Miss West?

WEST: Why not call me Jessamyn?

ARENA: Thank you, and you call me Dick.

WEST: People alternate between, "Shall I call you Mrs. McPherson or shall I call you Miss West?" And it's been forty-some years since I was Miss West. I've been Jessamyn all my life. Since you were speaking of visiting with Ezra [Charles] Milhous' children yesterday, it reminded me of several things that I've just run onto in rereading some of my mother's letters. One is the picture that emerges from one's family's talking about another branch of the family. When Uncle Frank [Franklin Milhous] married Almira Burdg, there were people in the Milhous family who said, "This Burdg blood, this is kind of strange blood to be introducing into the Milhous family, because Almira's father was called nothing but a horse trader." Now I don't know what "nothing but a horse trader" is! His daughter was a school teacher. I think she was a year older. His first wife had died. She was a year older, and it was said that she had set her cap for him. He was a widower with two almost grown children. He was a widower for five, six or seven years before he married her. But it is an odd thing that there seems to persist in families a characteristic, and I have heard horse breeders, for instance, speak. I heard a man the other day who is a horse breeder and has horses, and has horses of OURS, talking about a mare he had, and he said, "She is silly. There's no use trying to train her. Her mother before her was silly, and I knew the father was unreliable," and so forth. So that this is a thing which, sometimes, we think it cannot be. I mean, these things

don't persist in families. But in the Burdg blood there seems to be a sort of, say, gypsy element. I don't know if "wildness" is a term for it, but a strain that made it difficult for them to--, certainly this was not true of Aunt Allie [Almira Burdg Milhous]--but for them to settle down to the routine of business office, profession, white collar; all this sort of thing.

ARENA: On that question, if you don't mind my interrupting, through a meeting with the various children--and you probably know that he had some eleven in all--Mr. Ezra Milhous, the only son of Aunt Allie and Uncle Frank, moved considerably. Some of the girls said they changed school about every year during their elementary grades. And I put this question to some of them: What type of a man was your father? The thing that stands out is that they emphasized his gentleness. You would think a man on the move that way might not be the quietest or gentlest or easiest person to get along with. But that was a very dominant characteristic. This moving evidently did not come from his being unhappy or come from his being not at peace with himself. That's my impression.

WEST: Yes. I have, of course, seen him, but I have forgotten him. I think I told you before, he married his first wife. . . . Have you seen his second wife?

ARENA: Now this gentleman, Ezra Milhous, is deceased. He died just a few years ago.

WEST: Yes.

ARENA: His wife died in an automobile accident, which evidently hit him very hard. I did not have the impression that he had married more than once--Ezra Milhous. I did not know that.

WEST: Yes, he did, because I have letters from her.

ARENA: I see.

WEST: She was the widow of a minister who had, herself, done some writing--she wrote me after a story of mine--and I've forgotten the name of it, but it was about the underground railway, which was in Except for Me and Thee. And she, as do a great many people, takes these stories absolutely literally, as if--I don't know what--as if the Milhouses kept records. Now, so far as I know, I, myself, have not been able to find any trace. I would love to have found some trace of the Milhouses mixed up. . . . They may have been. But I couldn't find any trace of their having been mixed up with the underground railway. Anyway, she told me what she had done, which was to talk to--this was at the time that

Richard was running for President--our Negro friends, pointing out to them her story, which showed what the Milhouses had done in the past for Negroes. And what they had done, I don't know. Except if they were, as I believe, truly practicing Quakers, they certainly believed in some equality of people.

ARENA: On that point, if you don't mind my interrupting again, one instance regarding the relationship with blacks, or Negroes, came up in this question to Aunt [Rose] Olive Marshburn. When I asked her about the education of her sister, Mrs. Jane Beeson, she said that while she was in Indianapolis she either worked or lived or helped in a school for small Negro children. And that's all. I haven't been able to track that down, and she didn't know more than that, which is interesting. As you know, Mrs. Jane Beeson is quite elderly, and while she was studying in Indianapolis, she either had a position, or she was doing some sort of service, but with the small black children. And I was just wondering, have you come across that yourself?

WEST: No.

ARENA: I would like to put that to her directly then to see what the connection might be.

WEST: No, I never heard of that. Well, anyway, so there was a second Mrs. Ezra Milhous. I think, perhaps, I told you before, the first Mrs. Ezra Milhous lived next door--her family lived next door--to my grandfather's family. Her name was Lima Hudson.

ARENA: Now, as a matter of fact, one of the children has that as a middle name. I recall someone saying that Hudson was the name.

WEST: Yes, Lima. Well, the Milhouses then, in a peculiar way that they have, changed the name of Lima. They wouldn't call her Lima. They said, "What is Lima? Lima bean! Or Lima, Peru." It's not Sarah Jane or one of the names that ordinarily Quaker children get. So they didn't call her Lima. I've forgotten what they did call her, but it wasn't Lima.

But you see, then, in Ezra Milhous, that the people who, when Uncle Frank married Almira Burdg, said that that restless horse-trading blood came into the family. And Ezra could not fit himself, or did not fit himself, into the harness of professional life. And I don't know about his sons. I only know one son who came to see me. Did I tell you this before, about this son?

ARENA: You mentioned something about his dogs and training them and this is precisely the son whom I saw yesterday. This is Oliver [Griffith Milhous] who now runs this boys' ranch

with some twenty youngsters mainly, not mentally retarded but mentally slow, and some might actually be delinquents. His other two brothers came along, and he does have almost a little zoo, a variety of animals that he wants the boys to associate with. And he mentioned the fact that, from time to time, these animals, including a little herd of steers, longhorns, which came by his house as I was with him, have been used in movies, and that he would like to get a special story, written by you, for movie purposes.

WEST: Yes. The first time I ever saw him in my life; I saw him and his wife. He came here on an afternoon, and his dog had been used--now I may be repeating myself.

ARENA: Well, in view of the fact that, even if you are, this ties in with what I just said, I would appreciate your mentioning it.

WEST: Well, he came here, and I didn't know him at all. But, of course, the minute he identified himself, I knew who he was. And there had been a movie company making a motion picture on or near his ranch, and the movie dog they had, which was supposed to herd the sheep, he was supposed to bite the villain, and he was supposed to rescue the heroine, and all these things the dog refused to do. So they got his dog, Oliver Milhous' dog. And Oliver's dog was well enough trained that he herded the sheep and bit the villain and rescued the maiden, and the dog was paid, as I remember, forty dollars a day for this.

And this gave him a great idea. He had heard that I wrote stories. He thought I wrote animal stories. I don't think he had read anything I had written. But he had, perhaps, seen The Friendly Persuasion. And in The Friendly Persuasion there was a horse race and there were geese and so forth. So he came over with this proposition: That I write a dog story, which I would then sell to Hollywood, and they would then hire his dog to star in it, and we would then share in the profits. Well this showed, you know. . . . He was extremely pleasant; his wife was pleasant. They were then taking care of children. I thought that if I had a child, I couldn't find a better place for him to be than at their home. But they were both certainly innocent when it came to the chances of, first of all, my being able to write a dog story that would be bought by Hollywood, and then the added chance that, having written it and having sold it, they would want to hire his dog to star in it. But this was a dream that he had and that I had to shatter.

ARENA: He still has it?

WEST: He still has it. [Laughter]

ARENA: He volunteered this. I did not put ideas in his head. I vaguely recall your recalling that story, but I didn't realize it was he, actually.

WEST: Yes, he was the one.

ARENA: But once he began talking about this, I knew that this was the one you had meant.

WEST: Well, you can see how very nice he was. But still this is not typical Milhous [behavior], this is Burdg behavior of some sort.

ARENA: Speaking of animals, though, I could not help but remember that he showed me, while we were eating in the boys' cafeteria, two skins of coyotes, both of which have been given as presents by the family way back, Ezra Milhous' family. And they said that one of them, if not both, but one of them definitely had been tamed by Grandmother Almira. And I took a picture of that, as a matter of fact. If you go there, you might see that.

WEST: Well, where did she live? It was when they lived some place else.

ARENA: They lived in various places. This might have been in Lindsay [California].

WEST: There were coyotes around East Whittier [California].

ARENA: Antelope Valley [California] is one of the areas where they lived and worked; Lindsay as well.

WEST: In East Whittier my father [Eldo Roy West] killed a coyote. I'm ashamed to remember it. I don't remember it. I'm ashamed to have learned about it. My brother-in-law told me that my father--they had ducks and so forth, and a coyote kept coming down, and this probably was maybe in 1945--walked out into the orchard and killed a coyote.

ARENA: Coyotes are still killing cats in the Whittier area, especially above La Habra Heights. Several people have complained. They assume it is a coyote. But that's a common saying, that so-and-so lost his cat because of the coyotes.

WEST: Then they better put out something for the coyotes to eat. Why not do that? In the first place, of course, there are too many cats, everyone says, in the world anyway. And there are getting to be too few coyotes. Well, to go on about Burdg. And by saying the family, I mean what my mother gathered from talking with her cousins, but I do not suppose that she gathered it from talking with her cousins who were Burdg descendants. Although I was just reading some old letters of my mother's, and I don't remember what I may have written to Hannah [Milhous Nixon]. But I wrote something to Hannah, about what I don't remember now. But the letter

from my mother [Grace Milhous West] says, "Don't worry about what you wrote to Hannah. Hannah is a close-mouthed Burdg, and it will go no further than Hannah. The chatterers are the Milhouses." And my mother said that, and she is a Milhous herself. I had read the letter years ago and forgotten. It hadn't struck me. But I was thinking about your coming when I read them. And I thought, "Here is a Burdg characteristic, or a characteristic attributed to the Burdges that I hadn't heard about. And perhaps it is something that Richard has, this ability, you know, to keep your own counsel.

ARENA: The person, of course, in the President's own immediate family who probably was NOT close-mouthed, and you would know better, would be the father, [Francis Anthony] Frank Nixon, in the sense that he spoke his mind directly and openly to people and with force.

WEST: Yes.

ARENA: But in every case, everyone whom I have interviewed, including, of course, many of the relatives, the mother, Hannah Nixon, comes out in EVERY case, always in control of herself, NEVER raising her voice and obtaining her way through speaking softly. That is said, inevitably.

WEST: It may have been always a characteristic of hers, but also, she may have seen that it had to be developed, living with a man like Frank, because it was going to be impossible to out-scream Frank. That sort of thing could not be carried on. And I have a feeling, also, that there was, in spite of differences of temperament, a great deal of feeling between the two; that Hannah, while she knew Frank's weaknesses, had deep regard for Frank and that she would not want to upset that relationship; you know, just "getting my way", or "doing it my way"; that she wouldn't want to offend or hurt Frank; that she would hold her tongue; that she would not really confront him, out of regard for his integrity as a man.

ARENA: Could there be the possibility also that she felt that he might have felt as an outsider among the Milhouses? I did get this impression from some of the relatives; one example being that when they would visit Grandmother [Almira Milhous]--this might have been for the annual reunion or some other occasion--but this one relative recalled that he was unhappy and wanted to leave, and on some occasions would wait in the car. This might not have been for the actual family reunions, but I did get the impression that he was uncomfortable.

WEST: Well partly that discomfort I would attribute not just simply to his feeling of discomfort with the Milhouses, because he certainly felt none with my mother. My mother was a great laugher and joker, though she also could be irritated with Frank. But I think Frank was a man who couldn't well tolerate

simply the boredom of the repetition of social goings-on that he had heard one million times. "How is Aunt Bessie," and "How is this," and "I did this," and all this sort of thing. I think that THAT probably played a large part in this thing. "When are they going to get through clacking about these things?" Not that he was an outsider. I think that if he felt that they thought he was an outsider, he might have just waded in and said, "I'll show these people how outside I am." Now I don't know about this.

But Frank was an impatient man and, if it is true, as they say, that the greatest need, the greatest talent of a politician is a talent for enduring boredom, which certainly there must be an enormous requirement for, Frank would never have made a politician, because he would have walked out on the frequently STUPID speeches and so forth. He would be a better man working behind the scenes which, I suppose, as a father, in a way, he was. But it is true, I think. . . . And this again is simply remembrance as a child or as a young girl of the feeling that Frank was--you know--"Why did Hannah fall for Frank?" "Frank Nixon, who's he?" "Where'd HE come from?" Somebody said she married him because she got carried away; he had a dress suit. And I think there was this feeling.

But I think, as I told you before, that a first cousin of Richard's--and I think you haven't probably had a chance to talk with her--but when I talked with her about my own mother and father, she said, "Every Milhous girl thought she married beneath herself." And I said, "Your mother, too?" And she said, "Yes, my mother too." And there's no reason whatsoever--I don't know why they should think so highly [of themselves]. This doesn't mean that they didn't. . . . As my mother, it was the FAMILY; there was no FAMILY like the Milhouses. My mother didn't think of HERSELF as being superior. She KNEW that my father, in many ways, was enormously superior--in patience, in many qualities that she admired.

ARENA: Could it be, possibly, this idea of marrying beneath herself might be another way of saying that they were either non-Quakers--I'm thinking of Frank, of course, who was a Methodist--or, if they were Quakers, they were not the stereotype? For example, Russell Harrison, Sr., was very much like Frank himself. And he, in the interview, mentioned that he and Frank were bosom buddies, and you don't think of Frank as being the typical Quaker, although he became a convinced Quaker. And you might recall that I was wondering about proof for that. We were wondering because in some cases someone said, "Well, I don't know if he ever really became a Quaker."

WEST: Temperamentally, Frank was a Democrat and a Methodist, and temperamentally, I don't think he ever changed.

ARENA: Yes, but as proof that he did become a Quaker, Mrs. [Jane Milhous] Beeson had a pamphlet from the church in Lindsay of which he was a charter, founding member. His name was

listed, along with that of Aunt Hannah, his wife, and son, Harold [Samuel Nixon]. Speaking of Frank, two very interesting accounts came up in recent interviews, and I wonder if you have heard them. If not, we'll just leave them for what they are or, if you have heard them, you might want to comment on them.

One regards the death of one of the children of Ezra Milhous. This took place in another state. You will see why I'm not going to be too specific. There might be legal complications. But the boy was killed in an automobile accident where he was walking from school. The father was a prominent person in a city in that state. And there was going to be no settlement at all on the part of the young man and his father. The young man was driving; drunk at the time. This story was told by Oliver [Griffith Milhous] and Calvin [Burdg Milhous] and Phillip [Lawerence Milhous], so it's not just an isolated item. They recalled it very vividly. Frank and Hannah Nixon came. Frank went to the prominent man, said he was the lawyer for brother-in-law Ezra and demanded that at least he pay for the funeral, and that was done.

WEST: I never heard that. It's news to me.

ARENA: That's one interesting story. I think, by the way, that also shows that Frank Nixon had a personal regard for the Milhous side of the family regardless of this other incident where he might come and then want to go away.

WEST: Remembering him as a Sunday school teacher, he had a personal regard for what he thought was fair. He might have been quite willing to do that, if he had just been there in the community and this had happened, and the boy was not related to him at all. I can see Frank saying, "That shouldn't take place. That man's responsible. He has the money, he should pay, the very least . . ." And I can see Frank doing the same thing, not simply because the boy was related to him.

ARENA: I see. Well, the members of the family certainly remember it with real clarity. The other incident that was recounted was that while the [Harold Chantry] Beesons were living in Long Beach [California] and that terrible earthquake took place--I've forgotten whether it was 1930 or 1933, but in that early period . . .

WEST: I was in a sanitarium, lying in a bed with tuberculosis at the time. I can certainly remember it.

ARENA: And what city was that?

WEST: Well, I was in La Vina [California] which is just in the hills. It's a private sanitarium or was. I think it's burned down now. It was in the mountains, really, back of Altadena, which is there near Pasadena.

ARENA: Well, the story regarding Frank Nixon is that--this was told by Sheldon Beeson, the son, as well as other Beeson children--that Frank drove directly from Whittier, and in one case they said with the President himself, with Richard Nixon, but definitely that Frank drove [to Long Beach] to see how the members of the family were, and he was quite concerned and quite relieved when everyone was fine.

WEST: Well I think Frank liked action. I think he liked earthquakes and accidents and all sorts of things. I think he was stirred up by them. He was a man. . . . I don't know whether he would have been good as a general, maybe he was no planner. But I think his nature was drawn toward what was not so cut-and-dried. And I think that was one reason these family affairs were something that got on his nerves. He may have had resentments, I don't know, about the Milhous feeling, if there was such a feeling, that they were, you know, God's chosen, or something of that sort. By the way, have you read a book which has just been published, Among Friends by M. F. K. Fisher?

ARENA: No.

WEST: You had better read it. You had better read it. It was going to be called, at first, My Life in a Quaker Ghetto. It is about M. F. K. Fisher. Do you know the name at all?

ARENA: Would this be the [Mary Frances] Kennedy Fisher of Whittier?

WEST: Yes.

ARENA: I have heard the story, now that you mention it, but I have not read the actual work.

WEST: She was going, I understand, to call it, My Childhood in a Quaker Ghetto, and changed it to Among Friends. I've read an excerpt or two in the New Yorker. I haven't read the whole book. I know the woman. She sent me the book. The book has the inscription, "To Jessamyn West, a birthright Quaker, from M. F. K. Fisher, a born friend," which has its little innuendo. I think she toned it down in the book from the article. I was told that in the article she said that she knew of no Christian sect which has produced so many sanctimonious bastards as the Quakers. And it is, throughout, a book which finds the whole Quaker community--and she speaks as though there weren't another living soul in Whittier who wasn't a Quaker--finds them people without generosity of spirit or mind, and people who thought extremely well of themselves and did not think well of outsiders.

She says in the book that in forty years in Whittier she was never invited into, she never stepped into, a Quaker home. She herself, her family, were Episcopalians. It would be very interesting

and I don't know whether she knew--she is older than Richard Nixon and, of course, they lived out in East Whittier--that there were Milhouses living in and around Whittier, and I doubt that she mentioned them, though she might have. But it would be very interesting if you could get an entirely different view from somebody who was. . . . Really, she has a resentment that she has harbored into her sixtieth year.

She said something in the book that is EXTREMELY difficult for me to believe. She says that the children of Whittier, the Quaker children of Whittier were simply repeating what they had heard at home, because it is hardly likely that children would know these things or care about these things. But the children said that her father, who was a tall, lanky man, that because he was tall, lanky and Irish--well, he was not very recently Irish, and there are Quakers who are more recently Irish than Mr. Rex Kennedy--that he was, hence, a policeman and a saloon brawler; and that her mother, because she was Irish and fat, was obviously a cook, because all cooks were Irish and fat. And this strains my mind to think: one, that any children said it; and two, that any family said it. Now, there were Quakers in Whittier who were well educated. My own family was not, except as they educated themselves, well educated. And it would be beyond the limits of imagination to believe that my father or mother would make such stupid--apart from the, I started to say, wickedness of it--that they would say that, because a man is tall and Irish, he is a policeman and a saloon brawler, or that a woman who is fat and Irish is a cook. And, of course, you can think also of the possibility that there are people who would think, who might say to themselves, "If, after forty years I was never invited into a Quaker house," some people might say to themselves, instead of saying, "There's something wrong with these Quakers," might say, "Hey, I wonder what's wrong with me?" But that idea never crosses her mind. It is a bitterly anti-Quaker book.

And I received a number of letters from people saying, "You're a writer. Why don't you . . ." And I am writing to the New Yorker. And I know her, and for whatever reasons, this seems to her to be what Whittier was like. She has chapters about escape hatches by which her family and other people like her family got away from the oppressing Quaker atmosphere of Whittier. They went, for instance, to the beach. There's a chapter about going to Laguna Beach [California]. Well, the Quakers themselves went to the beach, not to escape other Quakers or to escape oppressive atmosphere. We went to the beach and rented a tent house, simply because the beach is a great place to go. But to read her, you would think that they lived for the day when they could pull up stakes and get out of Whittier. But, really, I think that it is a book that you would find interesting. It is certainly well written. It is interesting in itself.

ARENA: Could I say this. The point that is uppermost in my mind in many interviews--you might be interested in knowing that there have now been over a hundred interviews, this might

be about the one hundred and twenty-fifth, separate interviews--and obviously to people who were the President's teachers, people who were the President's school buddies, I DO raise the question of their different backgrounds and I have, therefore, interviewed them and brought up the question, particularly of their religion. And I have people who are Episcopalians, people who are members of the Church of Christ of Whittier, and in all frankness, nothing like that has come up, to date, as a matter of fact. And I don't raise the questions in such a way that they are leading or I'm putting ideas in their heads. I try to be as innocent as I am with you. I just raise the question and let come what comes. But in asking persons who were Methodists and Episcopalians, I raise that particular question: "Did you ever recall feeling uncomfortable because you were living in a Quaker town which had been founded by Quakers?" And they reply to me that, well, numerically they were not the majority, and where there were Quakers, anyway, they NEVER felt that experience.

The person who I might say, to date, has been the most comprehensive on that particular question, who was not a Quaker background, was Dr. Albert Upton. And I would say that his analysis of the Quakers from a non-Quaker point of view, but certainly one who lived with them and earned his bread so to speak, being a member of Whittier College when it was officially Quaker, his analysis is very penetrating. He does go into the statement that there are all kinds of Quakers, just as there are all kinds of Catholics, in effect. And, of course, I don't want to go into actually what he said, but his was the most overall analysis, and where there were faults among certain Quakers, he would point them out. But I didn't get the impression that these faults came from the fact that they were Quakers but that they were human beings; and his is a very penetrating analysis.

WEST: Out of my experiences, her feeling of conviction that her family SUFFERED, that they SUFFERED because of the fact that there were only thirty poor, little Episcopalians in this great mass of supercilious Quakers. And she says that her father must have suffered, when she thinks of the rebuffs and the what-not that her father must have suffered at the hands of Quakers. Now, she sent me the book, and so I wrote her a thank-you note.

And at that time, I had just discovered, in going through some old papers, a program of 1921 or '22, when I was in Whittier College. And they had a champion football team and they had a great banquet. And at the banquet I was one of the speakers. I suppose I kept the program because I was one of the speakers at the banquet. And another one of the speakers was Rex Kennedy, who was her father! And here he was, and the thing. . . . The poets had won! The Quakers had won! And here HE was, in the sacred halls of Quakerdom up there, making a speech! I can't remember a thing about it, because to me the football boys were the interesting people, not old businessmen from downtown who were making speeches. But this seemed

to indicate to me that they had opened the doors to him, that he was not suffering rebuffs. But it is a fascinating book to read, and to speculate on the nature out of which this interpretation grew, which is not your purpose. But I wonder if there were other people . . .

ARENA: As I say, I have raised that question, and the overall research is quite ample on that particular point.

WEST: Yes. Well you see, in my own family--and I don't know if this was a more tolerant or looser family than others--but we were in all kinds of homes; all kinds of people were in our homes. We were Quakers. My sister's best friend, her mother was a Christian Science practitioner. And my mother let her, because when my sister had an ailment which struck her occasionally, I would run over to Mrs. Kinsman and say, "Carmen is ailing." Carmen [Clara Carmen West] had so much faith in Mrs. Kinsman that she got well the minute I left the door and started running toward Mrs. Kinsman.* [Laughter] She speaks about the Mexicans who had to live down in Jimtown. Well, Jimtown is down around Pico [California], and it is quite true that people did kind of cluster around there. But this was the traditional center of Mexican life, because it is where Pio Pico, the last governor, lived, and it wasn't anything that Quakers had imposed upon Mexicans. And I remember my Uncle Lewis Hadley's home. I suppose it was thought of as missionary work, and mistakenly, I think, when they were trying to make Quakers out of Catholics. I think you better say, "Thank God they have what they have," and let it alone, but they met there. Japanese people met there. Well, you must read the book and see what you think. *[Mrs. G. C. Kinsman]

ARENA: While you mention the question of Catholics and the Quakers, in his book--and I'm sure in other places as well--but in his book, Six Crises, the President specifically refers to the fact that his mother, Hannah, had hopes that he might some day become a missionary to Central America, and I'm wondering if you ever had any contact with that confession?

WEST: Oh, my mother had great hopes that I would be a preacher, because it was a great tradition. And I was, you know, on debate teams and in forensic contents, making speeches at football banquets. And she thought, "If the girl can talk, the best think you can do with talk is to be a preacher," and there was a tradition in the Quaker church and in our family for female preachers. And in the letters that I've just been looking at of my mother's, I saw the letter she wrote me after my first book was published. She said, "This seems to me almost like a dream of my own come true, because I had two dreams for myself, one was that I would be a preacher like my grandmother [Elizabeth Price Milhous] and the other was that I might write. I had hoped you might, but

you were not drawn to preaching." Of course, there are a lot of Quakers and non-Quakers who think that the best thing you can do when you write a book is to preach anyway. I think preachers should preach and fiction writers should write fiction, and I think that both, when they mix up their missions in life, get into trouble.

Oh, yes, and I imagine that probably everyone of the Milhous family, in all branches, would have thought that the highest calling any one of them could have had would have been to be a Quaker, well not necessarily a QUAKER minister, but a minister. Now my husband is also a birthright Quaker, as were his father and mother, and a long way back. I don't know if it was because he thought they were his friends, or if he thought they were a livelier bunch, or for whatever reason, but he never went to the Quaker Sunday school; he went to the Methodist Sunday school in Whittier. And it was all right with his family. He was going to Sunday school. And, actually, there was so little difference, in many ways, between the Quakers and Methodists. There is a book--have you read, Quakerism in California?

ARENA: No.

WEST: Well, this is another book that you would find interesting to read, that's written by a man who has a strange name, which I can't remember now. He is president of George Fox College in Oregon. And I notice that on the book jacket of that, Elton Trueblood says, "No one can understand Richard Nixon who does not understand California Quakerism." And I said that Methodism and Quakerism in California were certainly nearer together than Quakerism and Methodism are in Philadelphia [Pennsylvania]. And when I was in Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] after The Friendly Persuasio had been made, a woman came up and told me, "You made a mistake in that book. You had Quakers wearing wedding rings and Quaker women don't wear wedding rings." And I said, "Well, in Indiana they do." But this woman said to me, "Well," she said, "Philadelphia still thinks that we're a bunch of wild Indians here in Indiana. [Laughter] So I think that Richard Nixon did come out of a kind of Quakerism quite different from the Philadelphia or Eastern brand of Quakerism.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: And you were about to say, Jessamyn?

WEST: I was about to say a lot of things, and I'll try to say them one at a time. A man was here and spent a day with me who is writing the life of Richard Nixon. And you perhaps remember his name. I can't, at the minute, recall it.

ARENA: A Mr. Hoyt, Edwin Hoyt.

WEST: Yes, Edwin Hoyt was here. And I had had a letter from Richard's secretary saying, "Would you please be kind enough to see him and answer his questions?" So, he spent the day here talking with me. His wife was with him. And this seems to me something about the Nixons, or about Richard's background that has been misunderstood or exaggerated. He asked me if I remembered, if I had been in the Nixon house and what I remembered about it and so forth. And I said, "Yes, I had." And I think, perhaps, I told you this when I talked with you before. I said that one of the things I remembered and liked to look at as a little girl when I was over there--I was eight or nine or ten years old--Hannah had one of these curved, glass-fronted china closets in the house, and I liked to look into it and look at her hand-painted plates, her cut glass glasses and pitchers. And at that point, Mr. Hoyt's wife said, "Where did she get them?" At first, I could not shake my mind into thinking what her question meant, and then I realized that what it meant was, that she had the opinion that the Nixons were so poor, you see, that they--I don't know what--maybe were eating out of tin cans or something; that they were absolutely poverty-stricken. Then it came to me and I said, "Well, I suppose from two sources. First of all, Hannah had had a large wedding, and all of the relatives--and many of them were quite well-to-do--gave her presents, and I expect many of them were wedding presents."

And while it is true that practically everyone in Yorba Linda [California] didn't have a great deal of money to throw away on cut glass, yet I have cut glass that my father [Eldo Roy West] was able to squeeze out, somehow, when he saw something pretty to buy for his wife.

But this whole business of the poverty of the Nixons, I think, has been exaggerated. I think I told you last time about the man who spoke to me. He was the Superintendent of Schools, a Mr. [Kimball] Salmon in Sacramento [California] and he had lived in Whittier. Do you remember my telling you this or not? If not, I'll repeat it.

ARENA: Please repeat it, to be sure.

WEST: I happened to meet him at a meeting where I was making a speech just a year ago, and he said, "What is all this stuff about how poor the Nixons were? We lived in Whittier and we were REALLY poor, and the Nixons owned a service station, they had a store, they had two automobiles, the kids were going to college--that was what we called rich. I thought of the Nixons as being rich people." So, as compared with the [Joseph P.] Kennedys and the [Franklin D.] Roosevelts, they were poor people. As compared with this man, they were well-to-do people.

ARENA: The assumption that they were poor could have come from this fact--I know that this became part of my research problem.

WEST: That they were [poor]?

ARENA: That they were [poor]. I assume that, since they lived in East Whittier, which has been swallowed up by Whittier--East Whittier was out in the sticks, East Whittier was rural; Whittier was the main center of a small area. But, of the two, it was Whittier rather than East Whittier, invariably, in asking old-timers, those who knew the old East Whittier and the old Whittier, invariably it was the other way around. It was East Whittier that was the well-to-do section of East Whittier and Whittier, because the well-to-do farmers lived there.

WEST: That's where you had the ranches.

ARENA: That's right.

WEST: By the way, you asked me whether or not I had read my first transcript. I HATE to have to reread the typed script of the tape last time. I had my husband read it. I have not, myself, read it. And I had my brother read it. And I said, "Tell me if you think. . . ." I HATE rereading anything I have said. I intend to do it. My brother said, "You said, 'Papa planted oranges.' He planted oranges and lemons." [Laughter] So I got that straight. And my husband is very careful. He thinks I. . . . You see, I am a Milhous person who chatters. [Laughter] He said "You could have gone on forever." And he found some other small thing that he said, "I think you should have qualified that." I have forgotten. I'm sure that if I, myself, went over it, I would want to cut out something. But since they didn't find any FACTUAL errors, nor did they find, which my husband [Harry Maxwell McPherson] is careful about, my saying things that he thinks might hurt anyone's feelings. But I think the thing here is to try, as much as you can, to tell the absolute truth.

ARENA: Not only that, but from the standpoint of history, it's really not important how you say it, but the more you can say, the better, literally, because it's the idea that once you are gone, there won't be anyone interviewing you. And a point might be, in your estimation, not important, or be minor, but who's to say what some economist, or so forth, might say? So, "The more the better" is the basic rule.

WEST: Yes, I shouldn't be mealy-mouthed. I am an inheritently kind person, I think, and I don't want to say anything that would, you know, hurt anyone. For instance, when I told you what I did, which I'm not going to repeat, about Frank Nixon--he wouldn't dance, you know.

ARENA: I don't recall that, but if it's in the original interview, fine.

WEST: Well, he said that the reason he could not dance was that it aroused his passions. But anyway, I thought about that afterwards. You know, Richard will not dance. And he must have a great sense of rhythm. He can play the piano and so forth. True, he didn't [dance]. He talked to me about dancing when I was with Richard and Pat [Patricia Ryan Nixon] on the way home on Air Force One from Ireland. He talked to me about dancing, and he said, "Pat is a great dancer, and I wish she would dance. But," he said, "You know about dancing. We were at Whittier College. We didn't do it when we were young, and it isn't easy if it isn't a part of your upbringing." He wasn't saying, at all, that he thought it was a wrong part of upbringing. Although I think our upbringing was, at least, that we shouldn't go to public dances, not to a public dance. And Whittier College, of course, didn't permit dancing of any kind.

But my guess would be that far from being the cold or prim or restrained fellow that people have Nixon pegged as being, that he is a man full of passion, a man full of feeling and that he, as Pat told me, he said that there was going to be no blustering in his home; that he has the example of his father, and he is determined to keep a close rein on himself. But I think that it is not coldness that gives people this impression, but it is control rather than that. And it just occurred to me, it would be funny if Richard shared--it would be strange--and Richard is not going to do what Frank Nixon did and tell anybody what Frank Nixon told my father about the reason that he couldn't dance. And I suspect also, of course, that Richard is sophisticated enough a man that that would not be as it was with Frank.

ARENA: That is not an absolute rule that he never dances--period. But it's not something that he does regularly.

WEST: No. He said that he didn't, that he did not dance.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, that is one of the questions that I do raise when I meet with neighbors of his, including female neighbors, and there are at least two who have said on record that he did dance with them. The two were neighbors. One lives in La Habra now, Mrs. [Florence] Sucksdorf. Her relationship with the President is that he borrowed, in a way, their Balboa [California] home to write his first political speech. But at some social affair she very definitely recalls that he did dance with her at that social affair. The other person was a neighbor whom you might know too from East Whittier. As a matter of fact, the family that sold Frank Nixon his land. The maiden name of this lady was Mundt, and now she is a Mrs. Anne Gillmore. Well, Mrs. Anne Gillmore wanted to set the record straight, and said that yes, he did dance with her and she found him to be a good dancer. There is the stereotype that he was cold and did not mingle with women or things like that. And obviously, it's in my interest to find his dates,

and I'm enjoying the pursuit of this part of his life. And there definitely were girls who dated him and so forth.

WEST: I think that you didn't have a chance to talk with his first cousin, Edith [Gibbons] Nunes, did you?

ARENA: I am to meet her.

WEST: Oh, are you going to meet her? Oh, that is fine, because I would guess that she knew the young Richard, the Richard of college days, because they were classmates at Whittier College, and Pat and Richard lived at their place at one time--that you will get from her more specific information than from almost anyone else. From me, you get what I've heard people say.

ARENA: And the family background which is essential.

WEST: Yes, I was a part of the family.

ARENA: On the male side, excuse me, I have seen some close college buddies. I'm sure you'll recognize the names too. [Clinton O.] Harris, with whom the President double-dated on various occasions, and he is very specific concerning that part of their joint social life. They were in the same fraternity and, of course, the mentor of that fraternity, the Orthogonians, Dr. Albert Upton, was very specific too, and also coached the President in his acting career. It is impossible, I think, to get too many views or to meet too many people. Edith Nunes, as you say, should be a real key to much of this, yes.

WEST: She told me she was in love with him. I don't think she meant quite that, that she was in love with him as a cousin, but as a young man. And I asked her. . . . I am ten years older than Richard, and he was a studious little boy out in Yorba Linda. After that, except for seeing him occasionally, I didn't know him. Is she coming down here?

ARENA: No, I'm going up to Idaho, yes, as well as all over the country. I've had the pleasure of interviewing a Nixon in Cleveland. She's married now, Mrs. [Alice Nixon] Linton. And the idea, frankly, is to interview all of the relatives, all of the friends, close and not so close, that two years will allow, so she is definitely on our list. And his youngest brother, Edward [Calvert] Nixon, has also made it very clear that she should be visited too. You might know, from the standpoint of the technical aspects of the project, that Edward is with the [Richard Nixon] Foundation and he is specifically assigned to assist me and work with me in the [Richard Nixon] Oral History Project.

WEST: That's fine.

ARENA: He makes it possible for me to see the relatives, whereas many might not . . .

WEST: I have here some things that you might just like to look at. This is what is happening. This, I suppose, will go into the Richard Nixon Library. This was brought to me by a woman I had never seen. She called me. It is the notebook of Great-great-grandmother [Elizabeth Griffith] Milhous--of this woman here. And if you look at the way it was kept, when she was going to a Quaker school.

ARENA: This is all done by hand.

WEST: By hand, by this girl who, I think, was seventeen years old when . . .

ARENA: Beautiful work.

WEST: Isn't that exquisite?

ARENA: Some of the titles or headings say, "To a friend . . ."

WEST: I don't have my spectacles. I can't see it at all.

ARENA: It is written rather fancily. "The Savior's Smile," these are poems. "The object worthy of pursuit in a 'friendship'," possibly that word is.

WEST: Is that "evil?"

ARENA: And I DO have my glasses on. It's very interesting. It reminds me, in a way, of the Huntington Library's medieval manuscripts, where they are very fancily decorated.

WEST: I thought this would be . . .

ARENA: Edith Price . . .

WEST: Edith Price Griffith.

ARENA: And the date, you think, would be about when, Jessamyn?

WEST: I think the date is on it some place.

ARENA: I believe it's written here. It's been added. She is nineteen and he twenty-six. And the date is December 7 (that famous date), 1820. Or does this say, "Amos Griffith and Edith Price were MARRIED December 7, 1820?" A scrapbook of Edith Price, my mother, while at Westtown Boarding School in 1890, which was also attended by a son of the Marshburns, Hadley Marshburn, who recalled it very vividly. And it just so happened that I had once been a guest speaker there while I was teaching in Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] It was a coed school. I wasn't sure, but Hadley

Marshburn insisted that it definitely was coed. It was just outside of Philadelphia, a coed prep school.

WEST: Well, then, this is what? She was married when she was twenty, in 1819. Here is a picture. I'll tell you who this woman is. I had never seen her. She had never seen me. She wrote me. Great-grandmother Elizabeth Price Milhous had a number of sisters. One of the sister's name was Edith, and she married a man whose name was Grubb. So this was Aunt Edith Grubb who lived with Great-grandma. And I remember her and remember seeing her. Well, one of her daughters married a man--this is going to get terribly [complicated]--whose name was Duffield. And then, this woman who came and her husband's name is Price Duffield. He is the one, of course--I don't know--about a third cousin of mine or something like that. They have no children. They have no near relatives of any sort. But they had these things, which were part of the Milhous family's possessions, and there are more in there. She brought me this. And this is the pity. This is what happens when things are not recorded. You do not know. I would judge by his dress that that man was of the Revolutionary period.

ARENA: Definitely.

WEST: And I have no idea, I don't know who he is. My husband said, "Go back in your records that you have. Pick out a Revolutionary Milhous and give him a name. Don't let him go down through history without a name." But this is what would happen with many things. I don't know what this is--a miniature--it looks as if it were painted on glass.

ARENA: Or were ceramics sometimes used?

WEST: I don't know.

ARENA: Or tile?

WEST: I don't know enough about . . .

ARENA: You might be interested in knowing that as I do go around interviewing, I ask the relatives if they do have any papers, or if they're discussing a parent who has the papers, so that it will at least be recorded, not only the interview, but from the standpoint of history where the papers are and what they possibly might be. And you might be interested in knowing that on this farm of Oliver Milhous, some of the wagons used by Ezra Milhous were really used to pioneer California, in that he leveled new, virgin land, including much of the desert; that some of these wagons and wheels and harnesses and aprons. . . . His own personal apron is in the possession of his daughter, whom I interviewed just last night in Manteca, California. Now this daughter, and the youngest one, Elizabeth Milhous Reeves, it's the husband who now has that apron.

WEST: What is it used for?

ARENA: It's a leather-type apron which he used while he was working at various occupations. He says it still has the clips for hanging things, like pliers. But the young man worked with his future father-in-law. And by the way, I couldn't help but ask, and I believe it's part of our project, "What did you think of Ezra Milhous, your father-in-law?" and so forth. "What rules were laid down for dating his daughter?" And frankly, those are typical questions. And it's fortunate that people answer them as frankly as I put it to them. At any rate, somewhere along the line, as these interviews are studied, not merely for the factual content, but they might give leads to sources of manuscripts and artifacts, which, I hope, also will find themselves in the [Richard Nixon] Library.

WEST: So, this woman, who had never seen me, felt that, since she and her husband have no children, that these objects should go to someone who is interested in the Milhous family, who was a Milhous. This is a picture of a dress of Great-aunt Edith Grubb, the sister of Elizabeth Milhous, Richard's great-grandmother. Look at all that handwork and how beautifully it is preserved.

ARENA: Recently, at the East Whittier Women's Improvement Club, they would have enjoyed having this for part of their stitchery exhibit. This is the club of which Mrs. Hannah Nixon was an honorary member, you might recall. I'm sure they would have appreciated that.

WEST: I don't want to forget. I'll say it now, so you remind me. Have you seen the October and November issues of Outdoor Indiana?

ARENA: Thank you. I have not seen the second one, just the first one, and Ihave a copy of it. I'm going to send for the second one. Good. I think the sequel is now out, because brother had it. I haven't received mine.

WEST: This is the marriage certificate of--what is this? Is that Edith?

ARENA: Edith Anna Grubb, and it does say them both, "Marriage Certificate."

WEST: What is the date on that?

ARENA: The date? Probably the last line. "And moreover, the said Samuel M. Grubb and Edith Anna Griffith, she (according to the custom of marriage, adopting the name of her

husband) did, as a further confirmation thereof, then and there, to these presents, set their hands"--I'm looking for the date--"and on whose names are also hereunto subscribed, being present at the solemnization of the said marriage, have as witnesses thereto set our hands the day and year above written." And I'm still looking for the date. Maybe it's on the very first line. "Whereas, Samuel M. Grubb, of Mount Pleasant, in the County of Jefferson, in the State of Ohio, son of Curtis and Anna M. Grubb, of the same place of the former deceased, and Edith Anna Griffith, of Brownsville, Fayette County of Pennsylvania, daughter of Amos and Edith Griffith of the same place, having declared their intentions of marriage with each other before a monthly meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, held at Redstone, and having consent of surviving parents, their proposals of marriage are allowed by said meeting. These are to certify, that for the full accomplishment of their said intentions . . ." This seems to be a kind of form. Now, in a different kind of ink, or faded ink, is the date, and in this different color of ink is, "Eleventh day of the fourth month." (now we go back to the regular color of ink) "in the year of Our Lord, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Sixty-Six, they, the same Samuel M. Grubb and Edith Anna Griffith, appeared in a Public Meeting of the said people, held at Brownsville, Pennsylvania." Does this hurt you to hold this this way? I'd love to get this on the record. It's interesting history.

WEST: No, I am interested in hearing it.

ARENA: ". . . and the said Samuel M. Grubb, taking the said Edith Anna Griffith by the hand, declared that he took her to be his wife, promising, with Divine Assistance, to be unto her a loving and faithful husband, until death should separate them. And then, the said Edith Anna Griffith did, in like manner, declare that she took him, the said Samuel M. Grubb, to be her husband, promising, with Divine Assistance, to be unto him a loving and faithful wife, until death should separate them. And moreover, they, the said Samuel M. Grubb and Edith Anna Griffith, she, according to the custom of marriage, adopting the name of her husband, did as a further confirmation thereof, then and there, to these presents set their hands. /Signed/ Samuel M. Grubb and Edith Anna Grubb." And those signatures, with a little different ink, match the little different ink coloring for the day of the year, and the day of the year above had been the eleventh day of the fourth month.

WEST: I suppose this was made out and then those spaces left for putting in the date of the actual ceremony . . .

ARENA: I would assume that, yes.

WEST: . . . and for the signatures.

ARENA: Excuse me, this is the original . . .

WEST: Yes.

ARENA: And there is a seal up above. Maybe I could read what is on that seal. It says, "Reynold's Bristol Board." Fascinating.

WEST: And are there any Milhouses?

ARENA: Now I shall read the names, bearing in mind that people's handwriting sometimes makes it difficult to understand the lettering.

WEST: Yes.

ARENA: The first names "Antiago A. Crawford", "Lithe D. Morrell" "Maria B. Cook."

WEST: They called it Maria, I bet.

ARENA: "Seaborn Crawford."

WEST: You know, they gave the name Seaborn to children who were born, oftentimes, at sea.

ARENA: "Lucy Wood, R. E. Vernon, Mary B. Mason, Abraham Garwood, Mary A. Garwood, Ella Slocum."

WEST: There was a Slocum who went to Whittier College.

ARENA: "Lura Campbell, Anna B. Rogers, Eli Haines, James R. Rogers, Edith M. Rogers, Ann Starn, Lydia H. Haviland, Mary Alexander, Rollie West, Anna R. Bransom, O. M. Boucken, Bella Jefferies, James Y. Griffith, Anna M. Jefferies, Amos Griffith."

WEST: Now we're getting to the bride's father and mother.

ARENA: Next, "Mary E. Griffith, Amos Griffith, Edith Griffith, Lewis N. Griffith, Nancy A. Griffith," and that is the complete list.

WEST: I wondered if there would be Milhouses there. But, actually, the Milhous family and the Griffith family only mingled with the marriage of Edith Griffith's sister, Elizabeth, to J. B. Milhous. This was another sister, a Griffith sister, marrying into the Grubb family, so the Milhouses were not involved in this. And Edith Griffith, who became Edith Grubb, I think that she was the youngest of the sisters. So that her older

sister, Elizabeth [Griffith Milhous] probably had her own home and children and was established someplace else. I think that was extraordinary. And there are more things that she brought to me. I have, by the way, the marriage certificate--which is really more pertinent, closer related to Richard and to the Milhous family--of Elizabeth Griffith and her husband, who was a Milhous, Great-grandfather Joshua Milhous.

ARENA: Would this be the same Elizabeth who was brought from North Vernon, Indiana, with Franklin Milhous, the President's grandfather?

WEST: She would resent your saying "brought with" because she lived--he came in 1896, '97, someplace in there--into 1923, or something, and was still, in her nineties, officiating at weddings and funerals. So, I think you better say "She CAME WITH . . ." [Laughter]

ARENA: You might be interested in knowing that a photograph showing her and Aunt Allie, along with husband Franklin Milhous, surrounded by Ezra Milhous' children, is in the possession of Oliver, and it looked like a copy of a copy, and there are others, evidently taken on the porch, and they all felt it was the home in Lindsay of Mrs. Jane Beeson. At any rate, you might be interested, if you have not seen any photographs of Elizabeth, the mother of Almira, there is this photograph, and in excellent condition.

WEST: I have my own pictures of her, pictures of her taken in my Uncle Charlie's home, with whom she lived before he moved here to California--her son, Charles [Wright Milhous]. A picture of her by herself. Did I show you when you were here last, had I yet had a picture enlarged and modernized of the whole Milhous family?

ARENA: I don't recall that.

WEST: Let me bring it to you.

ARENA: I would appreciate it.

WEST: It's so clear.

ARENA: This is the photograph that you had recently restored?

WEST: Yes. I had it restored and enlarged.

ARENA: I've not seen this particular one, no, but I've seen quite a few.

WEST: Here, you see, this is Great-grandfather [Joshua Vickers] and Great-grandmother [Elizabeth Griffith] Milhous, sitting. This is their home, which still stands. And, as I wrote to the man who wrote the articles which is in Outdoor Indiana . . .

ARENA: I thought I heard Oliver say something about a fire recently.

WEST: Yes, that was Uncle Frank's house.

ARENA: I see.

WEST: Not this house, which to my mind is of greater interest than either my grandfather's [Jessie Griffith Milhous] house, which was also destroyed back there.

ARENA: Where was it located back there?

WEST: In Jennings County, Indiana, in Bigger Township, on the . . .

ARENA: And you are not aware of the owners?

WEST: Oh, yes, I've been inside. Yes, I know who the owners are, I've been inside there. I have pictures, when my mother visited, with her arm around the pillar. But here is Great-grandfather and Great-grandmother. And here is. . . . I sent this picture to Richard, because it has his mother. There's his mother, there's Hannah Milhous, and his grandmother, Almira.

ARENA: She is very evident there.

WEST: Yes. And she never changed. She wore her hair in those little scallops.

ARENA: She remained thin and fully active to the end.

WEST: Extremely active. She broke her hip. She was running after a chicken. Have you heard that too?

ARENA: No, but the fact that she maintained the chickens and made a soup of some of them and discarded vegetables from the grocery market was very vividly recalled.

WEST: She was enormously active. I lived there, I think I told you, while I went to college. I visited there sometimes too when I was younger. And she had things organized, and she had ME organized, and I never did so much work in my life.

ARENA: What she had some of the other relatives do, she would collect certain items, I believe the lemons, and then set up a little stand and and then sell them to nearby neighbors and stores.

WEST: No. She evidently didn't think that I was the salesman type. She had me doing manual labor. I ran up and down the stairsteps bringing stuff out of the cellar that she wanted, I don't know what done with, but she wanted it brought up. There was, in the kitchen, I remember, a sign pasted (because [Rose] Olive Milhous was the youngest of the daughters) saying, "If you want something done, do it yourself, don't ask Olive." They [my parents] put me there. It was a large family. Edith Milhous was not yet married.

This was when I was probably about nine years old. They put a stool up for me to stand on while I washed dishes. And I said, whether innocently or with malice, or a kind of combination of the two, or just plain curiosity, I said to Jennie, to Jane Beeson, "Who washed the dishes before I came here?" [Laughter] Because I went through an enormous lot of dishes. It made Jennie mad and she didn't talk to me for the rest of the dishwashing. And I washed away.

You see, we lived out in Yorba Linda[California] on a ranch, and I have an idea that Aunt Allie thought that we were having a somewhat less conventional bringing-up than we ought to have. And I was very, very freckled. And when I got to Aunt Allie's--I think probably the girls rather than Aunt Allie, although Aunt Allie may have said to the girls, "You know, you should do something about Jessamyn's freckles,"--they put a buttermilk mask on me. You put thick, thick buttermilk, you know, on a piece of cloth, and then you make holes and a place where you can breath through it, and have strings and tie it at the back. So I went around with my buttermilk mask. [Laughter]

ARENA: The other relative who had freckles, and this came up recently, was your cousin. Robert Franklin Milhous, now in Bakersfield [California] who evidently, like the other sons of Ezra, loved the stock and has been dealing in selling and transporting them now by truck. But he, also, is a freckled one, and quite light-complexioned even now.

WEST: I think freckles were in the Milhous, not the Burdg side of the family. My mother's father was sandy-haired and freckled.

ARENA: While we're on this question of the relatives staying with other relatives, which seems to have been the common thing throughout, I could not help but raise the question to the nephews and nieces who were evidently the poor relations, in the sense that they were given money. They recall their aunts givin

them money. I was just going to ask you if there was any special feeling, living with any of your relatives, whether it was with Aunt Hannah, if you did for a while, but certainly with Grandmother, if they mentioned this idea that you were a bit different, or that you were from Yorba Linda and needed some conventionalizing or something?

WEST: I was trying to think what SHE thought about putting my buttermilk [mask on], because you know, Mama wasn't worried about my freckles. No, I never stayed with Hannah at all. I stayed with Aunt Allie. The two or three times I stayed there were only for three or four days when Mama went on a trip with, say, Elizabeth Harrison. There were trips made up to the Lindsay area, to look at land, or whatnot, and it was just a pleasure trip for my mother, and the children would be farmed out while she made these trips with her cousins, most of whom, at that time, were not married--with her unmarried cousins, for fun. I stayed at Aunt Allie's house my senior year when I was in college. At that time I paid fifteen dollars a month for my room, which had no heat. I rented the room. And if I thought of it in ANY way, I thought I was doing her a good turn, you see, in giving her fifteen dollars rent for the room. And I never ate there. I ate breakfast there every morning, but I got up early to walk to school, and every morning I had the same breakfast, which I fixed myself. I had a pint of milk delivered each day there, and I bought Shredded Wheat biscuits, you know. And every morning I had a bowl of two Shredded Wheat biscuits and the pint of milk and off I started. And people have asked me, "Didn't Aunt Allie ever give you a hot breakfast?" No, because I think I was up and on my way. Olive and Oscar Marshburn and Hadley [Earl Marshburn] were living there at that time. For a while, Hannah was there.

BEGIN SIDE I TAPE II

ARENA: I believe at the end of the last tape we were discussing the idea of visiting Grandmother Almira, and you were recalling, also, something about Hannah.

WEST: Yes, Hannah was there. I don't know under what circumstances, whether she was there for two or three days, but she was there, so that I remember two things: One, that I was going out to a party, and Hannah must have had three or four small children to look after, but she volunteered to press my party dress for me. She set up the ironing board. And I don't know whether we had electric irons or not. And it isn't anything that I ever would have asked her to do. I don't know whether she volunteered because she saw me hurrying and going to do it myself, or saw me hurrying and knew that I WASN'T going to do it myself and OUGHT to. In any case, she pressed my dress for me, and she must have been weary and tired and so forth.

Another things which I've ALWAYS remembered, which was something that I didn't know that one did, I was going out; I don't know whether

on a date or to a meeting or to a party, or what, and she offered me something to eat. And I said, "No, thanks, I don't want to eat it." And she said, "Oh, yes, I understand. You've already brushed your teeth and you don't want to eat something now after having brushed your teeth." And I didn't say anything, but this was news to me. I brushed my teeth once a day. I brushed them when I got up in the morning and that ended the brushing of teeth. And I didn't realize that it really was nicer, after each time you ate--I was proud of myself to brush them once a day--to brush your teeth again. And I don't know whether this might have been Hannah's way of really teaching me something, of saying to me, "Jessamyn, it would be nice, before you go out to a party, if you've eaten, to brush your teeth."

ARENA: As a matter of fact, and I was going to ask that question a moment ago when we were discussing the moral aspects and the upbringing of children and so forth, do you EVER recall that besides your father and mother, any of your aunts or your grandmother did lecture you in a positive way, "Do go to church on Sunday," "Do go to Sunday school," "Don't tell lies?" Do you recall that?

WEST: No.

ARENA: Neither have the other relatives but, nevertheless, the message came through somehow, some way. [Interruption]

WEST: When Mr. Hoyt was here talking to me--and I told you I had a letter from Rose Mary Woods asking me to talk with him--he said that he was going to write about the families, not a history of Richard Nixon himself. I told him that I didn't truly know Richard, because I was older than Richard, but I knew the families. And he said that he had written books about the--I don't remember now--the Vanderbilt family, and the Astor family and so forth. And this book, he said the title that he had in mind for it was, An Ordinary American Family. Then I thought, I wondered whether or not a family as deeply Quaker--and it has now been found that a great many of the Nixons, likewise, were Quakers too--that is not an ordinary family, or it is not statistically at least. Statistically, it is unique, because there are so few, actually, numerically there are so few Quakers in the country. For three hundred years they were Quakers when they arrived here, the Griffiths, the Milhouses, the Prices were all Quakers, and a number of the Nixon forbears too were Quakers when they arrived here. I wondered about, just factually, whether any Quaker family who had been Quakers for three hundred years should be called an ordinary family. In a way it's unique. It's unique statistically at least.

ARENA: This is a case that, possibly, is similar to the role of the Puritans. Numerically, the Puritans don't exist any more. But actually, they're ingrained in conscious United

States history. I think I might have mentioned this in the first interview, and I would stand by it, that every school boy learns about [William] Willie Penn and the signing of the treaty, and not only is the average American aware of the Quakers, although he rarely, possibly, comes into contact with one directly. People now know that the President is of Quaker background, but the average American rarely comes into contact with a Quaker, but he has a deeply imbedded stereotyped notion of the Quaker . . .

WEST: . . . which may be mixed up with the idea of Shakers and Dunkards and . . .

ARENA: . . . abolitionists, the underground railroad, that's usually brought up in the lower grades in school, which everyone gets. Not everyone goes into college, not everyone goes on and takes college history, where they might go into depth.

WEST: What you're saying reminds me of another thing that Mr. Hoyt said. He was in Indiana and, of course, the Milhous clan--I suppose there may be some second or third cousins.

ARENA: Unfortunately, the research that's been done so far indicates there aren't any Milhouses around that area now.

WEST: Uncle [Franklin] Frank Milhous' place was bought by a woman whose name is Crawford, a Mrs. [Frieda] Crawford, and her husband [Harold Crawford] is, I think, a descendant of a Thomas Milhous. So he bought the Frank Milhous place, and he is, I don't know, a third or fourth cousin, not through the same line but through a brother of Great-grandfather. But, anyway, what Mr. Hoyt was saying was that--it struck me too when I was first there--that because my mother thought her people. . . . She had so much love and feeling and respect for them, for the Milhous family, that I thought that I would see something saying, "The Milhous Library," or something. But he said that they moved on and no trace was left whatsoever that they had ever lived there.

It is true, I did see about my father and my mother's mother, who was a McMannaman, and I saw a McMannaman on a bridge, that he had been a county supervisor, or something, and my father's relatives who were buried in the graveyard outside of Vernon. It said, I think his name was "John Bouter, Proprietor of Vernon." But the Milhous name was not there. But I was thinking about that. This has been, it seems to me, characteristic of the Quakers, that the influence, if it was there, it was there in some other form than met the eye. It was not there in objects or in material things. It was there in these women: Great-grandmother taught school, was a preacher for a long time there. My grandmother was the head of

the Sunday school. If they had influence at all, the influence was on the lives of human beings . . .

ARENA: . . . as handed down by word of mouth rather than the written document.

WEST: Yes.

ARENA: Would that be, possibly, the best argument for any oral history project, where there are not enough written records, but there are people who have recollections of these things?

WEST: It seems to me that the very best argument for an oral history is simply to look back in history and see how great, how magnificent it would be to hear someone who knew [Thomas] Jefferson, people who knew Jefferson or who knew [Abraham] Lincoln, to speak in their own tongues. If the ONLY thing we got out of it was what kind of words; how did they pronounce words then; what were their intonations, their inflections, their ways of speech? If only THAT we knew, apart from how it related to, "What kind of a man was Lincoln?" The most important thing that might come out of it would be, not, "What kind of a man was Lincoln or Jefferson?"--this would be interesting, of course--but what were people like who lived in that day? What were their values, what were their standards by which they judged this man Nixon or this man Lincoln? What kind of people? We read in history books that this was a time of great turmoil, of great violence, and whatnot. Here are people speaking out of their lives, out of what they believe to be true, and certainly you can tell out of people's voices and out of what they say, as we say, as we are talking to you. We haven't much chance to, you know, make up stories that will whitewash anything. You can tell what people are like. That seems to me to be the enormous value of oral history.

ARENA: The voices of your cousins who are the children of Ezra Milhous are an excellent example of words and intonations and accents that go back to, real literally, pioneer California. I'm certain that the children, and especially the oldest of the children, Phillip, are very similar to their father, Ezra. They're very interesting.

WEST: I'll bet what they go back to is, not pioneer California, because children speak the language of their parents, but it goes back, I would guess, to Indiana.

ARENA: I meant, in a way, recent pioneer California, in the sense that Ezra--I'm putting him in that category--cleared virgin land.

WEST: But he is still speaking for--he picked up some California-isms, those "coyotes" and "rodeos" and that sort of thing. But the speech of my mother which was still. . . . And she relished language. She relished words. She used words just for the fun of having them in her mouth. She used words like, you know, "bread up the house,", "they're too fine-haired," clever-meaning, not smart-brilliant, but simply hospitable. She used words like those for fun. Those were words that were used, extremely characteristic, not of just Southern Indiana but of the South. And if you go through books of dialect, of words used in the South, Southern Indiana is very close to Kentucky and in its language is much closer to the South than it is to Illinois or to Iowa.

ARENA: One particular Quaker family in Whittier--the name might ring a bell to you--not a relative but a very definite old Quaker family--is Votaw, and I had the pleasure of interviewing a Mr. [Clayton] Votaw who recounted from firsthand experience the incident where his father engaged in a horse race where his wife said almost the same thing as you have said in the book, The Friendly Persuasion. And I pointed out the fact that you had written about that in the book. He said he was aware of it and that this was just an absolutely true incident and it happened in his background. In addition to the Milhous Quaker love for horse racing, evidently this could have happened with others as well. Mr. Votaw would be evidence of that.

WEST: My father has heard people say--and I think my father, himself, almost came to believe it--that this horse race had truly happened and that someone had told me about it.

ARENA: Well, he would be the evidence.

WEST: I never heard a word, you see, of the horse race. In this Outdoor Indiana, when you read this article, you will see that the man who wrote the article, who is the editor of the magazine, says that my story about Morgan's Raid was evidently a story passed on to me by a Quaker ancestor. Now, insofar as I know, no Quaker ancestor had anything whatsoever to do with Morgan's Raid in any way, shape or form. They were quite a bit distant. They were--I don't know--twenty miles away from where Morgan was coming. They weren't fighters. And my story is simply for the sake of drama, because this sort of thing happened in some Quaker families. I had a boy who wanted, who thought it was his duty to go out and join the home guard and that sort of thing, because otherwise, I didn't have any story. Otherwise, I just had the Quakers sitting home in their rocking chairs and Morgan going on his raid. But they are inclined to do this, to think, you know, that this is factual, the stories in The Friendly Persuasion and Except for Me and Thee. They are factual only to the point that I tried to keep them in the true spirit. If Great-grandfather should read it, he would tear out his

hair and say, "I never had such a thought in my life!" Did I tell you before about the relative who wrote to my mother and to my English teacher after The Friendly Persuasion came out?

ARENA: Please repeat it, because it doesn't come to mind.

WEST: I have the letter down here. I was just looking at it recently, the letter that my mother wrote to me about it. This relative wanted me to clean up The Friendly Persuasion because I had some of them saying "aint," and she was sure no Milhous ever said an "aint." And by the way, in the first stories I had published, I spelled it "Millhouse," and after this complaint came in, that's when I changed it to Birdwell, because I thought that by spelling it that way I was saying, "Look, these are fictional people, but just out of affection or whatnot, I will give them this name." (1) No Milhous ever said "aint"; (2) I had a story where Jesse prayed a little longer than was necessary while the organ music [was playing], and this was thought to be sacrilegious, you know. He wouldn't pray for a purpose of that kind. (3) And this is also another point: That I had some of Jesse's children calling him "Pa," and this relative said to my mother, "Why, Grace, you didn't call YOUR own father "Pa." Frank Milhous was the oldest child, I think, in the Milhous hierarchy. I think that Frank Milhous felt they were THE star. Well, he was not called "Pa" all the time, but once in a while the kids said "Pa" instead of saying "Father," or something, whatever. And (4) That I used a dirty word; I used a four-letter word. I said that the ducks deposited, you know, duck dung, and this person wanted the "dung" taken out. And my poor mother, who at this time was extremely happy--you know, I was having a book published and whatnot--and here I was bringing scorn down upon her own family and members of the family. Well, it was A member, really A member found fault with this. My English professor just laughed. It didn't hurt him. If I wanted to say "dung" it was okay. But my mother was hurt at this. And I changed the name from Milhous to Birdwell, so that it came out as Birdwell. This relative, after having spoken to my mother--and you should read my mother's long letter about it--was broken-hearted, her pride was knocked down and so forth. Then when the book became popular, she [the relative] put on a Quaker costume and went out and gave readings at church socials, and things of this sort.

ARENA: That's delightful. And we're going to discuss at this point the idea of the attitude regarding smoking among Quakers.

WEST: This was copied by my mother. It's something that was written by Martha Jane [Milhous] Ware, who was Joshua Milhous' daughter, and she was writing about her father. This was read March 30, 1932, at a Milhous reunion at Edith Timberlake's. And it begins, "Joshua V. Milhous, with his twin sister,

Jane, were the youngest, except a sister who died when a child, of a large family. At the age of twenty-seven, he went into Pennsylvania and brought home his bride, Elizabeth Price Griffith, all the rest of the children having married and gone. The father and mother lived in a part of the old home for several years. Frank [Franklin Milhous], Edith [Griffith Milhous] and Jesse [Griffith Milhous] were born here in Ohio, before the family moved to Indiana."

I will mention one incident of their early married life as Mother told it to me. "Father used tobacco. Mother was so utterly opposed to it that when they were married, Father swore off, so everything was lovely with them until Baby Frank came. Soon after that event, carpenters came to do some work on the house and boarded with them. As was their custom in those days, after supper the men, Father included, went outside and sat on the fence with the others, smoking. They guyed Father, saying he was under his wife's thumb, till he threw off the petticoat rule and he smoked and joked with them, while the lonely little woman [she's writing about her mother] sat inside with her baby in her lap, crying, feeling utterly desolate and homesick. After that, she had scant patience with his tobacco habit. On one occasion when he came limping in with a sorry tale of having been knocked downhill by a cross buck--I guess a cross buck was a goat, I don't know--she merely said it was because the old fellow smelled the tobacco on him and attacked him. It was not until he realized that his boys were following in his footsteps that he gave up the habit, twenty-five or thirty years before his death." Now, I'm stopping quoting from this.

This is enormously amusing, and I wish I had come upon it earlier when I was writing my stories about the family. Of course, if I had had any smoking going on in The Friendly Persuasion, heaven knows WHAT would have happened with the relatives! [Laughter] But I didn't know that anyone smoked. But I was told by my mother that Great-grandmother [Elizabeth Griffith] Milhous, the mother of Jesse G. Milhous, my grandfather, my mother's father, said that she considered that my grandfather [Jessie Milhous] had a kind of queer turn, and she attributed it to the fact that he smoked all the time that she was carrying Jesse G.! But then he gave up [smoking].

"It was not until he realized that his boys were following in his footsteps that he gave up the habit, twenty-five or thirty years before his death. His brother, Vickers [Milhous] (that's Cousin William Milhous' father) and he quit at the same time, the two agreeing that the first one who began again should give the other his choice of horses from the stable. A few months later, Uncle Vickers wrote to Father to come out and get his horse." [Laughter]

"Father was a well-read man, having a large library, the cases of books reaching almost to the ceiling. There was a great variety of subjects in those books: religion, science, history, poetry, drama, romance, Sir Walter Scott being a prime favorite. Also Charles Dickens' works, also E. P. Rowe." By the way, I have collected E. P. Rowe's [works] now myself, with whom Great-grandfather had had some correspondence in a business way, both being interested in nursery stock.

This whole thing is a fascinating report. And it's the report of a true writer, who has a sense of what is amusing and what is interesting, because she was faced, you see, with trying to hit upon some highlights that would be interesting and amusing to her listeners at a Milhous reunion. And here my mother went to the trouble. . . . I don't know where she got this. She lived next door to Aunt Mattie [Martha Jane Milhous Ware] for a while. I don't know whether it was ever printed for other people, or whether Aunt Mattie's family has copies of it, but Aunt Mattie undoubtedly wrote it out and then read it to them, because this was not extemporaneous speaking. And Mama, perhaps, then borrowed it of Aunt Mattie and made a copy of it herself. But it's full of funny things.

ARENA: Evidently these reunions were set according to a certain format, and this would be a part of it, and I think they still are. This is where some of the actions of the President playing the piano or in reciting poetry would be remembered by his different relatives, his different cousins, today. They remember the President playing the piano or they remember someone reciting. And this evidently served the same purpose in its day.

WEST: Yes. At one of those reunions, I don't remember where it was held, it was when I came back from my first visit to Ireland at Timahoe, when I tried to find the graveyard where the first Milhouses were buried, and when I came back from England and Ireland and France too, I was twenty-six years old when I made THAT report. I spoke at one of the Milhous reunions and told them all about what I had found at the library in London [England], the Quaker Meeting House library there, about the Milhouses, about letters that I read there, written when Elizabeth Price Griffith, who was Great-grandmother's mother, who was a RENOWNED preacher, and didn't just preach in her local neighborhood, but was sent by the Society of Friends to preach in Ireland and England, letters written about her and by her, which are in the library there at the Friends Meeting House in London. And there was one letter which I remember, which made me laugh, written about them saying she was the star performer. I mean, she was going about making the speeches and her husband was simply going with her. And this person in the letter (I've forgotten whether it was a he or a she) said, "It was amusing to see her husband take on the part that usually the woman plays; that when she got in from a speaking engagement and sat down, wearily, by the fire, he fetched her house slippers for her to put on to rest her feet, and looked after her in this way." So for QUAKER women--Women's Lib--we've had it! Our men were fetching our slippers long ago. [Laughter] But this smoking part, too, I suppose this is a thing that some of the relatives must have known it because they heard this read. But if I had put it in my book, my mother would have had stronger letters written to her than she received.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you regarding a point that you did mention earlier, and this would be more in the sense of an overall philosophical or personal, and maybe even an emotional question, but when you do go through an area such as North Vernon, Indiana, where there are no living relatives . . .

WEST: No, I HAVE some living relatives.

ARENA: Well, let's say there happen to be no Milhous relatives, we'll say that. And you are interested in the Milhouses. You're interested in that side of the family; what does happen to you?

WEST: I am filled, because of my mother's feeling for that part of the country . . . [Interruption] I have a VERY special feeling. It isn't a feeling, I'm sure, that all of my relatives have, many of them haven't even taken the trouble to go back there. It is a special feeling, I think, because of the feeling my mother had, and the fact that she could articulate this feeling. So that, in a way, she ruined me as a writer. She MADE me as a writer and she ruined me. Because her homesick, longing, imaginative reports of Southern Indiana, that neighborhood that she knew as a girl, stirred my imagination so much that where I lived in California, which had its own romance and beauty, certainly, and history and whatnot, that was nothing to me. Here, I could have spent my time. I lived in a neighborhood where there were the big Spanish land grants, where I went to school with the Yorbas, but my mind was with what my mother had talked about, with the absent, and I suppose this is a form of romanticism, but I thought about Southern Indiana, about where my mother had lived, these Quaker meeting houses, these pie suppers, these box suppers, these papaws, these Johnny-jump-ups, the flowers that grew in the spring. I was filled with a feeling about this countryside.

So, when I first went back there it was, of course, a disappointment, because nothing could equal the combination of her homesick memories plus my imagination. And I went back there and saw, what seemed to me to be a ragged, semi-cultivated land, because I was accustomed to California, where we have either trees or we have cultivated land. We don't have, as you have in Southern Indiana, you know, trees standing, and then a little patch of corn and whatnot. It looked as though people had fallen down on the job, as if they had given up.