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Thomas T. Seulke (November 12, 1971)

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Second Oral History Interview

with

THOMAS T. SEULKE

November 12, 1971
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #2 with Thomas T. Seulke of Fullerton, California. Today's date is November 12, 1971, Arena interviewing, in Whittier, California. To pick up where we left off on the interview, Tom, shall we take one of the areas and look at it a little more in detail now--your relationship to the family. Would you mind, just to get us on the right foot again, explaining just how you are related familywise with President Nixon?

SEULKE: It would go through our mothers, I believe. His mother and my mother were first cousins. His grandfather and my grandfather both being Milhouses were brothers.

ARENA: And your grandfather's name was . . .

SEULKE: Charles [Wright] Milhous, C. W. Milhous.

ARENA: Just to remain on that for a while, you recall the family reunions that used to be held . . .

SEULKE: In Riverside [California].

ARENA: In Riverside. Some were held in Whittier itself or at that time Grandfather [Franklin] Milhous' home was in East Whittier. I understand that side of what is now Whittier Boulevard, that side was considered East Whittier, where the grandfather's home was, if I'm not mistaken. It used to be called the County Road at that time.

SEULKE: Yes.

ARENA: Well, the point is you don't recall any reunions in that home.

SEULKE: I do.

ARENA: Do you recall Grandmother Almira [Milhous] herself?

SEULKE: Yes.

ARENA: Will you describe any one of these particular reunions, as you recollect them: Numbers of people; what was done both from the standpoint of if meals were or were not served; how were the religious services taken care of; were the reunions held just once a year around Christmas? Take one that you recall which was held in Grandfather Milhous' home.

SEULKE: That would have been the home where Marshburns used to live, Olive and Oscar.

ARENA: If I'm not mistaken, it's their married daughter who lives in that home now, Mrs. [Marygene Marshburn] Wright.

SEULKE: That's right. They moved the house back.

ARENA: At the time you attended, the house had not been moved back, it was still in its original spot?

SEULKE: Right. I would make a guess, purely a guess, that the number of people would have been, oh, 70 or 75 people, it seemed to me. Now, maybe being young I am exaggerating a little bit.

ARENA: When you say young, about how old were you that you are recollecting now?

SEULKE: Six to eight years old, maybe, in that period. The kids all would get together and play around, have fun at these deals. Of course, the older people would sit around in the living room and talk. The dinner itself--if you can imagine trying to feed that many people at a large dining table, and as I remember they had a pretty large one, a pretty fair-sized dining room. The women would prepare the food. I think a lot of it was brought by different ones, then all put together there. As I remember it, Olive Marshburn--kind of a, I guess you would call her the hostess--kind of taking charge, making sure everything is right. Of course her sisters, Hannah Nixon, Edith Timberlake, [Martha] Mattie Gibbons and Jane Beeson, all the sisters would, of course, help. We just had a lot of fun. It was kind of enjoyable.

ARENA: You don't recall as a youngster that this was something that was forced on you by the older folks, and that you had to fight or you were forced to go and you didn't look forward to it; you recall it as enjoyable experience.

SEULKE: I do. Maybe a little later on in years it might have been a little different, but at that age, in those times you didn't have activities going on that kids have nowadays to go to, and something like this was kind of special. Especially when we would drive clear out to Riverside to the [Philip] Timberlakes. In fact, I was going through some pictures the other day and I found a photograph of one of those reunions. One odd thing was that all the kids had paper hats on. I don't know whether it was around New Year's or when it was. Maybe it was just a party hat. I was trying to pick out different ones, they've sure changed. I'm sure that Dick was in that one. I believe I picked out Harold [Samuel Nixon]. I believe he was in that one, Dick's older brother.

ARENA: I do recall visiting the Timberlakes not too long ago and the daughter, Mrs. [Elizabeth Timberlake] Paldanius, had birthday pictures where the youngsters were wearing hats. It might be the same party or it might not. I do recall in one case there were such pictures. So it was not just a question of reunions, but you might also have attended birthday parties, or some of these may have been combined. Maybe some youngster had a birthday around the time of the reunion. Maybe a part of it was a party. Could that have been possible?

SEULKE: That could have been. Not only a child, it might have been one of the older people that they would have celebrated at the same time. But when you ask about the religious part, grace was always said before a meal.

ARENA: Would one person in particular be in charge of the blessing; for example, the older person, Grandmother Almira, or do you recall this said by different persons?

SEULKE: No, I really don't remember who it might have been. It was really an older person, she could have been one. Of course, she used the older speech and accent of "thee" and "thou."

ARENA: Would you possibly remember any particular prayer that was used for grace?

SEULKE: No, I wouldn't.

ARENA: Can you recall back whether it was read or was it composed by the person at the time, the words? Do you think it might have been a formal one, one that was from a particular prayer of some famous Quaker. Or do you think that maybe it was a personal thing referring to their own personal needs, their own immediate family?

SEULKE: As I remember it there was just a prayer, but since you mentioned that written. . . . I believe once in a while, maybe every time, that someone had written something that was read. Maybe some others that were there could elaborate on that. But you mentioned it, and I believe there was a time or two when it was either in a poem form or something of that type that one of the older people read before dinner or maybe even after we ate.

ARENA: Tom, do you recollect what part of the day the main meal was held and then did people break up to go to religious services, say, before or after, and did the entire family go as a group or was this something where you're on your own? Some would go maybe to an earlier service or to a later one. Do you recall that aspect, tying in the religious part of the family reunion? By the way, this would still be the Christmas period. The one you're talking about in particular was one held around the Christmas holiday.

SEULKE: To that point, you know I can't remember. At that age I imagine we had services before we went or either afterwards, if it happened to be on a particular day when there was a service held.

Most of the reunions at Riverside were in the spring of the year before it got too hot.

We ate at noon, food was brought by all who attended--potluck type--no religious services. These were strictly family get-togethers to catch up on the family activities--new babies, new husbands or wives, etc.

ARENA: Were you living in Whittier at the time and did you travel to the home where the reunion was held and sleep there, do you recollect by any chance? Or was this a one-day affair where you left home and came back the same day?

SEULKE: This was one day to me.

ARENA: You don't recall sleeping overnight?

SEULKE: No.

ARENA: Do you recall any special excitement over the fact that relatives were coming from far away, relatives you hadn't seen or appeared strange to you, especially at that time being a youngster? Do you recall that there were a lot of strange faces?

SEULKE: Yes, that's true, and I expect my mother was really looking forward to these with anticipation because in those days you didn't travel like you do now. I think I told you before that my father had passed away when I was young, and my mother did the driving, so she wouldn't drive too far. I would

recollect that my grandfather might have taken my immediate family to these deals in Riverside. In Whittier she would have driven. I know that she would anticipate meeting these relatives that she hadn't seen for a long time. Of course, that's when the kids would see some of the children we hadn't seen for a long time either.

ARENA: Speaking of lady drivers, is it your recollection that Mrs. Hannah Nixon, the President's mother, did not drive? Can you recollect ever her driving, even right up to the time she passed on?

SEULKE: Oh, yes, she drove.

ARENA: Do you recall her driving in these early years?

SEULKE: No, I don't. Not much in the early years, but later on I know she drove.

ARENA: Also speaking of driving, do you recollect anything like your Aunt Martha Gibbons--I believe that was the nurse, if I'm not mistaken--do you recollect her driving a motorcycle, or something to do with a motorcycle?

SEULKE: No. I imagine she would, knowing her.

ARENA: A letter was pointed out to me by one of her daughters. And the letter was written by Mrs. Gibbon's mother, [Almira Milhous] dealing with her riding a motorcycle. That's the only thing I've come across so far. I'd like to find more about that. Someone who recollects the motorcycle itself, for example.

SEULKE: My father had a motorcycle, I remember years ago. It was a Harley Davidson. It was a belt drive, it wasn't a chain drive.

ARENA: Did he use it for necessity or for real transportation, or was it kind of a sport, extra vehicle for pleasure?

SEULKE: I was so young then, It's hard to say. I imagine a little bit of both. He was quite a fisherman and a hunter. He might have had it for sport as well as for transportation.

ARENA: Just to recollect about your father's background, what was his occupation, Tom?

SEULKE: Basically, he was an electrician in Indiana. And then when he came out here, of course, he worked for my grandfather [Charles Wright Milhous] on the ranch.

ARENA: And your grandfather was a farmer.

SEULKE: He was a pharmacist, really. He was a pharmacist in Indiana and then he came out here and bought some property and then expanded from that.

ARENA: Do you know if he opened up a pharmacy shop as well out here?

SEULKE: Not out here, to my knowledge. I rather imagine that his brother, Frank Milhous, must have come out here first. That's probably what profited him to come out, I think. I might be mistaken, but I imagine that property there was the first piece of property that Frank Milhous bought. Have you heard anyone say?

ARENA: I don't know if it's the first. You probably know as well as I that he owned property elsewhere as well. I believe one of the areas was Lindsay [California]. And I would assume that the Lindsay property came later, that this was the first point to which he came from Indiana and then bought some other pieces along the way. I don't know, maybe you might know, if there is anything besides Lindsay and Whittier? I guess it would be East Whittier, in particular, that he owned.

SEULKE: His brother [Jesse Griffith] Jess Milhous had some property in Yorba Linda [California]. Whether the other Milhouses had any property up there--my grandfather didn't, not to my knowledge. Whether Frank Milhous did or not, I don't know.

ARENA: Do you recollect, or do you ever recall the question coming up as to whether or not the Yorba Linda property was connected in any way with the property that [Francis Anthony] Frank Nixon, the President's father, owned for his lemon groves? You don't know if that property he got had some connection?

SEULKE: I don't know. My Uncle Jess [Jesse Griffith Milhous], which would have been their brother, you know, I went out there a couple of times with him probably. He wanted to drive out and look the place over and we went in an old automobile touring car, I remember that. We'd drive out there. I thought to me that that was quite a ways away from home, because a few miles then seemed like a long ways. As far as property goes, I don't know of any other piece that they might have had.

I can tell you, on the side right here, something kind of strange. I told you I worked for the Nixons in the market and we used to deliver groceries. Of course, every now and then we'd come up towards Whittier this way and bring groceries to the [Oscar] Marshburns where Almira Milhous lived. And at that time she must have been way up in her eighties. I drove around the backyard, started to get out of the truck and she came around from the side of the barn with a pair of pruning shears in her hand. Now imagine, here's a woman at that time must have been around eighty-five. And I said, "What are you doing?" She said,

"Well they're furring out, getting ready to irrigate, and some of these avocado limbs were pretty low for the tractor to get through and I just went back to trim them off." This was an amazing woman. She had stamina.

ARENA: You might know, too, that she traveled across country to see and attend the President's law school graduation at Duke [University] in 1937. And I know along the route she stopped back in Indiana and saw relatives too. I was just wondering if you would recollect that and recall the trip or recall something about it? That would have been 1937 in spring, around June when graduations are held. It would have been Grandmother Almira and the parents.

SEULKE: You know, the only trip I remember was a fast trip back there and I believe [Joseph Alden] Joe Beeson drove Frank Nixon's car. But there was Joe, Frank and Hannah [Nixon], Aunt Allie [Almira Milhous] and I think Olive Marshburn, and I think there was another one. As I recollect there were six people that drove, and I think they drove just about straight through and at her age that was amazing. I think it was about a 1936 Chevrolet sedan.

ARENA: Considering that the trip was made in 1936, if that's the same one where they attended the President's graduation at Duke, then that would have been a good car for such a long trip, of course.

SEULKE: Right.

ARENA: Just to be sure, the fellow Joe Beeson is also Alden Beeson.

SEULKE: Right.

ARENA: And would you say most members of the family referred to him as Joe, or is it the other way around?

SEULKE: All I remember is Joe. Maybe the older people would call him Alden.

ARENA: I know that his mother refers to him as Alden. She did mention though that he is Joseph Alden Beeson. Speaking of that part of the family, and Grandmother Almira, what do you recall in the way of a personal contact, anything at all under any circumstances; your witnessing her, describing her, the books she read, the books she kept in her room? Do you recall her offering you cookies and tea or anything like that?

SEULKE: No, I don't remember much on that part. I do remember as a young boy I could realize that she was quite religious and followed religion quite a bit. As I said, she used

the Quaker "thee" and "thou" which to me was. . . . I just liked to hear her talk. One thing, we talked about baking. I remember one time we stayed overnight out at the Nixon's house. In the morning we got up and she was there. I don't know what the occasion was. She had stayed there that night. And she made hotcakes. I can tell you the count. She was amazed. I think Don [Francis Donald Nixon] and I, and Dick must have been there, too, probably getting ready to go to school, we had roughly seventeen hotcakes apiece. They weren't large ones, but she was just tickled to death. Usually you know some places you go they think that kid's sure eating a lot. She just seemed to be getting a big bang out of it, the more we ate the more she wanted to make for us. That's one little thing that I remember about her. But I really thought of her as an amazing woman, really, her religious and personal life.

ARENA: From the standpoint of religion, was it a question of her bringing it up and speaking about it, or was it more a question you might say of her living it and serving as an example? Where religion did come up, in your case, or maybe where you saw her at a distance in discussing it with someone else, do you recall actually discussing, we'll say, the Bible and discussing Quaker thoughts, Quaker teachings, in that sense of religion, or again this idea that she just seemed to live the beliefs and was religious in the sense that she was a living example?

SEULKE: I think your latter part, a living example and just living her religion. I don't recall too much about her. She wasn't the type that would push religion on anyone, if I remember.

ARENA: You don't recall that happening to you, for example, in all the time with her, she'd say "Be sure to go to church every Sunday."

SEULKE: No.

ARENA: She didn't harp on it with you.

SEULKE: She did it in such a way, she was such an example and that probably did more good to a small child than trying to talk to them and, say, beat the religion into them. I had an uncle the same way, Emmor Ware. Now he was my mother's sister's husband. [Gertrudel] Lucile Ware's husband.

ARENA: Then your mother's maiden name was Ware.

SEULKE: No, no, Milhous.

ARENA: Your mother was a Milhous.

SEULKE: My mother and her sister Lucile. She was also a Milhous, from Charles Milhous' family. My Uncle Emmor was the same--I classed him the same with Aunt Mattie

[Martha Gibbons]. Actually Olive and Oscar [Marshburn] were the same--studied the same type of religion. They followed their religion the same. My uncle [Emmor] was, what you wanted to do was your business, but I learned a lot just from the association with him. The reason I brought his name into it, he reminded me a lot of Aunt Allie. The same type, Quaker, methodical. I could see his lips moving before he'd say something. He wanted to make sure he was saying the right thing, possibly. He was just a wonderful person. And I classed her the same.

ARENA: Speaking about that personality, for example, when we raised the question of the motorcycle and Aunt Mattie, which would be Mrs. Martha Gibbons, you wouldn't be surprised at her riding a motorcycle. Would you have been surprised if Mrs. Marshburn, Olive Milhous Marshburn, got on a motorcycle?

SEULKE: Yes, I believe I would.

ARENA: They did have certainly different personalities, although religiouswise they were pretty well the same in the sense that none of them harped on it, so to speak. In that, they were pretty well the same. You wouldn't be surprised that the Marshburns--Olive Milhous by the way, her full name is Rose Olive Milhous Marshburn, although most people who do know her and, possibly yourself, always refer to her as Aunt Olive--did missionary work in Africa for a while and they engaged in missionary activities? And that is in keeping with her as you know her, you might say through your life. That would not have been a surprise?

SEULKE: They were down there for a year or more I guess, weren't they?

ARENA: At least a year, and I think it was a second trip. They had made a trip and then came back to remain for this missionary activity. Again, along with this family personality of the Milhouses on the President's side, what can you say about Mrs. Hannah Nixon, Hannah Milhous Nixon; say, did you ever come across the idea that she was interested in missionary activity herself, or did you ever come across the idea that she had hoped that her son Richard, President Nixon of course, would engage in missionary activity? Did that ever come out in any way, as far as you know?

SEULKE: Not as far as I know. I would class her as the same as her mother, as far as living a good Christian life. That woman was terrific. Of course, I worked around Hannah a lot for several years, probably knew her better than any of the other girls, of course, with working with her. I could see it in everyday working around her, the way she would treat people and, my goodness, the accounts there in the store. We used to

carry charge accounts, and there would be people who couldn't pay their bill. Of course, Frank knew the financial problem and knew he had to have the money to keep going, but she would never press anyone. If they couldn't pay it, they couldn't pay it. But she was exactly a pattern of her mother, I think, as far as the Quaker religion goes. She was just a very wonderful person.

ARENA: You weren't in charge of the books by any chance, Tom?

SEULKE: No.

ARENA: Of course, you were aware that accounts were held.

SEULKE: Every Sunday we used to add them up, these charge accounts. I'd go down there sometimes on Sunday. We'd sit in the front room there, Frank, Hannah and Don [Francis Donald Nixon] and I and add all these different customers' bills up just in your head, write a total and send them a bill.

ARENA: Would you describe as much of that accounting method that they used, including this point of adding them up that you recall? In other words, were books kept in which at the time of purchase receipts were made, and then from the receipts the items were kept in the books? But just how did the Nixons of the store maintain the books, and was there one person who seemed to be in charge in particular, say, Mrs. Hannah Nixon, or was it Frank, or both? Whatever you can recall about keeping the customers going and keeping the books that dealt with them. Excuse me, just to make sure, I assume that during this period there was no such thing as a CPA [Certified Public Accountant] or bookkeeper who came in and kept the books for them, especially we'll say before 1945. There was nothing like that?

SEULKE: Well I think, as I remember Frank did the bookwork and the paperwork. Then, like I say, each customer had a book that they kept in a big box with their name on the top. When they came in to purchase anything we'd grab that book out, it was in duplicate, and write down the item they bought and the price. If we had time at that particular time and weren't rushed, we'd add it up; if we were, we'd add it at the end of the month. Of course, the customer had the copy of what they bought and we had the original copy. Like I say, at the end of the month we'd add these up and then they would either--I'm not quite clear in my mind whether we sent them a bill or whether we'd put the total on the book and the people would come in in a few days and say, "What do I owe you for last month?"

I'll tell you one thing, it was 1945 when Don actually took the business over from his father. Of course, they had to send someone out from the state to go over his books. If I remember right he was there two or three days. He made the remark it was the simplest, most accurate set of books he'd gone over, and I think he found just a very few dollar mistakes. It didn't even

pay this man's time for coming out there and going over the books. He kept books in such a way that it was simple for anyone to pick it up and follow it. Well, it was just exact.

ARENA: Do you recall the nature of the individual book that was kept for a customer; was it a small one, was it a loose leaf where you would add or a regular bound book where the pages were stuck right into them?

SEULKE: I think it was one of these hard-covered books, a ledger, like you say, the pages were just in a book. They weren't loose leaf or anything like that.

ARENA: And one of these for each customer. Any idea how many of those, how many people he kept?

SEULKE: It must have been 200, 250 current all the time. You know, some would drop out, some new ones would come in.

ARENA: Is it your impression that the great majority actually were kept on account and the business depended on this sort of business, credit?

SEULKE: Maybe not in the first years, but later on there was so-called competition come in and carrying credit held a lot of his business. If he hadn't had credit he wouldn't have had the business.

ARENA: Would this be, Tom, because of the nature of the customers in that these were farmers who did not have ready cash and depended upon the sale of their crops? And Frank knew this and, by far and large, these people did meet their obligations when the crops were sold? And it was because of that he was selling mainly to farmers that he kept his books?

SEULKE: Yes, basically. Now, of course then too, Leffingwell Ranch was in operation then and they had a lot of workers down there getting paid by the day and possibly by the week. They carried some of those accounts. Nowadays you wouldn't think of carrying someone like that on account. They'd be here today and gone tomorrow. Some of those were some of the accounts that they lost. And a lot of them were good. Some of those people down there were just as good as gold, they were as good as anyone around there that owned property. They're the ones that when they'd get a little bit heavy on the account, they're the ones Hannah really wouldn't push. She would ask them now and then if they could pay up the account.

But another thing along those lines--we're getting a little bit back, a few years later--I'll tell you the feeling of the people, of the mutual friendship with people. A woman was into

us for probably \$60 or \$70. She come in the store and started shopping and Don saw her and he says, "Tell her she can't have any more groceries until she pays her bill." This woman had two little children, probably four and another one three, and she was pregnant at the time. She had the basket probably half-full, and I went out to talk to her and I talked about everything else but the bill, and I come back and told Don, I said, "Don, I just can't tell her." Don says, "By golly, I can tell her," and he went storming out there and in three minutes he come back and says, "I can't tell her either." So she got into us for another \$20. But that was just the way the whole family was. They just had a heart. They couldn't bring themselves around to cutting anybody off that needed food.

ARENA: That's very interesting. Were customers kept on the books all the way from Whittier itself or were these mainly East Whittier people and Leffingwell Ranch customers?

SEULKE: We had a few customers up in town; mainly more around the store. You know at that time that was the only market between Whittier and La Habra on Whittier Boulevard. Of course, having delivery service helped a lot of his business. It finally worked into people up in the [La Habra] Heights. You know Frank told me one time when the Heights really started to expand and the building was coming in there pretty good--at the end of the year, you know, he used to give calendars every year; businesses used to do that, it cost a few bucks but he figured it was worth it--he says, "You take some time out one day a week and drive around through the Heights up there when you are delivering and go by a new place, stop and give them a calendar and tell them where you are." And he says, "For every customer you get I'll give you a dollar. I mean that stays with us a month, you know."

ARENA: As far as you know that was Frank telling you to do that.

SEULKE: Right.

ARENA: Was it his idea as well, do you recollect, Tom?

SEULKE: It must have been his idea.

ARENA: And do you recollect how successful that was?

SEULKE: It didn't turn out too bad. I just hit it lucky and probably I picked up \$10 or \$15 which was a lot of money for me, making, I don't know, \$22 a week probably. But we picked up a lot of customers and a lot of those customers stayed with us. We had Laura Scudder.

ARENA: Would this be the same Scudder of potato chip fame?

SEULKE: Right. She started the company.

ARENA: Do you happen to know if she is still living?

SEULKE: No, I heard she passed away. I guess her daughters are around. They went to Fullerton High School. But there was a wonderful family. They had one of the nicest homes there in the Heights, I guess. Of course, being a delivery boy I went into a lot of nice places. I used to go into some homes up there, they're not always home when you deliver, and I always knew where the key was. I would open the house, take the groceries in, put the cold stuff in the refrigerator and the rest out on the counter and lock the door and take off. That's the type of people you had in those days.

ARENA: To what extent did you find the homes even not locked and you'd walk in? Did that happen at all?

SEULKE: Oh, once in a while. Maybe some of the older ones would say just to put the things in if they weren't there, but not too often.

ARENA: How would you make a distinction, if there is one, between the time, say, you helped out in the store as just a cousin or relative and the time you did it on a full-time basis for which you were being paid? Is there that distinction? Do you recall like always coming into the store as a youngster helping out here and there and coming in on a full-time basis? Do you recall that you did both types of labor in the store?

SEULKE: Of course I didn't do a whole lot of labor in those younger years. Let me see, I must have been probably eighteen when I started full-time. Being younger, you know, and running around with Don and of course Don had a few chores that he had to do, I remember him going in--they had bulk ice cream--every now and then he would go in and he would come out with a couple of ice cream cones. We'd sit out in back and eat them. Another one, they had a floor register. It happened to be right under the cash register where we had the register, and every once in a while coins would drop and they'd get down through there; and once in a while Don and I would climb under the old building and get under that register and we'd pick up a dime or a nickel. There were some interesting times. We'd help out, we'd go into, sometimes Frank would go into the early market to buy vegetables. They had one jobber in there, a Chinaman. We'd call in the evening and Frank would give them the order. He'd have it all put up and we'd go in there early to market and pick it up and bring it back. I went in a time or two with Don. To me it was interesting, it was different.

ARENA: It would have been the main one in Los Angeles [California].

SEULKE: Yes.

ARENA: Would this have been the same one that the President himself visited when he was in charge of fruits and vegetables for a while?

SEULKE: I imagine it would be.

ARENA: You don't recall ever going with the President himself?

SEULKE: Never with Dick. No.

ARENA: But it was the same one.

SEULKE: Same one.

ARENA: I think I cut you off when you were giving the name of the street.

SEULKE: I think it was Seventh Street Market.

ARENA: Is that still standing by any chance?

SEULKE: I believe it is.

ARENA: Has it been changed basically, or modernized?

SEULKE: I don't think it could have been changed too much.

ARENA: How would you describe it when you used to attend with Donald Nixon; the market, the layout, the payment of goods, did the store maintain credit, say, with this Chinese jobber as well as others? Was it cash, was it up to Don to pick and choose from the standpoint of quality? Did Frank Nixon make Don responsible for actually picking up the items that you went after?

SEULKE: As I remember we paid cash. We always took the money in. We knew roughly what it was going to be. He would pay cash, never carry credit. I think for that reason these jobbers would pick out good merchandise for him. Of course, we didn't have a big volume store, couldn't buy a whole lot, but he'd go to I believe it was Crenshaw Banana and LA [Los Angeles] Potato to get the bananas and potatoes and the fresh vegetables the Chinaman had ready for us. I went in with his dad several times and they knew him down there. He'd walk down the market and look at different products and they knew him by name. There was no bickering. He told them what he wanted and he always seemed to get good merchandise and I think it was because he always paid them cash right when he picked it up. I would imagine that some of the others were probably carrying credit, they had to be, like they do nowadays.

ARENA: On this point of Mr. Frank Nixon not bickering, not having arguments with these marketplace people, would you say that that was typical when it came to his buying from people? Do you recall, for example, that during his buying he did not go into arguing not only about price but about politics, which from time to time I understand he liked to do? When it came, in other words, to this business he knew he had to get there and get back to the store, there was a distinction? In other words, this was Nixon the businessman who had to get down to LA and back, get the store going, or while he was at the store this question of arguing politics with people, including customers, that that was a different Frank.

SEULKE: Yes, and another thing too. In these years Dick wasn't in politics at that particular time like going into the market with him, but I might point out now that I'm not saying that Frank wasn't shrewd. He was a sharp businessman and not that he would take just anything they offered, but he could bicker. He'd tell you what he thought if he thought someone was trying to get to him. But basically he didn't have to. Everybody liked him. Now you talk about politics, talking politics in later years in the store, sure, he enjoyed that. I can just picture him now standing back there with a grin on his face and talking to somebody about politics and the way he felt about them. He was a terrific person. He was real gruff at times and he'd have a few words with Don once in a while across the store, but he was a good man. When he got outside he seemed to be altogether different. I think being in there and around people he kinds of tensed up. I worked with him several times when business was kind of slow. He'd say, "Well, we'll work in a couple of houses," which he rented, "Maybe we'll go up and do some work around there." I don't know whether I told you the last time I was here, he had a place out there across from East Whittier School. He had a large-size single garage he decided to put a cement floor in. We'd mix that blooming cement in a wheel barrow and poured that floor. We worked all day and I think part of the next day on that. I don't think he got as sore and tired as I did, and I was a young, strong boy. But he was a worker, he loved carpenter work. I helped him build a garage one time behind the old store. He was just an altogether different person when he was doing that. He enjoyed it.

ARENA: From what you know of the three sons, how did they make out from the standpoint of carpentry and mixing cement and working in that way--Richard, Donald and Edward?

SEULKE: Not too well. Frank used to make the remark that--maybe Don would build something, a table, a brace or a shelf in the back of the store, Don was pretty good at it-- Frank always said, "My gosh, he's got more steel in that than he has wood," because Don would really put the nails in it. If there was something Frank wanted to tear down later, why he always made the remark about the number of nails Don put in a piece of wood to hold it up.

ARENA: In a way, it appears as though the store was being run by Frank and Hannah and Donald. That is the case that they all had a say in the running of it. Did this create problems?

SEULKE: Well, I wouldn't say a problem. They had a few conversations back and forth, even Frank and Hannah. I mean, he wouldn't agree but I never heard her raise her voice. She'd say what she thought, and Frank, of course, would get pretty loud, and Don would express his opinion.

ARENA: Would it be a correct generalization, not necessarily unkind one but a correct one, to say that generally it was Frank against everybody else, Frank Nixon against Hannah and Donald? That Hannah either would be a referee or Hannah would be siding against Frank in a nice way.

SEULKE: When you talk about a referee, you're right. She was a referee. I can hear her say, "Now, now, boys, boys, keep your voices down." This would be during the time we were open for business.

ARENA: What was the reaction to the customers to this, if you recollect? Did they either just expect it and there was no embarrassment on the part of the customers who felt this was a family situation and they were a part of the family?

SEULKE: You're right on that point. I never did remember of anyone really looking astonished. I guess once in a while some of them might take sides, whether it was on her side or Frank's.

ARENA: Would I also be correct in the generalization, the way the family acted in the store when the customers were around, that that was pretty well the way they acted at home, or in the kitchen or in the living room? You were in both situations. You would know, being a member of the family. They were themselves, whether it was inside or outside?

SEULKE: Yes, possibly.

ARENA: If they had a discussion, if they had a difference, the store wouldn't stop them from not having it?

SEULKE: Oh, no. That's true. If they wanted to say it, they said it. Especially Frank, he expressed his opinion, either way you struggle with him. He was as good as gold and she certainly was too. Goodness sakes, he never would have met a person any nicer than her. And like I say, she was just like her other sisters, I think, and just like their mother. Real good people.

ARENA: As we come to a close of the second interview, Tom, I hope you will allow us to get together at least one more time. As you can see, we still have a lot to cover, and it's all important and all relative. I don't want you to be late for your appointment, it's now 9:15. Thank you very much.