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Mary E. Rez (January 31, 1972)

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Oral History Interview

with

MRS. MARY E. REZ

January 31, 1972
Newport Beach, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mrs. Rudolph Rez (maiden name was Mary Elizabeth Guptill) here in Newport Beach, California, January 31, 1972, Arena interviewing. Mrs. Rez, may I begin by asking you where and when you were born?

REZ: I was born in South Dakota on January 31, 1896.

ARENA: And how is it that you found yourself in California?

REZ: When my father retired from farming in South Dakota, he wanted to come to a warmer climate, so we came to California.

ARENA: Do you remember about when that was?

REZ: In 1912.

ARENA: So you were about sixteen years old then.

REZ: Almost seventeen.

ARENA: And do you remember where your father settled in California the first time?

REZ: They stayed in Los Angeles for a few months and then they settled right out in this area in Garden Grove area, Orange County.

ARENA: And when was the first time you met any member of the Nixon and Milhous family?

REZ: Well, it was after our pastor came down from Yorba Linda [California] and wanted me to go up and stay with his friends up there. Mrs. Nixon wasn't well and the boy had been having a severe case of measles and she needed some help. So he knew me from having been down in Alamitos [California] and he came down, drove down with his horse and buggy and asked me if I would go up and stay with Mrs. Nixon for a while.

ARENA: And this would have been Mrs. Hannah Nixon in Yorba Linda?

REZ: Yes.

ARENA: Do you remember that pastor's name?

REZ: Clifford M. Jones. He married us also.

ARENA: I guess you would remember him. [Laughter] Do you happen to know, while we're speaking about marriage, anything about a white bearskin rug which was used by some people, and I understand Mr. and Mrs. [Francis Anthony] Frank Nixon--there was something about standing on this white bearskin rug at marriage ceremonies. You don't happen to recall anything about that?

REZ: No, nothing that I ever heard anything about.

ARENA: And the boy who was sick with the measles.

REZ: Was Harold [Samuel Nixon].

ARENA: That would have been the first time then that you came in contact with any members of the Nixon or Milhous families?

REZ: Yes, that was the first I ever heard of them.

ARENA: I see.

REZ: Oh, I take that back. We knew Mrs. Nixon's brother, Professor [Griffith William] Milhous. I'm not sure whether we knew him before or after though.

ARENA: I see. This would have been her half brother, if I'm not mistaken. Another brother who was a full brother would have been Ezra [Charles Milhous]. Would you have known Ezra by any chance?

REZ: No, I think not.

ARENA: Ezra was a land leveler and he also held great numbers of horses which he used in his work, as he did this work throughout this State of California. Would you recall from the best of your memory how you took care of Mrs. Hannah Nixon during this period and how you helped out while Harold was ill?

REZ: Just did the things that had to be done in any home. She made more of a guest out of me than a servant, as far as that's concerned.

ARENA: Did you actually live in the home as well?

REZ: Oh, yes, definitely.

ARENA: If it isn't too personal, did you have a salary and what was it, if you remember?

REZ: Oh, I believe it was the munificent sum of four dollars a week. [Laughter]

ARENA: My goodness. And as far as meals were concerned, were these provided and you did not have to pay anything for them?

REZ: I had to get them. [Laughter]

ARENA: Did you also do the shopping for the family during this time?

REZ: Oh, some. Mrs. Nixon used to send me down sometime. Usually she'd go down with us.

ARENA: How did she drive down?

REZ: In a Model T Ford.

ARENA: She did have a Ford in Yorba Linda then?

REZ: Yes.

ARENA: And you recall that she did the driving?

REZ: Yes. She didn't drive a great deal, but she did drive some.

ARENA: Did you happen to be on hand when the President had that accident in which he got that gash or was that on a different occasion?

REZ: That must have been some different time. He didn't have any accidents while I was there.

ARENA: And from the standpoint of eating with members of the family or eating by yourself, do you recall how that was handled?

REZ: Very definitely, I WAS a member of the family. [Laughter]

ARENA: In other words, you didn't have a separate place to eat or treated separately in that sense. You were treated as a member of the family.

REZ: In other words, in those days if anyone came to help out they were just a friend of the family. It wasn't a matter of being a maid or a housekeeper or anything of that kind. People helped each other out in those days.

ARENA: Now, you might recall, the President was born, of course, after Harold, the exact year was 1913. Were you possibly on hand during that period as well, when he was born?

REZ: No. We came in 1912 and I didn't get acquainted with them until probably 1916 or something around that area. I don't remember the exact date.

ARENA: I see. Because they did remain in Yorba Linda until 1922. And it was before 1922?

REZ: Yes.

ARENA: Just to get the overall picture, did you have any contact with them after they left Yorba Linda in 1922?

REZ: Just once after Rudy [Rez] and I were married. We went up there where they had that little store on Whittier Boulevard. I believe that's the only time.

ARENA: Did you actually work or just visit.

REZ: Oh, we just stopped to visit with them.

ARENA: And, of course, Rudy is Mr. Rudolph Rez, your husband.

REZ: Yes.

ARENA: Now, would you mind describing how long it took Harold to get well and at this point was he suffering from what he would have more seriously later on, tuberculosis? What do you recall about that?

REZ: Well, he never was well. They were treating him for this throat condition and trying this and that for him.

ARENA: Would you mind continuing then whatever you do recall about Harold's illness, what things were done to help him and how Mrs. Hannah Nixon had to cope with the sickness?

REZ: Well, he was under some doctor's care at the time I think, because of the fact that there had been a history of tuberculosis in the Nixon family or in the Milhous family I mean.

They were possibly suspicious that he might be subject to it. So he was more or less a continual worry as far as his health condition was concerned, although he was not bedridden or anything like that but he was just more frail than the other children. And I suppose that's one reason why I remember he and Donald [Francis Donald Nixon] more, because Donald was a cute baby and Richard was in between and so I can't recall too many special things about Richard. He was just a nice little round-faced boy. [Laughter]

ARENA: Well, we're interested in the whole family, of course, so whatever you recall is very good. Was Harold up and around in the sense of during this early period, once he got over his measles?

REZ: Yes.

ARENA: Was he in good health after he got over that?

REZ: Except he was more subject to colds and things like that than the average child, I think. And they guarded his health more I think.

ARENA: Did he cooperate; how was he as a patient?

REZ: He was just an ordinary youngster. You know how much a youngster will cooperate. [Laughter]

ARENA: Comparing him with the President, what would you say, from the standpoint of his overall behavior, his listening to his parents and that sort of thing? Would you notice Harold more from the standpoint of being up and around than you would the President, for example, as a little boy? Was he in your estimation more active than Richard Nixon?

REZ: Richard was more intense I think and not as outgoing as Harold or Donald either one. Well, you just had the feeling that you didn't reach him as quickly as you did the others. That is as nearly as I can express it.

ARENA: And I'll just go on to the next comparison. How would you compare Donald the third born son, who was born in 1914, with Richard and Harold?

REZ: Well, he was much more outgoing than either of them.

ARENA: And I think you said something interesting before we put the tape on. Do you want to repeat that about Donald and what you thought of him?

REZ: [Laughter] His having been my favorite of the family and I named my son after him?

ARENA: That's very interesting. Why do you think he was your favorite?

REZ: I think more or less because he was at that cute age.

ARENA: Did he seem to take to you too more than the other two boys? Did that have something to do with it?

REZ: Oh, yes. Even after I left Mrs. Nixon said she found a blouse that I had left and he was just delighted to see something of "Mary's."

ARENA: Once Harold had passed his illness and you did remain, and he didn't need the constant attention, what did Mrs. Hannah Nixon do during the day? I am thinking, for example, did she work with anyone herself or did she leave the home and the boys with you? Was there that type of a situation?

REZ: Well, her health had been pretty poor--she had had more or less of a nervous breakdown, I think, before I went there the first time and so she went up and stayed with her mother [Almira Burdgy Milhous] at the Milhous place in Whittier for a short while and I stayed with the family.

ARENA: Before you came there she'd had this nervous breakdown?

REZ: Evidently.

ARENA: You were not there at the time, but this is what you thought.

REZ: Well, she had probably just overworked and worried about Harold.

ARENA: Do you think that has anything to do with the fact that Donald was not born in Yorba Linda, although they were there at the time? In other words, Richard was born there in 1913. Donald was born the next year, but he was born in Whittier. And I don't know if you knew that or not.

REZ: No, I did not.

ARENA: Well, he was born in the main home of her father, Franklin Milhous. Had you heard anything about why he happened to be born there instead of Yorba Linda?

REZ: I have an idea it was a matter of her health.

ARENA: The same situation, I see. Did you happen to know her while she was a member of Yorba Linda Woman's Club?

REZ: She wasn't active socially at all at the time I knew her. She was just in the home there.

ARENA: And you don't recall anything about this Yorba Linda Woman's Club.

REZ: Didn't know a thing about it.

ARENA: I found out the other day that she was one of the charter members and the year of the club's formation was 1912.

REZ: I found that out in this book on Yorba Linda that Mrs. [March D.] Butz. . . . Is that what you call her?

ARENA: That's right, Mrs. Butz, who wrote that book and the one who I heard would know about that also. But the person who brought it to my attention actually was a Mrs. Page, whose maiden name was Viola Bemus, and she was one of the long-time members and mentioned the Yorba Linda Woman's Club. I just thought maybe while you were there you would recall that there might have been a meeting of the women in the home.

REZ: No, the only place we went to was to the church there, the Friends church. I wasn't there long enough to be interested in their social life and Mrs. Nixon didn't take any part in it. She was a very quiet person and saved her strength for her home.

ARENA: How did you find Mr. Frank Nixon from the standpoint of his personality, his interests, his being a worker, anything at all that comes to mind?

REZ: Well, he was a very very hard-working man. He was also very high-strung and nervous as you have probably heard most everybody say. [Laughter] He was a fair and good man.

ARENA: Did you find any difficulties in getting along with him by any chance, since he was your boss as well as Mrs. Hannah Nixon, I presume?

REZ: Oh, yes, he was my boss. No, I didn't really have any trouble. One time he thought I shouldn't have let the boys go--that was one time when Hannah was gone--and he thought I shouldn't have let the boys go play at some youngster's home, which I probably shouldn't have. He just was very pleasant about it and told me that unless they had his special permission, he didn't want them going to other people's homes.

ARENA: Do you remember any reason why he would not want them to go to this particular home, or was it just a general idea that they had gone without permission?

REZ: I think probably that was it.

ARENA: Do you recall that Mr. Frank Nixon attended the Yorba Linda Quaker Church at this time?

REZ: Uh huh.

ARENA: And were you aware that he had been a Methodist before by any chance? Did that ever come up in any way?

REZ: No, not that I know of.

ARENA: Do you recall to what extent he was an active member? For example, did he belong to any of the committees or did he participate in any of the Yearly Meetings, either there or in Whittier while you knew him? Did he teach Sunday school classes in Yorba Linda?

REZ: Not at that time he wasn't teaching a Sunday school class, but I think he was a member of some of the committees. But I'm not sure. He was more active in the church than Hannah was because of her health. She didn't get out much, but he worked with the church.

ARENA: Do you recall that he did much in the way of carpentry from your own personal knowledge and experience?

REZ: Not from my knowledge, but I understand he did a good deal of the building of their home there. I know it wasn't completely finished at the time we were there.

ARENA: Would you mind describing the home from the best of your recollection?

REZ: I am trying to think what it was like. [Laughter] I know the three boys slept in one bedroom and it seems to me that that was the unfinished room, if I remember it. And I used to tuck them into bed, in the three little beds, there in the one room.

ARENA: And they all had individual beds.

REZ: Yes, as I remember they did.

ARENA: Was there any heat in the individual rooms or how was the heat during the winter handled?

REZ: I think it was a wood stove in the living room. There was a living room-dining room combination as they used to have so often in the houses. If I remember right it was a wood

stove. In the kitchen we had a distillate burning stove that we cooked with. It's the unrefined gasoline that they used to run tractors with and things like that--what they call fuel oil. And that's what we used to cook with at the time we were there and it was a rather erratic type of stove to operate.

ARENA: Was it dangerous in any way?

REZ: Oh, it would probably be considered so now. We didn't think so then.

ARENA: Was there running water and if you don't mind my asking a bathroom inside the house?

REZ: Yes, I remember that. There was a bathroom with quite a large dressing room connected with it.

ARENA: Was there hot running water inside?

REZ: I doubt it very much. I don't think people then had hot running water in the country homes.

ARENA: Do you recall that Mr. Frank Nixon had other jobs besides looking after his own land at that time?

REZ: Oh yes. That's what he made most of his income, because his grove was too small at that time to be producing and he farmed for other people. He did tractor work for other people. He would get up before dawn and be gone all day long.

ARENA: Was there any indication while you knew him that he was thinking of opening a grocery store some day, which he did of course when he left? But was there ever any talk about his doing that?

REZ: No.

ARENA: Did he ever talk or did you ever hear anything about his being a motorman with the Pacific Electric Company?

REZ: I think I had heard of it, but I don't think it came up at the time I was there.

ARENA: Was there any active role by Mr. Nixon in local politics in Yorba Linda at that time in any way?

REZ: Not that I know of.

ARENA: Did Yorba Linda have anything in the way of city agencies, like health, maybe a city doctor, or a police or fire department? Was it large enough to have any of these city services?

REZ: I don't think so. It was just a little village.

ARENA: Do you recall that the Nixons went to other homes for socializing and did any of the other neighbors visit them to socialize--for any type of socializing?

REZ: The only thing I recall is when Mrs. Nixon had the boys' teachers over there one evening for dinner. Also I remember a birthday party--a surprise party--that Harold got up for himself. [Laughter]

ARENA: Would you mind describing that?

REZ: Well, Mrs. Nixon didn't know anything about it until one morning one of the other mothers called up to ask what kind of gifts they should bring and, of course, Mrs. Nixon was very much astonished to know that they were having a party for Harold and it seems that he had figured this out all by himself. So Mrs. Nixon promptly said there won't be any gifts but we'll have the party. And so they just had an ordinary birthday party. She made a cake for it and they had the party, but they didn't have the gifts. She didn't think that was the thing for Harold to do.

ARENA: Was this during the time you were there?

REZ: Uh huh.

ARENA: How would you describe that party? For example, what children and about how many came and if you can recall, what type of a cake did she make? Was there anything like soda or ice cream as well?

REZ: I don't remember too much about it.

ARENA: How about birthday hats and little things like that?

REZ: No, it was just an ordinary--the children got together and had the refreshments and probably played some games. I don't remember but it was very simple. I don't remember how many children there were or anything of the kind. They were just children of the neighbors.

ARENA: Do you recall what Mr. Frank Nixon's reaction was and did he find out by surprise too?

REZ: He found out by surprise, I guess, but it was all over with before he knew anything about it. [Laughter] Because it all happened after he had gone to work and before he got home.

ARENA: Did he tend to leave the house while it was still dark and get back after dark, especially in the winter months?

- REZ: Yes, most generally and more especially in--towards the spring and summer months. He got up very early and went to work and he worked long hours and came home very tired.
- ARENA: Do you recall that he ever talked about or indicated that he suffered from arthritis or from former frostbitten feet? Did that ever come up in any way?
- REZ: No. He was supposed to be having stomach trouble. He was quite fussy about his diet. Mrs. Nixon didn't buy store bread very much. She had a recipe from which we baked mostly, with whole wheat grain and things like that. They didn't eat potatoes to amount to anything. I was a gal that grew up with bread and meat and potatoes. [Laughter] It was rather difficult for me to adjust to cooking.
- ARENA: Just to be sure, meat was not a common part of their diet.
- REZ: Not too extensively, but potatoes was the thing that I especially couldn't get used to not having as a main dish. There was plenty of food, as far as that's concerned.
- ARENA: There was always enough food as far as you recall?
- REZ: Oh, yes.
- ARENA: Do you recall if Mr. Frank Nixon would bring his lunch and not come back during the day or did he stop back for lunch during the day?
- REZ: Not often.
- ARENA: Do you recall anything about this tractor that he owned with someone else and that was also a part of his income, hiring out the tractor?
- REZ: Yes, that's what he worked at a good deal of the time.
- ARENA: Do you have any idea as to what ever happened to that tractor? Did you ever hear?
- REZ: No, I don't.
- ARENA: Would be interesting to know.
- REZ: Yes. It was one of these that had a track to run on.
- ARENA: A what type of tractor?
- REZ: A clectrac I think, or something like that. Instead of having the wheels like most tractors had at that time, it

had a track it ran on. I remember that but I don't remember the brand of it particularly.

ARENA: I believe you were mentioning a moment ago, and I got you off the track but whatever you recall about it would be interesting, that the teachers of the boys would be invited home. Were these male and female or just male?

REZ: Just a couple of ladies.

ARENA: They were ladies and they were invited home to eat. Would it have been on a Sunday, do you recall, something to do with attending religious services and they stayed afterwards?

REZ: No, it was just an evening meal. Mrs. Nixon invited them over to meet and get acquainted with the family.

ARENA: Do you recall that these teachers ever attended Sunday school services, or that Mr. Frank Nixon might have invited them to attend his Sunday school classes?

REZ: I don't recall anything about that.

ARENA: Did you ever meet with any of these teachers personally and what did you think of them as teachers?

REZ: The only time I saw them was that one time.

ARENA: Did they seem in any way nervous as a result of the personal invitation and could I also ask, was that a common thing by other families in Yorba Linda, to invite the teachers home like that?

REZ: I imagine it would have been. It was in most areas at that time.

ARENA: You don't recall, or do you, that you were surprised or did you think it was natural that they came over?

REZ: Uh huh.

ARENA: Were you aware, or did it ever come up while you were with the Nixons, that Mrs. Hannah Nixon had gone to college for some years?

REZ: I think I was aware of it. She was very much interested in education and she was well read and as I said interested in learning.

ARENA: Do you happen to recall if she did anything in the way of serving on the boards of education or anything like that?

REZ: Not that I know of. At the time I was there she wasn't taking on anything outside at all.

ARENA: What did you know about Mr. Frank Nixon's educational background?

REZ: Nothing in particular.

ARENA: Were you aware, for example, that he had not gone on to college and did you find that there were any special problems in any way because she had so much education more than he did?

REZ: It was more the unusual thing for people to have gone to college at that time, than for them not to have. I don't think, as far as Mrs. Nixon was concerned, that she ever felt she was superior because she had gone to college.

ARENA: She never gave you that impression.

REZ: Absolutely not.

ARENA: As far as her husband was concerned. . . . How about this idea of being superior or giving the attitude of being superior with any of the neighbors; did she ever give that impression?

REZ: I don't understand your question.

ARENA: Did she ever act in a superior way with any of the neighbors because of her education?

REZ: No. In fact, she was a very shy self-effacing person and yet she was a person that had a great deal of character.

ARENA: How could you illustrate that--that she had a great deal of character? What examples or incidents come to mind that would illustrate that, including what maybe some of her friends said about her to you and you need not mention any names.

REZ: I wasn't acquainted enough. As I said, we spent most of our time in the home, while I was with her. I did know the [Louis T.] Jones--the pastor's family but . . .

ARENA: How did he describe the Nixon family including Mrs. Hannah Nixon to you, if you can recall? In other words, what

impression did he give you of the type of people they were, which would give some idea of the type of reputation she would have in the community on the basis of the pastor's recommendation.

REZ: I don't recall anything in particular, except that he came down and said that one of his church families needed someone to help them and that's all.

ARENA: He didn't go beyond that. He didn't go into detail about what an exceptional woman Mrs. Hannah Nixon was or anything like that?

REZ: No.

ARENA: But evidently he would not have recommended her if he did not think that you would be happy there and that you and she would be able to get along, I suppose.

REZ: No. I was kind of an old maid aunt to everybody in the community, [Laughter] so when anybody needed anybody to come in and help them, they thought of Mary Guptill. I had quit school when we came from South Dakota. I hadn't gone on through high school and was just living at home, so I was quite convenient.

ARENA: Did you find the boys getting out of hand as far as you were concerned, while you were down there?

REZ: Not particularly.

ARENA: What was the hardest part of the job do you think while you were helping the family? Was there one particular thing or nothing stands out as being difficult?

REZ: I wouldn't say it was anything particularly difficult about it. Mrs. Nixon made it very pleasant as far as my association with her was concerned.

ARENA: Do you ever recall when an argument did come up between the boys among themselves, or between Mr. Frank Nixon and the boys, and how she would handle it? Does that come to mind in any way?

REZ: She always stood as a buffer between Frank and the children, as far as that was concerned although she never belittled Frank to them at all in any way. But she was perhaps a little more lenient with them than she would have been if Frank hadn't been as strict as he was.

ARENA: And when you say a buffer, you mean in the sense that he might let his temper get out of hand maybe sometimes?

REZ: Not physically. I mean smoothing things over like most mothers have to. [Laughter]

ARENA: Was there one particular boy who needed more discipline than others would you say?

REZ: I would say it was Harold.

ARENA: Was there any indication that the brothers felt jealous or felt that Harold was getting special treatment and that they resented it?

REZ: No, I don't think so.

ARENA: Was there anything in the way of the boys remembering one another or remembering their parents, say, around birthday time or Christmastime or where there was an occasion to give them presents?

REZ: I wasn't in touch with them at those times.

ARENA: Do you recall to what extent the parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Nixon, took a direct interest in the education of the children, in addition to inviting the teachers to their home? Did you ever see them read books to them or read the Bible? Was there anything like a set time in which Mrs. Hannah Nixon would read something to the boys?

REZ: The booklet, The Sons of our Syrian Guest, was a favorite story based on the 23rd psalm. I used to read to them when I put them to bed at night and when I wasn't there, I think, in fact I know, that this book of James Whitcomb Riley's poems was one she had read to them, and they were familiar with, and loved these poems and loved to have you read to them as long as you would read at night.

ARENA: Oh, James Whitcomb Riley. I see. Do you recall that there might have been a particular favorite poem that the boys asked for over and over again? Was there something in particular they liked to hear about?

REZ: The one about the hired man. I don't remember what the name of the poem was, but it had a lot about the hired man and the hired girl--the farm poems and the home poems they particularly liked this about the hired girl, Elizabeth Ann, so they dubbed me the hired girl and their mother said that was no way to talk about me. [Laughter] THEY really meant it as a compliment because they liked the characters in the poem and felt like they knew them.

ARENA: Was there any indication that Mrs. Hannah Nixon wrote her own poems or that her mother, Mrs. Almira Milhous, wrote

poems and that these would be read from time to time or anything like that?

REZ: Not that I knew of at the time.

ARENA: Was there ever any time when you saw the boys themselves trying their hand at writing--anything, whether it's poems or little stories?

REZ: No.

ARENA: Do you recall during the school period how the homework situation was handled if there was any?

REZ: I don't think there was particularly any homework. They didn't dish it out then, like they do now.

ARENA: Do you recall what the boys did for fun during the day, these long sunny days?

REZ: They played outside in the groves there. I really don't remember anything special. We used to keep them away from the irrigation ditch that run right by the place. Children out on a farm find lots of things to do to entertain themselves.

ARENA: Were there animals for them to be with?

REZ: Not that I remember. I can't remember that there were any animals. They had a tractor for caring for the grove.

ARENA: And they would go on the tractor you've heard.

REZ: Not that I know of. I don't remember them getting on it.

ARENA: You didn't see that yourself?

REZ: No.

ARENA: That's what I'm anxious to find out, what you recall from your own personal experience. From your own personal experience, did you ever see the boys in the ditch?

REZ: No, I would have fainted.

ARENA: Was that ditch deep enough for them to drown at the age they were?

REZ: Yes. As I recall the sides were quite steep and it would have been difficult for them to get out if they had gotten in.

ARENA: Was there any fence or anything to keep them out of the ditch?

REZ: I don't remember that there was.

ARENA: There wasn't any. There was not. Do you recall, although you didn't see them in the ditch, that they had been in the ditch and then they were punished by Mr. Frank Nixon when he came home at night or the next day?

REZ: I think probably that happened after I was there. I remember reading about it in one of those books.

ARENA: Did you ever see a gentleman whose job it was to patrol this ditch? Did you ever see that gentleman yourself, the Zanjero?

REZ: I've seen him.

ARENA: Do you recall his name?

REZ: No, I didn't know him.

ARENA: Do you know if he might have been of Spanish or Mexican background?

REZ: Quite possibly yes. They often were.

ARENA: Do you recall that the boys, any of them, performed regular chores and what these chores were while you were there?

REZ: No, I don't. I don't recall that they did.

ARENA: You don't recall that they would have to go out before breakfast or anything like that? Do you recall that they did jobs from time to time, not on a regular basis?

REZ: No.

ARENA: Can you recall ever seeing any of the boys in the fields or around the vegetable patch, if there was one on the Nixon place?

REZ: I don't think there was a vegetable garden there. They would raise them in between the rows of trees sometimes and at different places, as ground was suitable in the groves and different people would share their vegetables that they raised, but I don't recall at the time that I was there that the Nixons had any vegetable garden.

ARENA: You don't recall or would you know for sure that they did not raise all of their food on their ranch?

REZ: That I would be very sure of.

ARENA: That they did not.

REZ: All he had was lemons and they weren't at the bearing stage at that time. It was just a young lemon grove as I remember.

ARENA: Do you recall that the lemon grove was not considered good ground and that in a way Mr. Frank Nixon had not one of the best pieces or property in the area at that time? Did that ever come up in any way?

REZ: No, I wouldn't know anything about that. I know he worked awfully hard trying to make ends meet, but at that time I don't think lemons were considered to be too good a prospect as a grove. We leaned more toward the orange grove at that time.

ARENA: And he had the lemons only while you were there?

REZ: Yes, I remember that.

ARENA: Do you recall that around this time between 1914 and 1918 World War I was in? The United States did not get into it until 1917, but there was talk about the war I am sure even before we got in. Do you recall any conversation dealing with the war while you were there?

REZ: No, I don't. I don't think it was brought up at all.

ARENA: Were you surprised that Yorba Linda would be a place where someone with a college education would have gone to live and work on a farm. I am just wondering as you think back about Mrs. Hannah Nixon, did it ever come to you as a kind of surprise? Or did she give the impression that she wished she had been in Whittier rather than in Yorba Linda, for example?

REZ: Never to me. [Laughter]

ARENA: Would you say that you did or did not ever see her in an argument with her husband about living there, for example?

REZ: Never.

ARENA: Is there anything else before we turn this tape on the other side that you would like to recall? Anything that I have not mentioned or anything we've touched just lightly and you would like to speak on a little bit more. Anything that we have discussed so far?

REZ: Not that I think of.

ARENA: Then this tape will be continued on Side II.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: Mrs. Rez I would like to go into now some questions about the President's religious connections, the church that his parents attended and I know I brought it up before, but I would like you to give your impressions of what the church building first of all was like. Was there a church building in Yorba Linda and how far was it from the home?

REZ: Yes, there was a church building and it wasn't too far from the home. I couldn't say just exactly how far it was. It and the Methodist church I believe were side by side there in Yorba Linda.

ARENA: Do you recall that the different religious denominations such as the Quakers and the Methodists had any trouble in getting along with one another?

REZ: No, I don't believe so particularly. Oh, of course, there was some rivalry naturally, good-natured rivalry between the two groups.

ARENA: Was Yorba Linda considered mainly a Quaker community?

REZ: Not particularly, but I think the Friends church was the larger church at that time. I think it was the larger congregation. At that time it was just a small country church as far as that's concerned.

ARENA: Do you recall that the meetings were the kind known as the "silent" or those that had the pastor?

REZ: They had a pastor, yes.

ARENA: When the Yearly Meeting was held, was Yorba Linda represented, in the sense that they would have their meetings in Whittier, would that be correct? Do you recall that it was at Yorba Linda itself?

REZ: Yes. They would go to different churches and have their Quarterly Meetings and things like that. But the Yearly Meeting was always in Whittier. The Quarterly Meetings they had around at the various churches and the family groups would get together and they had a big dinner and different groups meeting and committee meetings and things like that. Discuss the church organization's work as a unit. Then at Yearly Meeting all the churches would be represented.

ARENA: Was there a set time every year when the Yearly Meeting was held?

REZ: Yes.

ARENA: About when would that be?

REZ: I believe in June or July.

ARENA: In other words, just about the time that school was letting out.

REZ: Uh huh.

ARENA: Do you recall that you were in Yorba Linda at that time?

REZ: No.

ARENA: Do you recall there was a choir held by the Quakers in their church?

REZ: Yes.

ARENA: Was there an organ or a piano in the church and who might have supplied the music?

REZ: Yes, there was a piano and I think for the young people the pastor's daughter, Lena, used to play the piano for the young people. I remember that.

ARENA: And by Lena, this would be Lena Jones?

REZ: Uh huh.

ARENA: Was there something like a Christian Endeavor at that time?

REZ: Uh huh.

ARENA: Do you recall that . . .

REZ: Furnas Trueblood was very active in that. He was very active with the young people.

ARENA: Do you recall that there was any special picnics or any special socials that were conducted by the Quaker church?

REZ: Oh, yes. They had their picnics and socials. We belonged to the Quaker church down here and we all did just the same sort of fun things. There was one time that they had a strawberry festival and served strawberry shortcake until it ran out of your ears.

ARENA: Would this have been at Yorba Linda?

REZ: Uh huh.

ARENA: Do you recall that Mrs. Hannah Nixon made strawberry cakes herself?

REZ: No. The children I think were not there. I think it was my age group that this particular thing was for. Of course, I was acquainted with the Jones girls and Mrs. [Louis T.] Jones was teaching Lena's Sunday School class at that time, which is how I happened to be there.

ARENA: Did you ever meet the [Eldo Roy] Wests who are related to President Nixon?

REZ: No I didn't. I've read her book. It was after I was there I think that she wrote that book about the Nixons. Richard was older. He must have been only four or five years old at the time I was there.

ARENA: Do you recall that there was a piano or any musical instrument in the Nixon home while you were there?

REZ: Yes, there was a piano.

ARENA: And do you recall who played it?

REZ: I don't think they played it to any great extent then.

ARENA: How did Frank and his brother, Hugh [Henry Nixon] get along?

REZ: Very little in common, I think. They were completely different personalities.

ARENA: In what sense?

REZ: Oh, Hugh was much more easygoing than Frank. He was quite a bit younger for one thing, I think.

ARENA: Do you recall that he had more education by any chance?

REZ: I didn't pay any attention to whether he had more or less. [Laughter]

ARENA: Do you recall that Frank Nixon's other brother, Ernest Nixon, who was a college professor, ever came to Yorba Linda or was he ever mentioned?

REZ: Not that I know of.

ARENA: Does the name ring a bell at all to you, a Dr. Ernest Nixon?

REZ: Never heard of it. Of course, that doesn't prove that he didn't come there occasionally.

ARENA: But while you were there you know that he did not.

REZ: Of course, it was a very short period of time that I was there.

ARENA: Do you recall that Frank Nixon in any way frowned upon the piano or music of that type? Did that ever come up to your knowledge or in any way at all, that he resented having a piano in the house?

REZ: No.

ARENA: Do you recall while you lived in Yorba Linda that there was any difficulty among the Quakers over the question of the use of music in the church?

REZ: I don't think so at that time. I think it had been pretty well decided to accept an instrument in the church.

ARENA: It was never an issue that came out in the church during a Yearly Meeting or anything like that?

REZ: No. Originally I think the Friends didn't believe in having any kind of instrument, or having any pastor, as far as that's concerned. They depended on the leading of the Holy Spirit of the individual. Different ones would get up and take part in the services, but as far as my history of association with the Friends church is concerned, you could hardly tell them from a Methodist church or any of the ordinary denominations, except that they didn't believe that water baptism was necessary. They didn't say it couldn't be done or anything like that, but they didn't feel it was essential. They feel it is a spiritual experience.

ARENA: In other words that would be one difference between the Quakers and the Methodists?

REZ: Yes.

ARENA: From your experience and knowledge, do you recall that the very term Quaker was offensive in any way at that time when you were living in Yorba Linda. As you know over the years it has had different connotations.

REZ: Yes.

ARENA: And some people prefer, maybe some old-timers, not to even hear the word or they still maybe take a little offense at it. I was just wondering from your experience, was there anything like that when you were living in Yorba Linda? Anything like the word being derogatory in any way?

REZ: I don't think so, although when I came to California I had not heard them called anything but Quaker, and when we came to Alamitos they called themselves the Friends. It just never came up one way or the other as far as I ever heard. But in the East they were always spoken of as Quakers and were considered something different than the other churches when I came out to California and joined the church out here, I liked it because I liked their idea of the individual's relationship with God and a less formal type of worship. I felt it fitted my need more than some of the other churches.

ARENA: As a matter of fact do you recall ever having religious discussions, not necessarily arguments, but religious discussions with the Nixons, with Mrs. Hannah Nixon or Mr. Frank Nixon or just some of these points that we are discussing now? Do you recall maybe after supper in the long evening when there was no TV, for example, that you would sit down, the youngsters were asleep or supposed to be, did discussions of religion of that nature come up in any way?

REZ: Not especially. Religion was a part of just living. It wasn't "Thou shalt not" and "Thou shalt" sort of a thing. It was just sort of a way of life.

ARENA: I would like to ask this question, and it is the sort of question I would like to get for the record and that's all. Did the Nixons give you the impression in any way of being Sunday Christians, those who just practiced their religion on Sunday?

REZ: No, as I've said before. I think their religion was a part of living with them. Mrs. Nixon, especially, was a very dedicated person and conscientious. Of course, I had much more association with her than I did with Frank. If she thought anything was right, well that's what she did whether it was easiest or not.

ARENA: Did Mrs. Nixon have an interest in other religions and in other people, we'll say, of a different background than her own? And how would you say she got along with people maybe of Mexican background who were Catholic, we'll say, Germans in Anaheim who are Lutheran? If you had the opportunity to observe, if you recollect, when she met people of different racial and different religious backgrounds, how did she get along with them?

REZ: I don't recall any special instances, but I'm sure she was never in any way bigoted.

ARENA: Did you ever hear her or Frank speak about a person with a different religion or different racial background in a derogatory way?

REZ: No. If Frank had anything derogatory to say, he said it to THEM. He didn't say it to anybody else. [Laughter]

ARENA: He would say it to the person directly about the person?

REZ: Yes.

ARENA: Mrs. Rez, would you say that the boys were brought up in a wholesome, healthy home and atmosphere from your experience now, not just a person who knew them in Yorba Linda, but in a way I'm asking you for your own estimate because you are a mother? I see not only your children but your grandchildren as well and you have lived in different parts of the country, and I know you have studied and are aware of human nature and differences among people. And I would just like to put that on the record. When you knew the Nixons, what type of a home atmosphere were these boys raised, from your own personal opinion?

REZ: I should think it was a well-balanced home life. They were disciplined when they needed discipline. Mrs. Nixon believed more in talking and explaining than in corporal punishment. I don't recall that they were ever punished while I was there for anything, as far as corporal punishment was concerned. They just didn't want to hurt their mother that's all and they listened to her. It was really a very healthful atmosphere, I think.

ARENA: Was there anything to make you believe at that time that these boys would some day be exceptional? Did they seem to you, one of them or any of them, of being a genius for example and would some day be as famous as a President today? Was there any indication of that when you knew them in Yorba Linda?

REZ: I don't think so. I just thought they were ordinary boys. [Laughter] In fact, they were quite astonished to find I liked boys. I remember Harold saying, "Well, do you really like boys?" [Laughter]

ARENA: Did any of the boys tease you in any way?

REZ: No.

ARENA: About, for example, not being married at that time or about going out with other boys?

REZ: No. They weren't interested in that sort of thing at all.

ARENA: Was there any feeling on your own part or did you see that among the Nixons, especially as we are getting in towards 1918, 1920's and on, that Hollywood was a danger to the spiritual life of the boys, that movies were a bad thing? Was there anything in the way of being on guard, we'll say, against the bad influence of movies or any of that?

REZ: At that time, movies were more or less banned in the Quaker churches. We young folks once in a great while went to a movie but not very often, and not with too much parental approval.

ARENA: Did that hold true for plays as well?

REZ: Not necessarily.

ARENA: It depended on the play?

REZ: Yes, it depended on the play, of course.

ARENA: But as far as movie houses were concerned, there were pretty much banned.

REZ: Yes, they and pool halls. No, we young people didn't go to the movies. I remember one time that Clifford Jones took us to see "All Quiet on the Western Front." The whole Sunday school group was there but that's the extent of our movie going.

ARENA: Do you recall where that movie was?

REZ: In Los Angeles [California].

ARENA: Right in Los Angeles.

REZ: Yes.

ARENA: Was there a discussion of the movie afterwards or was it taken up as a special theme in Sunday school or even in the pulpit?

REZ: Not especially. It just had the wartime atmosphere and it was considered a good picture to see. One of the Gish girls played in that one--Lillian Gish. Dancing and movies, even Sunday newspapers, were looked on askance when I first came out here.

ARENA: From your experience with other religious groups, would you say that the Quakers were more intense on that subject about

bad movies, of dancing and of card playing, more intense than any other of the religious groups or were there others as well and it wasn't just the Quakers, when you lived in Yorba Linda or when you lived in the Whittier area?

REZ I never lived in the Whittier area. I lived in Alamitos, in the Garden Grove area. But the orthodox churches as a whole pretty much banned the movies and dances and things like that at that time, but gradually they changed their minds about it. People who would not let us go, later themselves went every week. [Laughter]

ARENA: Would you say that the fun was taken out of your childhood because of this or did you have a happy childhood?

REZ: We had a very happy childhood, I think. We had group gatherings and things. We were more or less clannish, I think, because we were in a group. The young people at Alamitos didn't think too much of the young people at Garden Grove and things like that [Laughter] but we had very good times together.

ARENA: Do you recall that your friends--and you need not mention any names here--because the community, the church and the neighbors, those making up the church, whether it was the Quakers or the Methodists or both, that because they banned the movies there was a rush to get to them on the part of the youngsters, we'll say? Was there a great extra desire to go as a result of that?

REZ: No, I don't think so. No. We used to have our social times. We had our social committees to work with and fun in our groups--go to the beach and picnics and those kinds of things that were fun; go to Orange County Park, what is Irvine Park now and climb over those hills and have a wonderful time.

ARENA: Do you recall that the Nixons also participated in these outings while you knew them? Did they attend any camping trips that would take them to any of these beaches? Do you recall their packing up and maybe spending a night over on one of the beaches or in the mountains, as you just mentioned you did.

REZ: No, not at that time. Of course, Yorba Linda is a good deal farther from the beach. As I said before, they were going through a rather trying time with Mrs. Nixon's health and so forth while I was there and they didn't do too much, other than what had to be done.

ARENA: Is there anything that I have not brought up as this interview is coming to a close that you would like to mention or bring up--not just answer the questions that I raise but possibly you would like to say something yourself? Feel free to do so, Mrs. Rez.

REZ: Well, the one thing that I can remember about Richard more than I do about the others was that in their nighttime prayer he always seemed so much more sincere and put so much more depth into it than an ordinary child. They had a little prayer that each of them said.

ARENA: Would this have been a prayer that was memorized or was it a special thing as well?

REZ: No, it was memorized and each of them said this one little prayer.

ARENA: Would you happen to recall the words of that prayer?

REZ: Oh, yes.

ARENA: Please say it.

REZ: "Jesus Holy Savior, hear me while I pray, look upon thy little child, bless me all the day. Forgive me when I'm naughty, take all my sins away. Help me to love Thee better, dear Jesus every day." And he really PRAYED it, he didn't just SAY it.

ARENA: And you recall that the President used that particular prayer.

REZ: Absolutely, every night.

ARENA: Thank you. Mrs. Rez, I think I interrupted you a little bit as you were giving the beginning of that prayer, and if you wouldn't mind, would you repeat it again, please.

REZ: "Jesus, Holy Savior, hear me while I pray. Look upon thy little child, bless me all the day . . ."

ARENA: Thank you for repeating those first few lines and could I also ask you if you know the source of that prayer, where it may be found or where the Nixons might have obtained it?

REZ: No, I wouldn't know. There is a possibility some of the Nixon children would even remember it.

ARENA: Have you heard that before yourself? Is this a common prayer?

REZ: No, I never heard that before.

ARENA: The first time was in the Nixon home by the Nixon youngsters?

REZ: Uh huh.

ARENA: And did you memorize it because you heard them say it so often, is that why it has stayed in your mind?

REZ: Yes, because I was impressed by the way Richard said it really, I think, is one reason why it stayed in my mind.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if you passed that along to your own children or to your grandchildren or anyone else?

REZ: No, but I've prayed it myself sometimes when I needed a lift.

ARENA: I want to thank you again, Mrs. Rez, for allowing me to come into your home and take advantage of your privacy. This is really a great kindness and act of helpfulness to historians. Thank you very much.

REZ: Our pleasure.