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Basil Harold Nixon (July 16, 1972)

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Oral History Interview

with

MR. BASIL HAROLD NIXON

July 16, 1972
Stayton Island, Oregon

By Evlyn Dorn

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

- DORN: This is an interview with Mr. Basil Harold Nixon at Stayton Island, Oregon. The event is the Nixon reunion on July 16, 1972, Evlyn Dorn interviewing. Mr. Nixon, would you please start by telling me where and when you were born?
- NIXON: January 9, 1928, at Myrtle Point, Oregon.
- DORN: Have you lived in Oregon ever since?
- NIXON: All my life, yes.
- DORN: Would you give me a brief resume of your education?
- NIXON: Through the twelfth grade, high school, in Milton Freewater High School.
- DORN: Would you give me the names of your parents, your mother's and father's names?
- NIXON: George Thomas Nixon and Fay Rebecca Nixon.
- DORN: And give me your grandparents' name.
- NIXON: Boston Nixon is my granddad on my dad's side and Melvin Jackson Buzzard was my mother's dad.
- DORN: Now, Boston Nixon was a son of George Nixon III, right? George Nixon III was your great-grandfather, and he was the man who was buried at Gettysburg. [National Military Park].
- NIXON: Yes.

DORN: What is your occupation?

NIXON: I have a service station, a Shell station in Lebanon, Oregon.

DORN: And what was your father's occupation?

NIXON: He was a farmer.

DORN: In Oregon?

NIXON: Right.

DORN: Is he still alive?

NIXON: No.

DORN: Is your mother still alive?

NIXON: Yes.

DORN: Have you ever come face to face with the President? Have you ever had any contact with him whatever?

NIXON: No.

DORN: Have you ever been at a meeting where he spoke, perhaps?

NIXON: No.

DORN: You've just seen him on television and followed his career in politics.

NIXON: Right. He was supposed to come to Walla Walla [Washington] in his campaign at one time and we were going to be in a parade with him, but it was one of the first times that they canceled it out and they didn't get there. The second time he came, why then my sister got to meet him.

DORN: What is your sister's name?

NIXON: Reba Curcil.

DORN: Did she make any remarks about him, about his personality or anything in particular that you can recall?

NIXON: No.

[Shirley Jean Nixon's comments follow.]

MRS. NIXON: She was excited and she was impressed.

DORN: Was Pat Nixon with him?

MRS. NIXON: Yes, she was.

DORN: Did she make any remarks about her as the wife of the President?

MRS. NIXON: She liked her better because she was friendlier.

DORN: Oh, really. She's a lovely lady. Did you ever have any contact with his parents, [Francis Anthony Nixon] Frank and Hannah Nixon?

NIXON: No, none on that side.

DORN: Nor his brothers, [Francis Donald Nixon] Donald and Edward [Calvert Nixon]?

NIXON: No.

DORN: Donald and Edward both had hoped to be here today, but Mrs. Hannah Nixon's older sister [Edith Timberlake] passed away and the funeral was yesterday afternoon. They tried for plane flights in here, but the only one that could leave Los Angeles and get in here would arrive at 9:00 tonight, which was too late. And Don had asked me to telephone at noon to his home where he was waiting so that he could talk to a lot of you people and wish you well, but there was no telephone on the island so we had to forego that. You never met any of Mr. Frank Nixon's brothers or relatives like Dr. Ernest [Leland] Nixon?

NIXON: No.

DORN: In your home was the fact ever discussed about Mr. Frank Nixon leaving the Methodist Church and joining the Quaker Church? Are you people Methodist?

NIXON: No.

DORN: Frank Nixon was a Methodist when he came from Ohio. And then when he came to California he met Hannah Nixon and they were married and he became a Quaker and taught Sunday School. We wonder sometimes how the family felt about him giving up his Methodist religion for the Quaker religion, but you've never had any discussions about that at all?

NIXON: No.

DORN: Did any member of your family ever seek public office? Have you ever thought of going into politics, city or statewide yourself?

NIXON: No.

DORN: Regarding this marvelous Nixon reunion here today, how did you feel about this getting together of all these relatives? Were you excited that they could all be together?

NIXON: I really was, because most of these kids I've grown up with and I haven't seen some of them in thirty-three years.

DORN: Oh, really. That's wonderful.

NIXON: It's really nice to get together and many of their kids I've never even seen, most of them.

DORN: When the President went to Washington one of the hardest things for him to contend with was the fact that the press said he was an insincere person. Have you ever heard any talk of that sort of thing? When you have seen him on television or at any time have you ever felt that he was insincere?

NIXON: I've never heard it used, I don't think, with his name. I've never felt that way.

DORN: Did you ever meet Pat Nixon?

NIXON: I never have.

DORN: Can you think of anything in particular that you might like to add to this interview? Did I ask you how many children you have?

NIXON: No, you didn't. I have five, and three grand-kids.

DORN: You have grandchildren? You certainly don't look like it.

NIXON: We were in hopes that they could be here, but one of us had to work so I could get here. One of my boys has a girls' softball team and he had them up in Portland [Oregon] this weekend. We got as many together as we could and we are really tickled to be here.

DORN: It's been a lovely day. I remember when Dr. Ernest Nixon met Ed's wife, Gay Lynne, shortly after they

were married, and we were in Chicago [Illinois] at a convention and I remember him standing back and looking at her--he was a marvelous man--and he said, "My, aren't you a pretty little thing." He said, "These Nixon men certainly know how to marry beautiful women." And I think the Nixon men keep very young looking, if you are an example of being a grandfather. Mrs. Nixon, is there anything you can add to this? Do you people have any documents or pictures that might be of interest for the Nixon Library?

MRS. NIXON: Not really, because we've misplaced a letter that he sent to our daughter when she was in the fifth grade. He was Vice President and it was mailed from his office, but it was dictated by him, a personal letter to her. It was a reply on her letter that she and her teacher composed about wishing him luck as Vice President, and it's misplaced.

DORN: He's very thoughtful on things like this, very, very thoughtful. I lost my husband a year ago and I received a handwritten letter from the White House from Richard. And it was just a marvelous letter. He started out, "Dear Evlyn" and then he said Larry [Lawrence Melvin Dorn] was one of his favorite people and how much he regretted that he was gone and so on, and he signed it "Sincerely Dick." I was really touched because it came fast, three or four days after Larry had passed away, and for him to sit down as busy a man as he is and write it, so he's a very, very thoughtful person. I've heard of so many occasions where he's responded to people personally. So he is a very warm and thoughtful person. People mistake the fact that he's in deep thought much of the time and they think he's a loner and he's aloof, but he's not, he's a very warm person.

MRS. NIXON: I've always thought perhaps Mrs. Nixon kind of helped him with the niceties, reminded him of the little things so that he would be aware of some of the things.

DORN: Possibly so.

MRS. NIXON: I kind of get that idea maybe when they're on TV [television] and he's looking one way and she'll touch his arm or something and he'll glance and smile the other way, like she's reminding him there's somebody that should be recognized.

DORN: She is very alert. One of the secret service men told me that when they were briefed to go to a foreign country--this was when he was Vice President--they would be taken over to the White House to be briefed on the protocol of the country in which they were visiting, and he said that Pat Nixon had it just down with the snap of her fingers, she just really knew it. And he said, "If any of us were in doubt about anything, all we had to do is ask Pat and she knew." So she's really very bright and pays a great deal of attention to those things. So, I'm sure she helps him a great deal, and he, her.

MRS. NIXON: I'm really pleased to have this reunion because now you're really aware of all the Oregon relatives that they have out here.

DORN: Yes. We were very surprised when Don got the letter. It came to the Chamber of Commerce--it was from Mr. Memphis Nixon--asking the Chamber of Commerce to locate Don Nixon, they thought he had some restaurants in Whittier, which he used to have. I still do some of Don's secretarial work, or most of it. So I was down at his house for a few days and he gave me this letter to answer. Mr. Memphis Nixon has asked for the descendants of Lyle [Elihu (Lyle) Andrew Nixon] and Henry [Henry Delbert Nixon] and somebody else, so I looked it up in the genealogy book and sent it. Then I called to see how he was getting along. That's how I got the invitation to come and, of course, I was delighted. And we really didn't know that there were this many Nixons up in Oregon. This was a great surprise.

MRS. NIXON: Boston and his wife are buried here in the Aumsville Cemetery just a few miles from here.

DORN: There are a lot of relatives here. There are some over at Prineville [Oregon], and I am going to Prineville on Thursday to interview a first cousin over there. So, there are a lot of Nixons around. I want to thank you very much for this interview and what a pleasure it was to be here and be part of this reunion. Thank you.