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Clinton O. Harris (November 16, 1971)

C. Richard Arena
Whittier College

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Third Oral History Interview

with

MR. CLINTON O. HARRIS

November 16, 1971
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is an interview with Mr. Clinton O. Harris in Whittier, California. The date is November 16, 1971, Arena interviewing. This is interview #3 beginning with the contact between Clinton Harris and Richard Nixon in Whittier College. Clint, shall we begin by my asking you to go over again the direct contact that you had with the President over the college period in both a general and a direct way? By general, maybe you attended some of the debates in which he participated, even though you didn't speak with him personally; maybe you attended some of the theatre productions, even though you didn't speak with him personally. That would be a kind of general contact. A direct contact would be maybe where you and he double-dated or you ate at his home or he ate at your home, where there was a direct contact with him. And correct me if I'm wrong, but these college years with him are from 1930, graduating with the class of 1934?

HARRIS: Dick, you are right in those college years. We both entered Whittier College in the fall of 1930 as freshmen and both graduated in June of 1934. Speaking of general contacts, I hardly know where to begin on that, because what is general? I'd say the closest general contact was association with him on the football squad for the full four years, one year as a freshman and three years on the varsity.

ARENA: Just to be sure, Clint, do those years exactly parallel your college years? You came in in 1930 and also left in 1934?

HARRIS: Yes. We were both on the freshman squad during our freshman year, the fall of 1930, and then were on the varsity squad in the fall of '31, '32 and '33. And I

had many interesting, more intimate associations as you do with your friends on the football team, but stating generally, that would be one association.

I never entered into debating or anything of that nature. I heard many of his debates as, of course, he was a Whittier College debater, so I was very much a partisan fan on his side naturally. But I didn't enter into drama except in my senior year. I believe I was in one or two of the operas in a very minor part, but only as a senior, not prior to that, and he was in those I was in . . .

ARENA: Excuse me, while you're on that subject, now that's the first time I've come across that fact that he appeared in operas as well as the regular theatrical productions.

HARRIS: I believe I'm right in this, in the "Pirates of Penzance" I believe he was in that one. Our annual would confirm that, but I believe I'm correct in this.

ARENA: That's what I was wondering about the operettas. Of course, he did appear in his own church choir and he certainly knew music, so I would not be surprised.

HARRIS: I believe he was in the Glee Club. I wasn't. In classrooms my major was economics, his was history, so we didn't overlap too much. I believe one class of Shakespeare we were both in and as I recall perhaps one history class. And perhaps a freshman class, which was more of an orientation class which all of us took. But as I say, my major was economics with a kind of a minor in science, so we didn't overlap too much from that standpoint. Trying to stay with generalizations, I wonder . . .

ARENA: Were there possibly things like student government in which your paths crossed?

HARRIS: He was very active in student government and I was inactive I would say as far as taking any office in student government. I was vice president of the Varsity Club one year. We were both in the Orthogonian Society. He was president of the Orthogonian Society. I was not an officer.

ARENA: Do you recall who your advisor was, your faculty advisor?

HARRIS: Dr. Albert Upton was our Orthogonian advisor, and I think of him as our advisor all the way through, and I like to think of Chief [Wallace J.] Newman as the one that most of us leaned on when we wanted to talk something over. I am sure that Dick Nixon probably felt that way about him sometimes also. I am trying to stay with generalizations here before we get into any particulars.

ARENA: Other general points of contact might have been, say, your working. Your paths might have crossed if you worked together anywhere in the city of Whittier. I understand, for example, that some of the football players in order to make extra money were given positions with [Melville] Mel Rich's father. I was wondering if there was any contact in that way?

HARRIS: I'm not aware of any job the President may have had. I never had any job of that type. In the summertime what jobs I was able to get were usually over in the Covina [California] area in connection with citrus--orange groves--spraying, fumigating and things of this nature. And I just don't know in the summertime what his part-time jobs were. I imagine he was quite busy with his own family's store and work around there.

ARENA: We might move beyond the college years, again in general, to see what contact there was. For example, I assume while he was away in North Carolina, Duke Law School, 1934 through 1937, there was little if any contact between the two of you.

HARRIS: I don't recall any contact during those times, except that I might have bumped into him when he was in town and it wouldn't have impressed me too much either way. When he came back from law school and entered into law practice, then I saw him occasionally. And at that time we both belonged to the 20-30 Club in Whittier and I would see him there. However, I moved to Bellflower [California] about the time he came into 20-30 Club in Whittier and as a result I didn't attend very regularly, but we did both belong to this club and he was a leader there and I know played the piano at some of the 20-30 Club sings.

ARENA: Do you recall, Clint, if you and he got together in any social affairs that were promoted by the 20-30 Club, which they either hosted people at these affairs or you and the President were guests as members of the 20-30 Club at other affairs?

HARRIS: As far as outside social affairs, as I say I almost dropped out later in the thirties because of moving away, I didn't attend them and I don't know if he did or not. It was mainly the meetings that I came back to occasionally.

ARENA: Still keeping this on a general level before we get into specifics, how about contact with members of the President's family, including close cousins, among of course the immediate members were his parents and his brothers, all of whom I know you know. But possibly you might have had contact with some of the cousins who worked in the store on a fairly regular basis

and in many cases slept with the President or the President slept in their homes. For example, you have heard of Mrs. [Jane Milhous] Beeson. The President left and lived with her for a while in Lindsay [California]. Now she has two sons that live in, I won't say this immediate area, but one for sure is in Long Beach [California] and this is Sheldon Beeson. Have you ever had contact with relatives such as that, the Beesons? Others would be [Thomas T.] Tom Seulke. Still others would be [William Alan] Bill Milhous, who I believe now owns the Sea Fare Inn. So, what contact can you recollect with members of the immediate family and these cousin relatives?

HARRIS: Well, as far as members of the immediate family, of course, I just grew up knowing Don [Francis Donald Nixon] who is not much younger than the President. I can't remember when I didn't know Don. It seems it was quite a few years later that I knew Ed [Edward Calvert Nixon] because he was so much younger. I only knew the President had a baby brother when we were in Whittier College and that was Ed. I felt that I knew his mother [Hannah Milhous Nixon] quite well, but more particularly in later years because I almost loved her as much as you could love any outside person. She, in many ways, had the principles of my mother, and I seemed to feel like she was almost an extension of my mother, and felt like sometimes I could help her and advise her on some of her automotive problems. This was probably later when Dick was a congressman, a senator and away a great deal and even as late as when he was Vice President. I didn't feel I knew his father [Francis Anthony Nixon] as well as his mother. Maybe that was my fault, but his mother just seemed to be easier to know.

ARENA: As a matter of fact how far back do you recollect the President's mother driving?

HARRIS: That would be hard to say.

ARENA: As far back as you can recollect? For example, whenever you did run into her in town was she in a car or on her way to being driven by her husband Frank Nixon or one of the boys?

HARRIS: That would just be hard for me to recall. I was most aware of this perhaps during the time when Dick was Congressman and Senator and later Vice President, during these periods. Getting to Don, of course, Don was in business in Whittier and I saw a great deal of Don. He had a restaurant right across the street from where we are presently here, at my agency. He had the little family grocery store and restaurant that became a bigger one and, of course, the Nixon family restaurant out on Whittier Boulevard. I would see Don quite often. I believe at one time he was a director of the [Whittier] Chamber of Commerce, at the same time I was. And just another small town businessman that I saw a great deal of, of course.

Speaking of another relative, Bill Milhous, Jr., [William Alan Milhous] who now owns Sea Fare Inn, I have known Bill as far back as I can remember. I've known his father who now is elderly and has moved away from Whittier I understand.

Speaking of other relatives, I knew one of his cousins, Edith [Catherine] Gibbons. I believe her last name is Nunes now. I'm not sure of that. She was a Whittier College student a year or two behind me, and her mother, Mrs. [Martha Milhous] Gibbons, was a real fiery, fine little old lady, who I also took a special interest in when it came to car problems.

ARENA: Who was also the nurse, if I'm not mistaken.

HARRIS: I didn't know she was a nurse, but she was Hannah Nixon's sister and a great deal like Hannah Nixon I always felt.

ARENA: And did you know that she had still another daughter, and possibly you knew her, by the name of Mildred?

HARRIS: Edith's sister? I didn't know her well. However, at the Inauguration we had dinner with Edith [Gibbons Nunes] and Mildred [Gibbons Fink], Flora and I did, and had a very fine visit--almost like a little class reunion with Edith and, of course, the sister was there, so we got to know her. But I didn't know her in the earlier days.

ARENA: Her married name now is Mrs. Fink, which might ring a bell too.

HARRIS: I recall it.

ARENA: Mildred Gibbons Fink.

HARRIS: Yes, because I have a very good college football classmate of mine and the President's, Herman Fink. I remember the name because of that association.

ARENA: She now lives in the same area as Mrs. [Janel] Beeson, the President's aunt who taught him piano playing.

HARRIS: In the Lindsay area.

ARENA: In the Lindsay area, and she is a teacher as well.

HARRIS: I am still trying to generalize.

ARENA: You have made it very clear that you have more than just a passing acquaintance with the President's immediate family, such as with Donald. And you have had quite an acquaintance with his relatives, relatives who were on a close level with the President over the years, people like Bill Milhous, Jr.,

and, of course, Bill Milhous, Sr., [Charles William Milhous], the President's uncle. Do you recall possibly the President's grandmother, as well as grandfather. It would be a very brief period as far as the grandfather, but the grandmother lived to see him graduate from Duke University, Mrs. Almira Milhous?

HARRIS: No, I never knew either of them.

ARENA: Were there occasions when the President came back, although this might get into the political period, which we should avoid--1945. But I'm thinking of non-political matters, such as his serving on the Board of Trustees of Whittier College. I know you are an alumnus and possibly you had some function, including that of the Board of Trustees or some alumnus function, but would you generalize on those points of contact? The period after 1945 when you came into contact with him on any circumstance, including this on the college level--a reunion or college alumni affairs or anything like that?

HARRIS: From the period of around 1940 or soon after until the war was over, I didn't see the President or the then civilian at all. I don't recall seeing much of him until he ran for Congress, which would have been '46.

ARENA: He was approached in '45 and then ran the campaign in '46.

HARRIS: Yes, and you see he was virtually in the service until he came back, so he was completely removed from the Whittier area from about '40 to '46, inclusive. So during that period I saw nothing of him. And then when he ran for Congress, because I was so interested in him as a friend, and in his political career that I helped to whatever extent I could in various ways. And I might say the contacts just kind of continued to grow from that time on, along with the good start that we had before as just friends. I have been involved in helping him from time to time with automobiles when he needed them, but that's not generalizing, that's perhaps something separately.

ARENA: One other general area of contact might have been through his law practice. Do you recall if that came up in any way, his firm, if not he personally, his firm, that of Wingert, Bewley, and Nixon represented you in any way?

HARRIS: At that time I don't recall of anything, but once a little legal advice that we needed, and I think [Thomas W.] Tom Bewley handled that, because he was an old-time family friend of my wife's [Flora Harris]. And other than that, I don't recall any legal matters that we were ever involved with with his firm.

ARENA: Just to make sure, Clint, was there ever any contact between you and your wife or any members of your family through your interest in music, your interest in cultural affairs? For example, were you aware one of the President's uncles, a Griffith Milhous, taught music in this area? One was on the Board of Education for the Lowell District. Was there any contact in that way that you can think of aside from the direct contact with the President, but through the wide-ranging Nixon-Milhous mainly are the ones who are in this area. Any contact through the Milhouses in that fashion?

HARRIS: No, I wasn't even aware of these particular relatives that you mention, Dick.

ARENA: Going back to this pre-college period for a moment--we might have touched on this in an earlier interview but I want to be sure that we do cover it--was there any debating tie-up with your high school that you had attended and the ones that the President represented on either of his two high school levels? You know he attended Fullerton High School for a while, 1926-27 to be precise, and then he transferred to Whittier High School. Was there any contact there from the standpoint of debating? Did he visit your school?

HARRIS: I don't recall any contacts of Covina High School, where I attended, with either Fullerton [High School] or Whittier [High School]. I wouldn't say that there wasn't any, but I don't recall them. Remember that I graduated from high school in 1928 and stayed out for two years before I went to Whittier College, so I would have been in high school two years in advance of Dick Nixon.

ARENA: Do you recall the fact that he used to play football on the high school level? Through other interviews I've discovered that his father, Mr. Frank Nixon, would bring the President and some friends to play other teams when he was a student at Fullerton High School. Do you recall that coming up in any way?

HARRIS: That was completely before our association.

ARENA: Well, so much for the general contacts. Just to establish facts, that was the idea of running through these things. Now I would like to establish the direct ones, again going from the college period, 1930, right up to the present time, on the personal, direct level on the college level. For example, do you recall trips with the football team in particular, but possibly other events, where the Orthogonians attended affairs outside of Whittier? These I would call direct contacts. The question of dating, double-dating or attending social affairs. The question of eating in the President's home when he was a student at

college or later, after he married and lived in Whittier and practiced law. Whatever you can recollect in the way of direct contact experiences and don't worry about exhausting them at this point. Just mention them and then we'll go back and look into them more in detail. But it's just a kind of chance for you to think back, because I realize it is very difficult and under no circumstances can a person recall every incident. But as best you can, think of these direct contact you have had with the President, and we'll say beginning the college period when he was a freshman in 1930.

HARRIS: Well, perhaps my earliest recollection of the President was as college freshmen, when we were both out for freshman football. In those days the freshmen were a separate squad, a separate coach and completely divorced from the varsity because no matter how good a player you were as a freshman, you couldn't play on the varsity until you became a sophomore. As a result, we had a very small squad, perhaps not over twenty or twenty-five out for freshman football. And we, of course, knew each other pretty intimately, because we were so few. In the case of playing Cal Tech [California Institute of Technology], Oxy [Occidental College], [University of] Redlands, the other conference schools, we had a squad of eligible players according to the Southern Conference rules and then we had some other fellows who were not eligible. It seems that when we played a conference game, it took some scraping to get eleven people who were eligible. I don't know how I happened to be but I was one of the eligible and so was Dick Nixon, so we did play football together. And it was fun, and I think my earliest recollections of him was how much he was motivated and how he tried, and on the freshman squad he was probably as good as most of us because the competition wasn't as keen as when we got up to the varsity. And we would take these football trips together and he was just one of a grand bunch of guys. He was not outstanding either way except he perhaps had more fire than most of us.

ARENA: Excuse the interruption, but do you recall he played more in the games while he was on the freshman squad than he did later on?

HARRIS: Yes, he did.

ARENA: But was it not the policy then, or any time, not to award a letter to a person unless he was on the regular team?

HARRIS: I believe freshman squads in those days got a numeral which would have been the class of '34, if we played a certain percentage of the eligible games.

ARENA: Still this would be separate from the idea of the letter.

HARRIS: Yes, the varsity letter. It had to be a varsity letter to win that and, of course, you had to play in a certain percentage of the games and certain times to win that. But on the freshman squad, perhaps two-thirds of the people on the freshman squad didn't compete later for the varsity because they perhaps felt they wouldn't have the ability to play varsity football, but Dick Nixon went out in spite of that and stayed all three years on the varsity as well as on the freshman squad. But on the freshman squad we had a lot of intimate association. I can recall one time we played four football games in one week inclusive, Saturday to Saturday. I think for a while most of us had more football than we wanted for that one week.

ARENA: I imagine they were not games where you had two squads, one offensive and one defensive.

HARRIS: In those days we played both offense and defense and I know I was tired of football after four games in one week because we played most all of all games and in these games, I believe I can recall, one of them was at Bakersfield High School. I think one was a conference game at Cal Tech. I believe the other one was with Citrus Junior College and then the last one was on a Saturday with the Sherman Indian School at Arlington [California]. Three of these would have been non-conference games and one would have been a conference game but I can recall the discipline wasn't too great on our frosh team in those days. I recall that the Sherman Indian School game which was considered a practice game, and it was a tough game, because they were tough football players. When we ended up with only ten of our squad showing up, one of our assistant coaches put on a suit to make the eleventh person in that game. I can recall that--how tough it was. I think they beat us too, which they shouldn't have done, had we had our full squad and been motivated, but I believe we had lost a little of our motivation by that fourth game in seven days.

ARENA: Excuse me. I take it that your coach during all of this period was Chief Newman.

HARRIS: No, Chief was the varsity coach. He had nothing to do with the freshmen except look us over quite carefully, sizing us up for the next year, I'm sure. No, officially our coach was Verne Landreth, who was head of the Athletic Department and had very little time to spend with us because he had other duties, but as I recall it, George Kellogg gave us some help and I believe a man whose name was John Allen, the same name as the (Los Angeles) Rams present coach, and who was an employee at the boys' state school, came up and helped coach us. But it was a little help from all sources, because Whittier College was very poor financially in those days and they had a lot of volunteer help for this.

ARENA: Do you recall, Clint, ever discussing with the President his liking for football? I am thinking particularly, say, not recently, where you and he might have been reminiscing about the old days, but at that particular time why he was interested in football, and if you wish you might generalize as to the average fellow you met as to why football was an attraction. What, if anything, would have been the appeal of football to the President if it ever came up, and if it didn't come up, to other students as you think back at that time?

HARRIS: I don't recall having any conversations with the President or any others as to why we liked football or why we didn't. I guess some of us just liked it and we took it for granted. Football is a very competitive thing and I am sure we all know the President is a very competitive person. But I know I enjoyed playing football. I liked the fellows and the association that it gave you. Well a contact sport is fun. I just liked it and I am sure he did, in spite of the fact that physically he was not quite as strong or as big as the average football player in college. But as far as any discussion, no, I don't recall any discussion along that line.

ARENA: Do you recall that he was ever injured while playing or even during practice games as a result?

HARRIS: I don't recall it. I'm sure that he had to get bruised up, much as he was in scrimmages. But I don't recall it.

ARENA: When he did play, or the position that he practiced for, was what?

HARRIS: Usually in the line, tackle or end.

ARENA: Do you recall seeing his parents, either at the games bringing him or picking him up, and particularly his father who, as I say, did bring him to high school games in which he participated?

HARRIS: I don't recall that and, of course, the varsity games we'd go as a group usually ahead of time. I just don't recall that.

ARENA: Looking over the four years of college, would you say that the main direct contact between you and the President was as a result of this football experience?

HARRIS: Oh, I would say very definitely so. Yes. Because as I say, we shared only two or three classes. Of course, we were also both Orthogonians and that gave us a mutual interest.

ARENA: Did the Orthogonian Society have their own building by the way?

HARRIS: No, not at that time.

ARENA: Did any of them--the Franklin Society?

HARRIS: None of them.

ARENA: They did not have, as some fraternities on campus do?

HARRIS: No. Quite often groups of us would live together in little places around but as far as having a complete frat house, so to speak, nothing even close to it.

ARENA: Is it correct that the majority and the complexion of the Orthogonians was mainly that of the athletic members? Maybe not the entire football squad but the majority were football players?

HARRIS: Yes. I don't know how it turned out that way, but it just seemed that a high percentage of the Orthogonians were on the football squad, and a big part of the football squad were Orthogonians. It overlapped some, but that was more true than of the Franklins, which was the other men's society and then I believe there was another one; it might have been the Lancer Society that got started before we were out of college. I'm not sure about that. But when we were freshmen, there were only the Franklins and then the Orthogonians started later, I believe, that year and became quite strong and competitive to the Franklins before we were out of college.

ARENA: If I'm not mistaken, some authorities have given the President a great deal to do with the founding of the Orthogonians. What is your recollection about that?

HARRIS: Well, I was not a charter member. I was one of the first four who were pledged and initiated into it the second year, so I couldn't be precise in the founding of it. But it is my understanding that the President and Dean Triggs were the two main ones who founded the Orthogonians.

ARENA: What do you recall of the work of your faculty advisor, Dr. [Albert W.] Upton who, if I am not mistaken, was in the English Department, and, although as you say, Chief Newman was always available? Was Dr. Upton particularly interested in sports or do you recall that the students went out of their way for some particular reason to have him serve as their advisor, a man in English?

HARRIS: I can't recall particularly why Albert Upton was chosen but I can understand after knowing him as well as I have over the years why he was a good fellow for it. Albert Upton was professor of English. I believe prior to that he had served quite a long career in the Navy. He was quite an all-around guy. He knew a lot of things other than just English. He was the kind of fellow you could communicate with and kind of a buddy type of a professor, just like Paul Smith was in those early days when he was a professor rather than the president of the college. And Albert Upton, I am sure, was quite interested in sports, although as far as ever participating in college football, I would doubt that he had, although I don't know this, of course.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, you may be aware that both Dr. Paul Smith and Dr. Albert Upton gave a course together. I wonder if you attended that joint course by any chance?

HARRIS: No, I didn't.

ARENA: Were you aware of that?

HARRIS: No, I didn't realize they had given one together.

ARENA: It might have been later, one dealing with politics and English. Of course, many of the great examples of the English language deal with politics and that wouldn't be surprising. But that must have been an interesting course. So there was this contact with the Orthogonians. Did the Orthogonians pal around with a particular group of girls, we'll say? Did a particular group of girls have their own society equivalent to the Orthogonians or the Franklins?

HARRIS: The girls' societies that I recall were the Metaphonians, the Palmers, the Athenians, and I'm sure I'm overlooking one or two. There were more girls' societies than men's, but the Orthogonians in those days kind of rated as the poor dumb football players--the big brawny guys with no brains and no money, and the Franklins were listed as the rich boys that had all the tuxes and so on, but this was over-exaggerated in both cases, of course. I don't recall this distinction or attempt to distinguish between the girls' societies as much.

ARENA: Did the dating, including the double-dating, stem directly from the college experiences or from girls both you and, if you recall, the President knew from outside the college period, say, girls from other schools or girls that you had kept in contact with since your high school days, whereas the girls did not go on to Whittier College?

HARRIS: As I recall it, I think a lot of our double-dating was right from the college--college girls and college fellows

going out together, probably because they knew each other and it was convenient. And sometimes one would have a car and others wouldn't. And they would take advantage of the one with the automobile. I'm sure that probably Whittier residents that went to Whittier College probably overlapped more because they had their high school friends also. But I believe most of the double-dating would have been more with Whittier College people.

AREBAL Did the double-dating consist of daytime dates, for example, going on picnics, going to not only your own football game but other athletic events that were taking place in the area, including maybe car races and so forth? What were the occasions for the dating, other than the pleasure of being with a member of the opposite sex?

HARRIS: As I look back on double dates, I think some of them were days like going to the mountains to play in the snow at the right time of the season. I think of double dates more often as going to football games. However, in most cases of that nature, it would usually involve two girls and one fellow going to the game together and picking up the fellow on the football squad after the game. That would be the way I got involved in double dates on football games, perhaps more than any other reason, because as a football squad you went ahead of time and you had to have your mind completely off of girls and on football before the game. After the game I guess you could think of girls a little while then. But many of the double dates were of that arrangement. Of course, in those days you had no television and I think there was a much higher interest from the student body in general in football and basketball, by far than there is now. I mean it was a big thing at school then. We had our rallies and bonfires and the whole thing whirled around football and basketball later on in the season, and occasionally the various parties that the societies would give. And if you had a ditch day to go to the mountains, everybody that could get away and get there would go--a lot more involvement in things around the campus.

ARENA: Did Whittier College have an unusually good team in the thirties, especially this period '30 to '34, which heightened the interest of the community? I'm thinking if I'm not mistaken, there was one particular team which had done the greatest accomplishment in 1921. Was that the championship year--1921--where Whittier was quite a power to be reckoned with? Well, whether it was or not, was this period '30 to '34 an unusually successful period and this brought quite a bit of attention to the college as well as to individual players, of course and the community?

HARRIS: I think those three years were not particularly good or bad, Dick. Good-average, we won the Southern California conference one of the three years. I felt disappointed

that we didn't win it all three years actually. We were up amongst the top but we actually only won it one year, as I recall, and I don't recall if that was '31 or '32 now. The college annual will confirm this, of course. But we had good teams. We played a lot of schools outside of the conference. I believe the greatest fun I had in playing football was playing the University of Southern California, not that we could come close to beating them, but the thrill of playing with teams that were some of the best in the nation and to find that we at least could stand up and push them over once in a while was real satisfaction.

ARENA: Was that schedule in operation all the time you attended, you and the President?

HARRIS: Yes. Usually we'd play USC [University of Southern California] as a practice game early in the season before our conference or theirs started. It was a warm-up game for them and a pretty good one for us, of course. And then sometimes, perhaps, we would play some of the military or Navy teams, non-conference schools like Loyola University, which was a powerhouse in those days, and then settle down to playing our conference games as we got into the season later. We would wind up playing a non-conference school. I remember we played the University of Arizona when I was a senior--the last football game I played and disappointed to get beaten in our last game. We played it in a snow storm in Tucson [Arizona] of all places. You don't think of snow in Tucson, but we did. But in those days there were not so many colleges. We played Fresno State [Collegel], for example, every year it seemed and teams up north. San Diego State [Collegel] was on our schedule I believe every year. Of course, there were only a few state colleges back in those days.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: Clint, while we're on this question of dating and the social life of Whittier College, let me begin by asking some general questions. One, did you and the President double date over the four-year period you knew one another in college? Did this happen mostly during one year?

HARRIS: No, I would say, generally speaking, no. When you say double date, I remember a triple date when, I believe, we were freshmen. Three couples of us went in my car to Los Angeles County playgrounds, Big Pines I believe they called it for a day in the snow, and as I recall it, [Kenneth] Kenney Ball and Delores Lautrup, who he later married, were in the front seat with me and the girl that I took, and Dick Nixon and Ola Florence Welch were in the rumble seat of the car. I probably made the statement later, facetiously, "If I'd have known he was going to be President, I wouldn't have made him ride in the rumble seat."

But it might have been nice back there, I don't know. But that's the first recollection I have of a double or a triple date. And I don't recall if we had--probably might have had two or three other occasions. But I recall that one sepcifically because we had a lot of fun that day up in the mountains in the snow.

ARENA: Do you recall possibly, and if it isn't personal, after the dating experience, you exchanging ideas about women, about marriage, not necessarily mentioning individual names, but what the President's attitude about marriage was, when he intended to get married? Any ideas or any conversation along these lines that comes to mind?

HARRIS: I don't believe in those days, Dick, that we discussed these things with each other too much. You could pretty well size a fellow up by his attitude toward girls. I can think of one or two whose names I wouldn't want to mention, who I thought had a very--I wouldn't know how to express it--vulgar attitude toward girls but that's the percentage of all people. But I think most of us, we liked girls but we respected them and were careful what we said about any girls, and I don't recall ever having any discussion in general about girls with the President. I know that he had high ideals and I know from the girls he went with that he was very selective. I knew of several of the girls that he did go with and I respected them very much and thought well of them.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, do you recall that the President was in any way uncomfortable or unhappy or that he was not enjoying himself on these dates? Did that ever come to mind or did that ever appear to be the case as far as dating with him?

HARRIS: Well, as I say, I didn't go on many double dates with him so, as a general comment, I couldn't say, but I don't recall it happening that particular day that we played in the snow. A lot of us from Whittier College were up there, and the three couples of us went and we had fun.

ARENA: What were the college regulations, if any, concerning social affairs? Was there just a period, for example, where dancing was not allowed on campus and only for unusual circumstances was it allowed?

HARRIS: As I remember, dancing was forbidden or at least frowned upon when we were freshmen and it was allowed and not frowned on so much when we were seniors. And I believe that Dick Nixon had quite a bit to do with broadening the attitude of the college administration towards dancing.

ARENA: And the rule concerning drinking and smoking were in force at this time also?

HARRIS: Smoking was forbidden and I don't recall ever seeing anyone smoke on campus. What drinking was done was certainly done behind the scenes, that's for sure--even beer. Of course, remember that prohibition was on at that time and it wasn't as easy to get involved in drinking as it is now.

ARENA: In addition to attending affairs such as dances, were there other affairs that boys and girls could attend on double dates that you might think of? I'm thinking about the theatre in town.

HARRIS: Well, I believe to most of us to go to a 10 cent movie at the Scenic Theatre was quite a date in those days because we had very little money, and I'm sure a lot of us double-dated there. I think a lot of our dates were around football games or after football games and sometimes dances after football games and after basketball games, of course. The student body seemed to be much more interested in football and basketball at that time than they are now. I don't mean this Whittier College versus Whittier today, but I think all colleges versus their interests now. And it was more of a way of life. For example, before football games they'd usually have a tremendous bonfire up on Fire Hill and a big rally, and it seemed like most of the student body would turn out for these and it was quite a social affair in itself.

ARENA: Did the churches of the area have any special affairs for young people or any of the young people's church groups make an effort to host young couples in the immediate Whittier area that you recall?

HARRIS: I'm inclined to think they did. But I personally didn't get involved in them, so I wouldn't really know that.

ARENA: Was the custom of giving one's fraternity pin or even a football letter the practice at this point, and do you recall any connection there involving the President?

HARRIS: Do you mean the custom of letting a girl have your fraternity pin?

ARENA: Yes, or did they have pins then?

HARRIS: When I was in school I guess you'd call it "pinned" or different way of having a "pinning." One year we won the Southern Conference championship and we got gold footballs and I think at various times different girls wore my gold football and maybe my varsity sweater later on, and this seemed to be the custom at that time. I can't answer that regarding the President, because although he made every effort to play football, he didn't win a varsity letter at Whittier College, so he didn't have the college letter until a few days before he was inaugurated

when he got one over in Anaheim [Convention Center]. But that was the custom to let them wear your sweater or your football, and I believe we had rings rather than pins.

ARENA: Do you recall what the percentages were, since Whittier College was co-ed, was it about fifty-fifty sexwise, or did the boys or girls have an advantage, one was the minority?

HARRIS: I had never thought of it, but I would feel that it was approximately half, fifty-fifty.

ARENA: Do you recall the President and yourself attending a dance together and you recall observing him and what comes to mind now if you do recollect such an experience?

HARRIS: I was such a poor dancer that I could say I hardly danced at all, and as a result didn't attend as many dances as lots of the fellows did. I don't personally recall the President dancing. I can recall some of our Orthogonian dances, some of them informal where we'd all be there, but as to remembering that he danced with who, I couldn't say that I do.

ARENA: Do you recall the places where the Orthogonians did hold their dances, especially this period when the President was campaigning to have them legally on campus? Sometimes they were as exceptions, but do you recall over a period of years where they tended to hold them? Was there a regular place where they would hold them off campus when they were not allowed on campus?

HARRIS: I believe we had an old barn dance once down in Santa Fe Springs [California]. I've forgotten now the exact location. And then quite often after football games we would have just complete student body dances at the old Whittier Women's Club building which was off campus, but not far off campus. Those are the ones that I recall most.

ARENA: Do you recall the President's musical ability, playing the piano, playing the violin, the fact that he appeared in choirs from time to time, was this put to use? Do you recall him entertaining a group, whether it was a small group on a double date or whether it was the Orthogonians as a whole during the college period?

HARRIS: No, I don't recall him entertaining anyone. I do recall that he was on the Glee Club and I understood that he played the piano some. I wasn't aware that he played the violin until later.

ARENA: And you don't ever recall his sitting down at the piano at any of the affairs you were attending?

HARRIS: No, not in college. Later in the 20-30 Club, yes.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you what years you belonged to the 20-30 Club?

HARRIS: Probably 1936 to '38 or '39.

ARENA: Let's leave the social side of the President, unless you think of something else and want to bring it up again, and go to the events dealing with his debating and those where he performed for the school theatre. I'd like you to go over again what you said about your recollection of seeing him, if you did, in any of the college debates in which he participated.

HARRIS: Yes, I'm sure I saw him in numerous college debates. As far as any specific ones, I can't recall now the topic. Some of our debates were part of our college convocation, we called it chapel then. But I remember him as being the best, in my opinion, debater that Whittier College had during the four years that I was there. He was very good at it and they were always interesting debates when he was involved.

ARENA: Do you recall the debating season paralleled that of football? Was he getting ready for debates while he was also getting ready for football practice?

HARRIS: If he spent much time at it he didn't lose any sessions in football practice, because he was loyal on attending the football practice. But again, I wasn't too aware of debating except to attend and hear the debates.

ARENA: Do you recall the size of the audience and would the audience be just the school people, the school community, or would these be open to the outside?

HARRIS: I think generally it was the school student body.

ARENA: At that time you attended these debates, and any time later, do you recall any conversations directly with the President to the effect that the debating experience warmed his appetite for political activity?

HARRIS: I don't recall talking to him about it. I feel that it did and I think that most of us felt he had a great potential in going far in the field of law or politics. But as far as discussing it with him, I don't recall any discussion.

ARENA: Regarding the President's other extracurricular interests, that of participating in school plays, do you recall seeing him appear in any on the college level?

HARRIS: Yes. I've forgotten the names of the plays but I can recall two or three that he participated in. I believe one, I've forgotten the name, he had the lead in, or one of the leads. I believe he was in one or two of the operettas that were put on.

ARENA: In the operettas, did he have a leading part, do you recall?

HARRIS: I don't think the leading part. But I know that he was interested in dramatics and I am sure that he was in more than a few of the plays.

ARENA: All this period where you had contact with him, say, directly in football and not as much on the same level in the Orthogonian Society, although you had considerable direct contact, and on this level with the operettas and musical performances, did you ever get the impression that he was difficult to get along with, either with you personally, or that say in the case of football, the coach, or in the case of the Orthogonians, whoever the president was, the school advisor, and in the case of the musical programs, whoever the director was, was there ever the impression that he was difficult to get along with? Was that opinion ever expressed by any of the gentlemen under whom you also served? Again coach Newman was over you as well as over the President and, of course, where the operettas were concerned, there would be someone in charge over all of you. Do you ever recall any problems that the President had with any of these people?

HARRIS: In my opinion, he was not difficult at all to get along with. He was easy to talk to and communicate with. He was a busy fellow. He did not live on campus and as a result he didn't waste a lot of his time just sitting around dreaming or talking or gossiping. Because when he wasn't in school in classes or out for football or doing something as part of the school activity, he seemed to be home working. Now, it's true that fellows who lived in the dorms, perhaps they would be studying out on the grass, or they would be wasting time like I did. I didn't live on campus, but I probably wasted more time than the President. But as far as being difficult to get along with, no, he was easy to get along with and easy to communicate with.

ARENA: Although the expression might not have been used as commonly as it is today, the expression "A good team man," would it be your impression that at that time in these performances, whether it was football or was with the acting, he gave the impression and people referred to him as "A good team man."

HARRIS: My opinion on that would be formed mainly from my association with him on the football squad, and I would rate him from that standpoint as very high, from the standpoint of being a team man. He had great motivation. He would inspire others and he would help others by encouragement. Perhaps that feeling has more to do with me feeling close and having respect for him than any other one thing. He was one of the fellows, a team man, doing everything he could to help. From other associations with him--well, as I say, I never worked closely with him in plays or drama, but as a fellow Orthogonian he was one of the group and a good team man and one of the fellows.

ARENA: Although he had these very good grades, and as you know went on and won a scholarship, did you ever find him difficult to speak to on a personal level? And I'm asking you to re-think this last statement you just made that he was always easy to get along with. Was he easy to understand? Did you ever feel uncomfortable or notice others feel uncomfortable in his presence? Here he was active in these other activities, whether it was football or debating, and in the classroom. Whereas he didn't shine in football, he did tend to shine on the scholastic level. Debating called for facility and skill and use of words among other abilities, of course. And if you don't mind my repeating this, I believe you said you always felt ill at ease before an audience, and the idea of giving an oratorical address was not something that came easy for you through this period. Did this difference between you and him in this area create a gulf, as you think back to that period, or was he always really easy to get along with?

HARRIS: Well, I wouldn't think that that difference would matter because in my case that's only in large groups, and any discussion I would have with him or small groups never bothered me at all. I just felt he was easy to talk to on a one-to-one basis, or a few people or our squad or whatever it might be. I probably am not answering your question, but I don't think he was any different than the rest of us. He was more talented than most of us except perhaps in football, which took physical size and strength. But he probably was more motivated. He worked harder than the average of us and he also went further than any of us. That's, of course, obvious. But as far as He was just another one of the swell guys that went to Whittier College to me, but I wouldn't put him too far apart from any of the rest of us.

ARENA: Would that carry over, do you think, Clint, with practically all of the fellows on the football team at that time? Would you say that you had a particularly close relationship with him; and even if you did or did not have a close relationship with him, the others as far as you know had the same attitude, in the sense that they did not find him difficult or at a loss with words or things to talk about when they were with him, as in your case?

HARRIS: Well, I feel my close friends feel somewhat the same way I do about it. I can't separate him from the rest of the fellows, except perhaps a little more fire and motivation and a little less physical ability. He was just one of the gang. It's just about that simple.

ARENA: Just to get this clear for the record, there was no feeling of a division economically speaking? You did not feel that he was well off or less well off economically speaking?

HARRIS: Most of us were so poor. We felt everyone was in the same boat, and perhaps I could think of two or three people in Whittier College who we assumed their folks were wealthy. If anything, it might have separated them just a speck from the rest of us. He was just one of the poor guys like the rest of us, just happened to live at home with his folks instead of living twenty miles away from home and trying to batch like a lot of us did that came from a little ways off. But no distinction that way at all. Because his dad had a little country grocery store didn't make him any more of a wealthy man than some of the rest of our people's dads who had jobs or who had a little orange grove somewhere and were struggling along. We were all in the same boat.

ARENA: Were you aware that he was working at the store?

HARRIS: Yes, I knew.

ARENA: And you were working, part-time or full-time yourself?

HARRIS: In the summertime when I could get jobs, of course.

ARENA: Is there anything else regarding this college period association between you and the President that you would like to bring up that I have not? Any unusual circumstance in the way of an emergency or any other unusual activity? Concerning one important aspect that we've left hanging in the air, Clint, a bit earlier this question of the President's social life, his dating with girls. When you knew him, was it a question of his being a one-girl man in a sense? Did he just date the same girl over and over again and when he stopped with her start a new girl or, was he, I won't say playing the field, but was he not tied down to any one particular girl when you knew him on the college level? Anything you want to add to his experiences as a fellow with girls. Whatever you want to say about that.

HARRIS: Well, Dick, in college as I recall it, he dated considerably. He didn't make a career out of it as some did perhaps. Of course, I mentioned earlier that the first triple date that I went on with him he had dated Ola Florence Welch. I had another girl [Virginia Ward] and then [Kenneth] Kenney Ball

and his girl [Dolores Lalltrup] were with us. But that's the first time I met Ola Florence. I might add that as far as I can remember Dick Nixon went with Ola Florence occasionally during our freshman year. Later she started going with another friend of mine, went with him quite a bit, particularly to dances, and later on I went with Ola Florence I believe to a show regarding a history class and we came to like each other, and I went with Ola Florence off and on along with other girls at the college for perhaps a year or more. Later Ola Florence and Dick Nixon started going together again. It was an intermittent thing. I can recall after Dick Nixon started going with Ola Florence again, and the fact that I felt that my going with her had hurt my friendship with another fellow that she'd gone with, and I didn't want this to happen between Dick Nixon and I, that he and I had a discussion about this. Well, we were good friends and because one of us had gone with a girl and later he had made no difference to our friendship and fortunately it never has. The interesting part of it is that she married another good friend of ours, Gail Jobe, who was a Covina High School classmate of mine and a good friend of Dick Nixon, a fellow Orthogonian and a fellow member on the football squad.

I guess what I am trying to point out is that he was probably no different than the rest of us. He went with several girls during college. We didn't think of getting married in those days due to the depression and the fact that we considered financial ability to support a wife as part of the marriage contract.

I remember a very pretty young blonde girl by the name of Margaret Binford that the President went with. I went with her also a time or two. Nothing unusual about it. He also dated Marjorie Hildreth, another very striking girl. We all went with many girls and he was no exception to this rule at all, that I can recall.

But these dates of most of us--oh, sure, I can think of two or three or four who maybe started going with a certain girl when they were freshmen and went all four years and married the girl--but in most cases we played the field, just the way times were, and as I say you couldn't think too seriously about getting married in those days. I don't think he was very much different than the rest of us.

ARENA: Is there anything else that possibly we have not discussed regarding this four-year college association between you and the President before we bring this interview to a close?

HARRIS: Well, I think some of the most interesting and intimate things were perhaps more pertaining to football, track meets and things of that nature. Do you want to discuss that at another time or continue now?

ARENA: I think this would be a good time to bring it to a close and we could discuss those intimate things, plus the post-college association that you had with the President in our next interview. Thank you very much, Clint.

HARRIS: Okay, Dick.