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Earl Robert Nixon (July 16,1972)

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Oral History Interview

with

MR. EARL ROBERT NIXON

July 16, 1972
Stayton Island, Oregon

By Evlyn Dorn

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

- DORN: This is an interview with Mr. Earl Robert Nixon at Stayton Island, Oregon, on July 16, 1972, Evlyn Dorn interviewing. Mr. Nixon, where and when were you born?
- NIXON: I was born in Bridge, Oregon on April 13, 1934.
- DORN: Have you lived in Oregon all your life?
- NIXON: Mainly. I've worked out of the state but mainly in Oregon.
- DORN: Give me a brief resume of your education.
- NIXON: I started school at six years old in Sublimity, Oregon at a Catholic school. We moved to Aumsville, Oregon and I started the third grade there at the Aumsville Elementary School. And then I went into the service from there.
- DORN: What is your occupation at the present time?
- NIXON: Service representative for the city of Salem, Oregon.
- DORN: And Salem is the capital of Oregon, isn't it?
- NIXON: Yes, ma'am.
- DORN: So as to establish your relationship to the President will you give me the names of your parents and your grandparents?

NIXON: My father's name was David Palmer Nixon. My mother's name was Berchie Combs before she was married to David Palmer Nixon. And my grandfather was Boston Amos.

DORN: And Boston was a son of George Nixon III.

NIXON: That's what I understand. Yes, ma'am.

DORN: Same grandfather Richard Nixon, the President has. Have you ever met the President personally?

NIXON: No, ma'am, I haven't.

DORN: Of course you've seen him many times on television.

NIXON: Yes, ma'am.

DORN: And you're naturally very proud to be a Nixon.

NIXON: Certainly.

DORN: What about his personality as it comes through on the television? How do you feel about him? Do you feel that he's a dedicated man? Do you feel that he's sincere. I think perhaps the hardest thing for him to contend with when he went to Washington was that the press said he was insincere. This has been very hard for him. How do you feel about his sincerity?

NIXON: Well, frankly, I think that was one of the poorest evaluations of his personality, I really do. Down deep I feel that way. I feel that he was so sincere, frankly, that it hurt him. I really do, for the simple reason that one man just can't do it.

DORN: Mr. Nixon, had you ever thought of running for public office, or was politics discussed in your family at all?

NIXON: Certainly it was discussed, but frankly that would be one of the last occupations I would take up.

DORN: Thinking about this reunion today, you live right here in Salem, right?

NIXON: Yes, ma'am.

DORN: How did you feel about getting this Nixon group together and what inspired it?

NIXON: We were sitting around and talking, Memphis [E.] Nixon and I probably more than anyone, and we thought it would be a real good idea and we would meet people that we've never met before. Also, we would get people together that haven't been together for years. We thought it was an exciting thing, and certainly it's turned out to be that way.

DORN: Certainly it has. This is a beautiful place, this Stayton Island, even if it is hard to find. You have never met the President's mother and father, Hannah and [Francis Anthony] Frank Nixon?

NIXON: No, ma'am.

DORN: Nor his brothers?

NIXON: No.

DORN: Of course, not his uncles either, Walter [Walter Wadsworth Nixon], Ernest [Ernest Leland Nixon] and Hugh [Hugh Henry Nixon]?

NIXON: No.

DORN: Was there ever any discussion in your family about the fact that the President's father gave up his Methodist church for a Quaker church when he married Hannah Nixon?

NIXON: No, ma'am. I don't believe that was ever discussed. I don't believe the family really followed back that far.

DORN: Did you have much of a problem in locating relatives for this reunion?

NIXON: No, ma'am. I think most of us have been in contact with several of them, one member of the family or another. Especially Uncle Kess [Winford Kessler Nixon], he has the background of most of them.

DORN: Have you had any correspondence with the President, or do you have any family pictures at all? I'm thinking in terms of the material for the Nixon Library.

NIXON: Yes, ma'am. We have pictures of my parents and their immediate family, and possibly of my grandmother and grandfather, Boxtton A. [Ames] Nixon.

DORN: I don't believe we have any pictures of Boston at all, and we would certainly like to have some. I will contact you again about that. We are going to start in this year

on our picture project, and we would like very much to borrow the picture from you, unless you want to give it to the Nixon library. If you don't want to give it, we have a process where we can have one taken from it so it can be filed in the Nixon library.

NIXON: I'm not certain, Mrs. Dorn, whether we actually have that picture, but it seems that I've either seen one or heard someone speak of that picture.

K. NIXON: Let me say a word here. I've got some good pictures of him.

DORN: Have you? This is Mr. Kessler Nixon speaking. You say you do have some good pictures?

K. NIXON: Yes, I do. I don't have any, I believe, of him alone, but of him and my mother. I've got some good ones and I'd be glad to.

DORN: That would be very nice. If you don't want to give them to the library--of course, that would be the ideal thing--but if you want them just to be used, we could have pictures taken from them and they could be returned to you.

K. NIXON: I think I've got more than one.

DORN: We'll contact you again, then, about the pictures. Mr. Nixon, you are married, aren't you?

NIXON: Yes, ma'am.

DORN: What is your wife's name?

NIXON: Belle June Nixon.

DORN: And do you have children?

NIXON: Yes, ma'am. I have five.

DORN: Five children, and what are their names?

NIXON: Starting at the youngest it would be Brian Nixon. The next one would be Kathy Nixon. The next one would be Roscoe Wade Nixon. The next one would be Bret Reagan Nixon. The next one would be Pamillia Faye Nixon.

DORN: Do you have much discussion when you're out in the fact that your name is Nixon? Do you have a lot of people saying, "Are you related?"

NIXON: Probably not over fifty times a day.

DORN: Well, I'm sure your children are all very proud of it, and as they grow older they will be that much more.

NIXON: I do meet the public a lot, and invariably I speak to many people every day in my job, so I just more or less grin and that's it.

DORN: Well, you have a nice grin. Can you think of anything else that you'd like to add to this at all, any family history?

NIXON: I think probably you've got the main part of it from Mr. Kessler Nixon, because he's certainly the oldest and he follows it more closely. My sister, Sharon, was doing some research in that area, but I think her and Uncle Kess have about the same information.

DORN: I certainly want to thank you for this interview and this has been a marvelous chance for me to get acquainted with some of the Nixon people. I've certainly enjoyed it and I appreciate it very much.