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F. W. Palmer (July 24, 1972)

C. Richard Arena
Whittier College

Oral History Interview

with

MR. F. W. PALMER

July 24, 1972
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mr. Forest Palmer (middle name of Mr. Palmer is William), in Whittier, California, Arena interviewing. Today's date is July 24, 1972. Mr. Palmer, may I begin by getting an idea of your own background? May I ask you where and when you were born and your father's occupation, and how far back your roots go in Whittier?

PALMER: We came to East Whittier in 1916, the fall of 1916, from Newcastle, Indiana. There was quite a migration from Newcastle, Indiana, the [George L.] Hazzards and the [Thomas] Newlins and many old residents of Whittier came from Henry County, Indiana. [Colonel Simon J.] Murphys, [Cass A.] Reeses, probably a hundred families or more. Not all Quaker but many of their andestors were. George Hazzard was president of Home Savings & Loan Association, A. C. Johnson, president of Whittier National Bank, Bevin Johnson, vice president.

ARENA: In relationship to the President's family, you know I'm sure, that his grandfather, Franklin Milhous, came from Indiana also. I believe it was North Vernon, Indiana. Is that anywhere near that part of Indiana where the President's . . .

PALMER: Yes. The Nixons were scattered all around Henry County. There is quite a report on the Robert Nixon family of Newcastle, Indiana in the Hazzard book of Henry County History (1910). This family were bankers and government officials. Another Nixon family were druggists at Spiceland, Indiana, another Quaker settlement. Many Whittier families ancestors were from this community. Some of the Whittier College professors came from this area around Richmond, Indiana. Thomas Newlin, Emory Ratcliffe (my cousin) and others. This was a Quaker settlement, and some originally came from North Carolina with many many ancestral Whittier families.

ARENA: Excuse me. About the Milhouses in Indiana, from the standpoint of distance, do you have any idea of how far Henry County is . . .

PALMER: It's centered around Richmond [Indiana] and there was a circle I would say maybe fifty miles, but they originally came from North Carolina due to the slavery and went to Ohio. The Quakers bought a large settlement of ground in Miami County, Ohio.

ARENA: When you say they, are you talking about the Milhouses?

PALMER: The Quakers. The Quakers were . . .

ARENA: Oh, I see. You're talking about the general history of the Quakers.

PALMER: Yes.

ARENA: Oh, I see.

PALMER: And some of the Milhouses were also in this group that moved from South Carolina. You'll find many records in the Quaker minutes where the Milhouses were in South Carolina. They taxed Quakers so heavy because of. . . . Well, they didn't want to support the military and they freed their slaves, and that caused a lot of unrest in South Carolina, so they taxed them and fined them and they wouldn't pay the church tax. That was the big issue. So there was a mass movement. Several of the churches moved in body from South Carolina and North Carolina to Ohio, on the Miami River. And also, they spread out into Pennsylvania. Now, this Nixon family evidently were farmers and some were probably lawyers, because when we were checking my wife's family--we do geneology--the wife and I found that one of the Nixons bought 430 acres one day and sold it to my wife's Haydens the next day.

And there was a Quaker settlement, this was near Uniontown, Pennsylvania--the Redfield Quaker settlement in around there. The [W. Orville] Mendenhalls and many of the early Quaker families. . . . These are all the same family. These Quaker families in Pennsylvania, ending up in Whittier, have traveled together for over three hundred years.

ARENA: Excuse me. Before we get this general background, I want to pinpoint your own background. You did say that you came to Whittier in 1916, but when were you born, if I may ask?

PALMER: Newcastle, Indiana.

ARENA: And the date?

PALMER: December 20, 1901.

ARENA: That helps us pinpoint your age as compared with the President's, and just to remind you, he was born in Yorba Linda [California] in 1913. Now, may I ask you this: Would you give a general resume of your own education and your own career; and I believe at this point you're retired?

PALMER: Yes.

ARENA: And when did you retire? Just some personal information about yourself.

PALMER: Well, my first seven years was in a little grammar school in Indiana, all eight grades in one school room. Then we came to California; my grandfather came with a bunch of Henry County Quakers in 1910.

ARENA: By here you mean Whittier?

PALMER: Whittier, yes.

ARENA: May I ask your grandfather's full name?

PALMER: William I. Palmer. The middle name was supposed to have been Isaac, but he never liked that, so he always said I. He built the house, it's still standing, on the corner of La Palma [Street], and he also had a used furniture store.

ARENA: Excuse me. The corner of La Palma and what?

PALMER: Painter [Avenue].

ARENA: Would you know the exact number?

PALMER: No, it was on the northeast corner. I don't know the numbers. And he also built the house on Telegraph Road where the nursery is. It's an old brown house between Scott Road and Santa Gertrudes [Avenue]. He built that house.

ARENA: That goes back to around 1910 when he first came.

PALMER: Yes. There were some great migrations here at that time.

ARENA: Was your grandfather mainly a farmer though, and this building was on the side?

PALMER: He wasn't actually. He was a carpenter and he could do anything with tools, iron tools, and it goes back into the family history. He wasn't really a good farmer; none

of the Palmers were good farmers. But everybody else was coming to California so he came to California and bought an orange orchard out on Telegraph Road--Leffingwell it is now. We used to call it Telegraph Road. And during the twenties he got twenty dollars a box for oranges and a dollar apiece for avocados. So we came to Californis on the strength that this was the land of promise, see, during the war.

ARENA: By we, it was your father.

PALMER: My father and mother.

ARENA: Your father's full name, Mr. Palmer?

PALMER: Ernest Orville.

ARENA: How many in the family?

PALMER: Three. You've interviewed my sister, Marriet [Palmer Hudspeth]. And then I have a brother, Ralph [Palmer] which you know.

ARENA: That's the full family.

PALMER: So we came to East Whittier and I went to East Whittier [Elementary] School.

ARENA: What years?

PALMER: I finished up there in the eighth grade; it must have been 1916, I believe. Then the next four years I went to Whittier High School. I graduated in 1921, June of 1921. And we just celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of our class, just recently. And in this class at East Whittier were Walter Wood and Norman Hall and many of the old-time Whittierites were at the East Whittier School, see? Then I worked at the Whittier National Bank after that and got acquainted with George L. Hazzard and A.C. [Johnson] and Bevin Johnson, which were old-time bankers here. A. C. Johnson was another one of the officers. I believe he was president. So I worked a year and then I went to Fullerton Junior College. I knew I wasn't going to be able to continue my college education, so I went to Fullerton Junior College and took subjects that I thought would help me. After one year in Fullerton Junior College, why, the First National Bank of Whittier called. And there were the Perrys. Herman Perry was president at that time and Hadley [Frederick vice president. But I'll tell you an interesting thing. On his birthday he [Frederick Hadley] always came around and gave us the amount in cents of his birthday. If he was sixty, he gave us all sixty cents apiece. I remember that very well.

ARENA: Would you happen to know if he was the father-in-law of Mr. Bewley Allen whom I believe married into that family?

PALMER: Those families were all related, see? And so then, I worked there a year at the bank, and I told Mr. Perry that I had my application in with Standard Oil Company. So the Standard Oil Company, the sales department, called me and I got a job there and moved to Artesia [California]. And this was kind of a coincidence, because I delivered gasoline to Mrs. [Patricia Ryan] Nixon's father, Mr. [William M.] Ryan, and no doubt she was in high school at that time.

ARENA: And about what year would that be?

PALMER: It would be in 1925.

ARENA: You knew him just at that point, and just in that year. Was this a continuing . . .

PALMER: No. We moved after we were married. We were married in 1925 and I worked for Standard Oil Company. He had a little truck farm there, maybe five acres in it, and he had a gas engine to pump water, and I'd deliver distillate to him, see.

ARENA: What is the purpose of distillate? How would that be used?

PALMER: Well, he used it in his engine to pump water to irrigate his truck patch. And then Mrs. Nixon's girl friend was Myrtle Raine, and she was Pat's girl friend, and she helped us when both of our babies were born. She helped us when our baby was born here.

ARENA: As a kind of midwife, you mean, or just helping out?

PALMER: No. She was in high school and just helped us, but she . . .

ARENA: For the record, would you happen to know if she's still living in this area and could be reached?

PALMER: Yes. I have her address. Her name is Borden now. They're all the same family, all over the United States. The Borden family are all related. Pat had a brother, Tommy, [Thomas Sanford Ryan] who was a football player if I remember it correctly. I remember him quite distinctly. And, of course, the children would be out when I was delivering, but I don't remember anything. I do remember one thing. They had a five-gallon can that they had kerosene in. I suppose it was for their lantern, but

it was always full of sticks, and I always had to empty those sticks out before I could fill the five-gallon kerosene can. They might have had lamps but I rather doubt it, see.

ARENA: Did you see any electrical hookup at all to the place?

PALMER: Then?

ARENA: Yes.

PALMER: I don't remember. I just remember this five-gallon can, see, and the children around when I was filling it, but they'll come around, you know, and talk to you, never anything real personal about it.

ARENA: What do you remember about Mr. [William M.] Ryan, from the standpoint of doing business, his appearance, his personality?

PALMER: I believe he was a farmer, and very, very. . . . Well, he wasn't a man that you got acquainted with real easy. I don't remember in particular anything outstanding, other than he was just an ordinary farm person.

ARENA: Do you remember what was being grown on the farm?

PALMER: I think he raised potatoes. I'm just not quite sure, but I think he had a variety of vegetables for the family, see? This area at one time had flowing wells, see, and when we first went down there to Artesia these wells were flowing. It was quite an agricultural place but gradually was pumped out.

ARENA: From your own knowledge of land and real estate, would you say this was a valuable piece of property?

PALMER: No, not at that time. Well, we paid eighteen hundred dollars for a new five-room house on the corner there in Artesia. See, we lived there. I worked for Standard Oil Company. So I would guess that five acres was maybe worth two, three hundred dollars an acre, I think.

ARENA: Was that the basis of the economy in the community, the farming, maybe working with the oil company too, or what was the community's means of livelihood?

PALMER: Well, this was an agricultural, dairy country. There were many Portuguese there and the Dutch finally came in. Then to the south were the Belgian beet farmers and they farmed thousands of acres of the old Bixby Land Company. That

was one of the old California families. They rented this land out to the Belgians, and they'd farm hundreds of acres in the sugar beets. Then there was a factory in Los Alamitos [California] that turned out sugar.

ARENA: Right in this Artesia area.

PALMER: Yes, Los Alamitos. You know where Los Alamitos is.

ARENA: Yes.

PALMER: It was in that corner. An enormous big factory. But they would feed the beet pulp to the dairy cattle, and especially during the war it was a very thriving community.

ARENA: By the war, World War I?

PALMER: Yes. It would be World War I and right afterwards. There was a shortage of sugar. You remember, we were on rationing, see, so it was quite important. The tops were fed to the sheep. They'd turn the sheep in and let the sheep graze on the tops. They'd top the beets and leave the tops on the ground. Then after they had taken the sugar out of the sugar beets, why this was made up into pulp, which made very, very good dairy feed. They'd dry it and it was mixed in. It would give bulk to the cow's diet, see?

ARENA: Were the Portuguese mainly in the sheep grazing?

PALMER: No, they were in the dairy business. The Basque people--we had a lot of Basque people there--[Gracian] Arrambides and the Martinis. I know a lot of the Basque people and they are just wonderful people, everyone that I've ever known.

ARENA: If you don't mind my asking, how did these different groups get along? I'm thinking, the Ryans were Irish, then you had the Portuguese, you had Basques. As you know, today a word you hear about a lot is "racial conflict," and so forth. And then, of course, there were the original Mexican families. How did these different groups get along?

PALMER: They were all in separate groups, see. We had a Portuguese church right across from us.

ARENA: By Portuguese, would that be Catholic too, Roman Catholic?

PALMER: Yes. And then quite a few of the Belgians--of course, they were Catholics too--they had their own groups, and they just didn't pay any attention to one another. And

there weren't too many Irish. The Irish were in a minority. But the Holland Dutch, they were an outstanding group of people. Their dairies were clean, and they actually drove the Portuguese out of the country, because of their beautiful homes and the way they kept their dairies. You could hardly go to the back door of a Portuguese dairy, because they went to the back door and urinated, and when it got too dirty why they'd move, see? But the Dutch were clean, their homes were scrubbed. They didn't have money to buy carpet. They would scrub the floor. Everything about them was just neat; very admirable people.

ARENA: And there was a good number of ALL of these different groups here.

PALMER: Yes.

ARENA: And as far as you recall, the children didn't get into gang fights with the others or anything like that?

PALMER: No. They all went to school together and they played together, and there was actually. . . . No, no one ever thought of that. They were pretty much on the same social level, see.

ARENA: And how long did you stay there with the company, Mr. Palmer?

PALMER: Oh, I was between there and Whittier for nineteen years. I worked in different places from there. I drove to Long Beach [California] for a while and worked there in the Standard Oil Company, the Marine barge, and I drove to Whittier for a while. Then in '33 we moved here. This was during the depression, and my grandfather who was quite wealthy at one time lost most of his property.

ARENA: If it isn't too personal, how would he lose property in the depression?

PALMER: Excuse me?

ARENA: How would he lose property in the depression, if it isn't too personal?

PALMER: Well, for instance, he got twenty dollars a box for oranges in 1920. In 1930 the orange shippers would ship their oranges to market and get a bill for four or five hundred dollars to pay for processing and the purchase price wouldn't even pay for the processing, let alone the irrigation and the spraying and the taxes on top of that. And then if you can't pay your taxes, they'd borrow money thinking that next year would be all right, and

pretty soon everything was mortgaged up. So, when he died he didn't have a cent in the bank. William I. La Vancha and I were the only relatives. My father was indebted on his ranch. And Raymond was his brother, and he was a school teacher. He was a chemistry teacher in San Francisco at Mt. Tamalpais. It's an Indian name. He retired a few years ago. He was quite famous. They built a new building there and named it the Palmer Building, at this high school, see?

ARENA: The reason I was asking that, as you know, the Nixons had this grocery store, Mr. [Francis Anthony] Frank Nixon and the family, and they were right in the midst of this orange citrus area, and I was just wondering, from your own experience, while we're on that subject of the depression, did you see that affecting the whole community?

PALMER: Oh, definitely; they had an awful struggle during that. We traded with them from the time they moved there. They moved the old Friends church, which we went to church in when we first came to California, moved it over and made a store building out of it.

ARENA: Do you recall the building before they moved it?

PALMER: Oh, I went to Sunday school in the old church. We had a Sunday school class up in the belfry--we had a little room where the boys' class was, see, the Scott boys and the Baldwins, and a lot of the old families, Quakers: Kenworthys, Otises, Jacksons, Milhouses, Palmers, Careys, Nixons, Farquhars, Wares.

ARENA: That's the building that became part of the Nixon grocery store.

PALMER: Right. Yes.

ARENA: And you recalled it afterwards, seeing the little belfry area. Do you recall how they used that part of the belfry?

PALMER: I think they used it as an office later. Of course, I never did get up there. I think they took the bell off and enclosed it, because it was a little room, maybe ten by ten.

ARENA: It had a floor underneath it, in other words.

PALMER: Oh, yes, and then a ladder to go up to the bell, see. And, oh yes, I went to that church for several years, 1916-1920. My father was superintendent of the Sunday school. He played the organ and led the choir.

ARENA: And your father was . . .

PALMER: Ernest Orville. In fact, the church was his main interest. He really wasn't a farmer either.

ARENA: Would I be correct in assuming your father was a birthright Quaker also?

PALMER: Oh, I have the genealogy of the Palmers clear back to 1650. I have a copy of the deed that William Penn gave George Palmer for five thousand acres, and a copy of the deed that Charles II gave to William Penn, describing the boundaries of all the property of William Penn. Then this Palmer bought five thousand acres from Penn, and they could come over and pick out the hundred acres wherever they wanted. That's where all this thing began back in Pennsylvania, see? The Germans settled in one area, the Dutch was in another area, the Quakers in another, and pretty soon they were all intermarrying. So now you have the Nixons, who were English, and the Milhouses, who were Germans, no doubt or Swiss--Moritz Milhous sounds as though it might be Swiss. They settled here in Pennsylvania, and pretty soon they started intermarrying, see, and then they moved through Virginia and then into South Carolina and North Carolina, and after that the slave issue was the big thing, and Ohio, but all these families were moving together, and you find the Nixons in this history of Henry County here. I have a history of some of the Nixons, their moving to North Carolina, see?

ARENA: And from books on the President that I've read, although they mention some of the Nixons as being Quakers, there is no doubt that his father was a Methodist and he, himself, came from McArthur, Ohio, so I'm sure that was that part of the family.

PALMER: Well, here's what happened. Many of these Quakers were thrown out of the church. The church was very harsh on them and some churches were very radical. Now a lot of them like Burcham were German.

ARENA: A lot of your relatives?

PALMER: B U R C H A M, Charles Burcham, they were Germans, and they were in and out of the church so many times.

ARENA: Can I ask you this, to tie it in directly with the President's family, from your own firsthand contact with Mr. Frank Nixon, was there ever any problem in any way because of his former status as a Methodist? In other words, was he different, let me say, as a convinced Quaker? Of course, everyone is different, but I'm just wondering if there are any situations that came up because he was not a birthright Quaker and in a way was a

stranger, in that he came to Whittier from outside, married into a very solid Quaker family. What would you know about that subject?

PALMER: Here is the picture. They were Methodists. They'd get kicked out of the Quaker church, but they continued to move with the Quakers, see? They had relatives that were Quakers and they had friends who were Quakers.

ARENA: That means, possibly, and correct me if I'm wrong, that Frank Nixon, although he came in as a Methodist, would not be that far apart, and if he knew of it himself would have had some Quaker background among his relatives.

PALMER: Yes.

ARENA: Do you think from talking with him that he WAS aware of that? In other words, now you're really keyed up on this genealogy and you're aware of the Nixon-Milhous Quaker background. Do you think HE was?

PALMER: I would hate to record my knowledge of Frank Nixon. I doubt . . .

ARENA: . . . especially since you knew him firsthand, and if you don't record it, who will?

PALMER: Frank Nixon was a very abrupt man. He had an awful bad temper.

ARENA: Could you give examples of that?

PALMER: Well, for instance, we traded with him for a number of years, even after we were married we traded here, see? And he had a terrible dislike for Standard Oil Company, and I was the Standard Oil representative, see, delivering gasoline. So I felt that inasmuch as I was delivering gasoline and they had a gasoline pump that they delivered their groceries with, I should have some of the business. So I talked to Mrs. Hannah [Milhous] Nixon and she was very agreeable to it, and Don [Francis Donald Nixon] who was beginning to be a little older then. I was in Whittier at this time, see? So they said, "Yes, go ahead and fill our tank." So the next time I come around Frank was furious. He said, "That gas was no good. Our trucks wouldn't run on it. I don't like Standard Oil Company and anybody that works for 'em." And I said, "Well, Frank, I been tradin' with you all these years and that includes me." So that's when we quit trading with the Nixons, see? But she was one of the sweetest ladies and the boys were very nice too. EVERYBODY loved Mrs. Nixon. If it wasn't for her, the store wouldn't have been a success, but she was just a real sweet old Quaker lady.

ARENA: Did it ever come up as to why he had it in for the Standard Oil Company?

PALMER: During this time, you remember there was a wave of hate of Standard Oil. This lady, I forget her name, wrote a book on Standard Oil Company. I can't remember what it was, and at this time it was just beginning to take hold, and there were many places that I couldn't drive my truck in to deliver gasoline. They wouldn't even let me come in because of this tremendous hatred for Standard Oil.

ARENA: Those writers were called "muck-rakers" by Theodore Roosevelt, who were the [Ralph] Naders of their day, and that was one of the companies that they were writing about. And you think he had read that and others as well.

PALMER: Yes, and he was a railroad conductor at one time during the depression.

ARENA: Would it have been a local trolley motorman, the trolley car motorman for the Pacific Electric red car?

PALMER: Something like that, yes. And so when Richard was starting out as a congressman, they had a big rally at Pomona [California] I believe, so they dressed Frank all up in an engineer's outfit and put him in the engineer's seat.

ARENA: Did he seem to enjoy that?

PALMER: Oh, yes. He got a big kick out of it. He had the big striped hat on, you know, engineer's cap and jacket and overalls, you know. I was at that rally.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: I believe we were discussing your firsthand recollections of Mr. Frank Nixon, and we'll go back to him as well as the other members of the family. But just again, finishing this summary of your own background, you came back to Whittier, East Whittier in particular, and your church was the same as the President's, the East Whittier Friends Church, in 1933. And then did you remain in this area ever since, Mr. Palmer?

PALMER: I left that church and went to Whittier before I married.

ARENA: And by the way, that's the First Friends Church.

PALMER: I had a run-in with one of the ministers there. [Laughter] So I went to Whittier, and then when we were married in 1925, we both continued in Whittier.

ARENA: And that's the First Friends Church in Whittier on Bright [Avenue] and Philadelphia [Street].

PALMER: Yeah, that's right. So I had an opportunity of not only knowing all of the East Whittier Quakers but most of the Whittier Quakers, way back.

ARENA: As you know, the Milhouses--I'm thinking of the Marshburns, as well as the President's aunts such as Mrs. Martha Gibbons and, of course, Mrs. Rose Olive Marshburn--they tended to belong to that First Friends Church. Their father, I think, had been one of the early members too.

PALMER: Oh, they were way back in 1650. The Milhouses were in early Quaker history--Penns.

ARENA: No, I'm talking about the First Friends Church in Whittier.

PALMER: Oh.

ARENA: That's the one they belonged to whereas the Nixons were in the East Whittier Friends.

PALMER: Well, Milhouses were in the First Friends Church. I don't believe there were any Milhouses in the East Whittier church.

ARENA: How about Franklin [Milhous]? I'm thinking of the location there, what is now Painter [Avenue] and Whittier Boulevard. That's where the original Franklin Milhous ranch began, you know, where you have the Quad [Shopping Center].

PALMER: Yes.

ARENA: Now, did he attend the First Friends Church over the years, because he seemed to be closer, but not necessarily?

PALMER: I wouldn't know prior to 1916-17. Oh, I would say 1917.

ARENA: And, of course, you would not have known him too long anyway. He died around that time, 1917 or 1918.

PALMER: I know Charles [William] Milhous, the older Mr. Milhous.

ARENA: The older one who is now living in Laguna Hills [California] Leisure World.

PALMER: I knew him real well.

ARENA: His son operates the Sea Fare Inn.

PALMER: I knew his father. That was Charlie, Charles [Wright] Milhous, I believe. He lived on Russell Street, right back of the East Whittier Church at that time, see?

ARENA: Excuse me, I just want to be sure now. You were attending the other church, but you remained in Whittier for the rest of your life, or did you . . .

PALMER: We lived right here since 1933.

ARENA: I see. You lived here since 1933. Did you remain with that company, the Standard Oil Company?

PALMER: I worked for them for nineteen years, and I didn't feel that I was getting along as I should, so I quit and went in the pet business with my father, who had started a little pet store. It was a little affair and it looked promising. The Second World War was developing and there were no cans available, so he started having horse meat, and the business looked prosperous, so I went in with him and we had the Whittier Pet Store.

ARENA: Is there a Palmer Pet Store today?

PALMER: Yes, my brother and I split up. He took the uptown store and then I come out, my wife and I come out and built the one on Whittier Boulevard. My son-in-law and our daughter run that, see? She works for the Whittier City School District.

ARENA: Would you give your son-in-law's full name? I believe he's the gentleman who told me about you, as a matter of fact.

PALMER: Edwin G. Dean, Jr.

ARENA: Would you happen to know if he's a member of the East Whittier Kiwanis Club?

PALMER: Yes, he is.

ARENA: Because I believe that's where I met him. Now, have you retired from that business, then? Not from Standard Oil but from that business?

PALMER: Yes, I've retired. I believe I was in the pet business about twenty years. I retired when I was sixty-two. I have a lot of hobbies, and history has been one of mine, and travel, and we have all kinds of flowers growing. I'm interested in so many things, and the wife too. We're interested in nature of all kinds, birds and trees.

ARENA: Well, of course, it's your interest in history that is our great advantage now. May I ask you, Mr. Palmer, the very first time you can recall ever seeing President Nixon and the occasion?

PALMER: Oh, he was in and out of the church all the time, see?

ARENA: And you would have seen him as a fellow member of the East Whittier Friends Church?

PALMER: Oh, yes. It was just like, maybe, one of your neighbor's children. I picture him as kind of a mischievous, not a naughty child, but a rather mischievous and a happy sort of a child. And Frank could enjoy a good joke, and he had kind of a subtle humor, too, see, but he had that awful temper. But I worked at a little service station. Of course, he was in college part of the time, but he delivered groceries to us here.

ARENA: Do you recall what year, or where he was at the time he was delivering groceries? I'm wondering, would this have been the high school years?

PALMER: Well, I think it was in 1933--and later.

ARENA: He graduated in 1930 from high school, in 1934 from college, 1937 from law school, if that's of any help.

PALMER: Yeah, well, it was in about '33 or '34.

ARENA: In other words, when you moved into this area in '33, that's when he began delivering groceries, because you had been away--Artesia?

PALMER: No, no. My folks traded with him over at the East Whittier store. Then I got married and moved to Artesia. Of course, we didn't trade with them down there. So when we moved back here then we started trading with them and they would deliver our groceries to us. And he would deliver our groceries when he was in between semesters, I would imagine. And that was one of the big things when we were in Europe and they found out we were from California, the first thing they'd say would be, "Did you know Richard Nixon?"

ARENA: Is that a fact? In other words, you found that the man on the street, maybe, the hotel man and so forth, would associate Whittier with the President?

PALMER: Let me tell you a for instance. We were in London [England] for five nights and we were at the Waldorf Hotel. They had a pianist who played--you came in at

the sides, and the pianist sat down in kind of a little cocktail place there but the meals were served up a little higher. So he played different pieces and it was very, very nice. So I went down and sat down and listened to him right close to the piano. He took a break, and I told him that I enjoyed his music and wanted to sit and listen to him and he said, "That's very nice of you. Where are you from?" I said, "The United States, California." He said, "Oh then you know about Mr. Nixon?" I said, "Yes, he delivered groceries to us." And he just couldn't believe that, see? So every night the minute we'd step in the door he'd play, "San Francisco". And we went to Ireland and to Scotland, and then we came back and stayed there two more nights, and he still remembered us, see, connecting us with Nixon, and he wanted to know all about him. And I said, "Well, he's going to be our next President, I'm sure." So that fall he was elected President. And even in Nice, France, they knew that Nixon was from California and they were very eager to know about him. They seemed to have a real good impression from what they heard. They just couldn't believe, though, that he had come from a family, just come up by his bootstraps almost, see?

ARENA: Can I ask you to think back from the best of your memory as to just how he acted around this time? In other words, was he very businesslike, would he stop and chat, did he have a whole round of deliveries to make; did he seem to enjoy that?

PALMER: Oh, yes. As I remember him, he was in and around the service station. He and the kids were fighting together, you know, and laughing, of course. It was all in good fun, see. Harold [Samuel Nixon] had TB [tuberculosis] I believe, and that was quite a concern to them. He [Richard] wasn't too serious minded. I think he was a well-developed, balanced youth, a normal youth. There wasn't anything about him that particularly stood out.

ARENA: Did you ever see or hear him in connection, we'll say, with the church Sunday school group?

PALMER: Oh, he played the piano. It was a little country church actually. We'd have little parties. He wasn't in my group but in my sister's group, see. And, oh, they'd go out to people's houses and make taffy or popcorn or play games. They had a lot of parlor games, and he was just a normal boy. Nothing real outstanding about him other than he was quick-witted and he liked a good joke. He was just a jolly, all-around good chap. I just couldn't think of anything real particular outstanding other than he was a bright young chap that could have went one way or the other, but he went the right way, see?

ARENA: In his book Six Crises he mentions the idea that his mother would like to see him grow up and be a missionary in Central America. I wonder if you ever had any contact with Mrs. Hannah Nixon where she might have brought that up in any way with you, that she had such hopes?

PALMER: Well, that was quite a common thing for all mothers at that time, because they were Quakers. You have to understand Quaker doctrine. The Quakers believed that if you had anything to an excess you should help other people, so this was in the back of everybody's mind. Here we live in an affluent country. Here are these people, Indians in Mexico, that have nothing, see? The missionary work was very, very important to all mothers at that time. They wanted their sons and children to be ministers or missionaries, and that was just . . .

ARENA: Did that ever strike you, as you saw him, that he might be a missionary?

PALMER: No.

ARENA: Because I just happen to have attended the Annual Yearly Meeting of the Friends which, as you know, has just ended here, and during the final meeting I noticed that they introduced the young people who were going off to missionary activity and there was one young man from Yorba Linda, and I'm sure more than one from maybe Whittier. But I could just see that maybe that would have been the President.

PALMER: This revival is coming back, I think, more and more, but that is the basis of the Quaker religion. They didn't approve of jewelry. If you had enough money to buy jewelry, you had better give that to the poor people or to the missionaries, see? So that's basic, fundamental Quakerism, way back.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you this, if it isn't too personal. As you know, Whittier was founded by the Quakers in 1887, and there was an attempt to try to tie in the Quaker beliefs with the daily way of life. I'm thinking about the rules about no drinking and no gambling and no dancing. Did you ever see any of the young Quaker boys maybe dabbling with the devil a little bit, so to speak? Did you ever see the President smoking or ever see him in any . . .

PALMER: Oh, I don't believe he did.

ARENA: You never saw it personally yourself?

PALMER: No. I'm sure he didn't because he was a brilliant chap. He reasoned things out for himself and the Quaker background--here none of his family'd smoke.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, did Mr. Frank Nixon sell tobacco in the store at any time, do you recall?

PALMER: I doubt it. I don't know for sure, but I doubt it.

ARENA: As far as liquor, I'm sure that he did not.

PALMER: Oh, no, because the Quakers frowned on that, and he'd have been in big trouble if somebody had found him selling [liquor]. He did rent his service station out and I worked there during one winter when I went to college.

ARENA: You actually worked for Mr. Frank Nixon?

PALMER: I didn't work for Frank. He leased it out to a fellow and I worked for him, see? And I worked just off hours when I wasn't going to school; I got a chance to study a little bit. But the boys would come racing through and I would see them there, you know. They knew me and I knew them, a casual sort of thing. But I think of him just as a normal boy, you know. They might have sold tobacco out in [the service station]. Mr. Veech might but I doubt that. I don't think so. But the Mexicans come up and traded at this store and worked for Leffingwell Ranch. And most of them couldn't speak very good English. I remember one real amusing incident that might be interesting to you. One Mexican said to the other, "I no lika California, I rather go to Fresno." They would come in and sit on a bench there in the service station. They didn't have much idea of the value of money, so they'd go in and buy something and then come back out and eat that, and if they had any money left they'd go back and buy something else. They'd spend all evening there, see? The boys were mixing in with . . .

ARENA: According to your recollections, how did the Nixons get along with the Mexicans?

PALMER: They got along with them fine. At this time, they were a little bit better than the Indians. See, we had two groups. We had the Indians, or Mexicans, and then we had the Spanish people, and you didn't dare call a Spaniard a Mexican. The Sepulvedas--and I knew a lot of the Sepulvedas and the Ramirezes and the Camerillos--I knew a lot of them, went to school with them, see? But the others were Indians, practically, mixed Indians. And they would live in tents and things and moved around picking fruit. Well, some of them had houses. During the World War a lot of them were drafted into the Army, and they got American ways and American living, and when they came back they were an entirely different breed, see? They were Americanized then. There was no conflict of interest. We treated them with consideration.

ARENA: Do you recall yourself attending school--I'm thinking of East Whittier in particular--with the Mexican children?

PALMER: Oh, yes, a great many of them.

ARENA: How about any black children?

PALMER: No.

ARENA: I've seen a picture of Mr. Orville Espolt, whom I know you know is interested in history too, and he has two pictures showing a black driving a team of horses for Franklin Milhous. And he also has a picture showing Mrs. Hannah Nixon in elementary school with two black students, and I'm not sure if these were in Whittier or if these were back in Indiana. But I was just wondering . . .

PALMER: There again, that could be possible. What happened, a lot of these run-away slaves knew of the Quakers and they come to Indiana. Many of my people operated the underground railroad and they would hide them out, and once they were sure they were free, why then they would work for these different Quaker farmers, and they might have brought these with them. They weren't servants or slaves. They were free men and that happened. But it was isolated cases. I don't even know of a family in that early period that had any black servants.

ARENA: Before we leave this grocery store contact which you had with the President, is there anything else that you recall about his working in the grocery store and living there that I haven't raised in the way of a question yet myself?

PALMER: As I say, I knew them so intimately that it's just like your family trying to pick out some particular interest. I was working there with them and traded with them. He'd wait on us across the counter when he was there. Of course, he was in school a lot of times, see? But vacations he'd help out in the store.

ARENA: In other words, he knew you not as just a customer but also a fellow member of the church and a neighbor too.

PALMER: Oh, yes. All the Quakers were one big family, you know. We'd have church picnics, one thing and another.

ARENA: In view of the fact, of course, that he is now the President, and thinking back, was there any indication, did it ever cross your mind at all, that he would not just be another very successful Whittier man, but that he might someday go into politics and achieve the success he has?

PALMER: No, I don't believe so. We considered him just a normal boy. But he had that German tendency of being exact, no doubt, when he decided to do something, and that's quite common among the German people. I don't think he even had any idea himself, because he was associated with [Thomas William] Tom Bewley for many years, and Tom has been our attorney ever since we had any,

way back in the thirties. But I think he got into this law business, and he thought that was a pretty good business, and then Mr. Perry come along and said, "Well, we need somebody to run for Congress," as I remember it, and I don't think that up to that time he probably had any idea. And at the time he run for governor, he still didn't have an idea [Laughter] that he'd ever be President. I looked on him as a perfectly normal, healthy child. I feel that it was his Quaker background and his German background that gave him this determination that whatever he did that he was intense in doing it and he wanted to do it thoroughly and right, see?

ARENA: From your own experience, though, with the Quakers, was it unusual for a person brought up in a Quaker family, given the way Whittier was as you knew it and everything, was it unusual for him to go into politics?

PALMER: No, it wasn't. In Pennsylvania nearly all the big leaders were Quakers. In South Carolina the Quaker governors and things brought them out of many a depression. The Quakers had several things. See, William Penn set up his colony as a whole experiment in government, so they were very much interested in government.

ARENA: And as far as California, and as far as Whittier in particular, it didn't surprise you, but were there any others who had gone into politics and become congressmen or senators, from your own personal recollection, Quakers who campaigned as did the young Richard Nixon?

PALMER: In Whittier district?

ARENA: From this area, right.

PALMER: From this area?

ARENA: From your own personal recollection?

PALMER: No. They ran for school boards and things like that, but I don't remember.

ARENA: Mr. [Oscar O.] Marshburn would be an example of a person who was on the school board.

PALMER: Well, he didn't run for a political . . .

ARENA: No.

PALMER: He was interested in the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] and I believe that he was interested in things of government. I'll have to tell you an interesting history about Raymond Hunnicutt. The Hunnicutt family actually came from Scotland and Hunnicutt means beehive. And so Ezra Hinshaw, who

owns Hinshaw's Department Store--they were Quakers too at that time--so after World War I they joined the American Friends Service Committee and went over across the seas to Germany. They had black uniforms. So Raymond and Ezra were in London visiting, and no one could figure out the black uniforms. Officers would salute them and let them pass, you know, and they saw a big parade coming, or saw the people lined up along the streets. And people just made way for them and they walked right into the street. And so they started going up the street and met head-on with the Queen of England, see? [Laughter] So, here's Raymond and Ezra Hinshaw coming right to meet her and nobody stopping them. Ezra recently said, "That Raymond Hunnicutt could have got us put in jail real easy." But the Quakers were noncombatant, of course, and they joined this for the reconstruction of Germany, and they were very well accepted over there.

ARENA: Let me ask you this if it isn't too personal. Of course, the President WAS combatant. He joined the military forces in World War II. Was there any problem or any issue about that in your common church?

PALMER: Well, now, when you talk about Quakers there are many, many different kinds, and I'm sure we have a lot of Communists in our Friends church. But here's Richard and Robert M. Nixon. He was in the Civil War, and all through the Civil War there were thousands and thousands of Quakers who went to war. In fact, one of the Mendenhalls was called "The Fighting Quaker," and he was from this Redfield district in Ohio that I was telling you about, see? And it was also said that he could swear profusely on occasions. [Laughter] He also carried a jug of liquor. He was the road supervisor and during election time he always carried a jug of liquor in his pack. So when you talk about Quakers, there's so many branches, the far right and far left and middle of the road.

ARENA: And the President wouldn't have been the only one, not only, say, back in the Civil War, but even in World War II?

PALMER: Oh, no. Oh, no. A lot of my family felt real strong about the Civil War, see, and I lost a lot of my family in this war. But that is the thing of Quakers. You know, a lot of the Quakers don't believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. The Society is free, so my definition of a Quaker is "moderation in all things." That is the basis of the Quaker religion. Even our own people don't agree on doctrine. Anything you do to an excess is bad. Even extremes in religion are bad, see? So they are very tolerant. But now, when you got back in the 1600's, why that was entirely different then. You couldn't wear belt buckles, and the Coffins--you know the Coffin family--they were on one of these islands--Nantucket. I forget, just a minute, I have a sheet. I have over a hundred pages of Quaker history here, of notes, and

they couldn't wear buckles and they couldn't go to weddings and they couldn't have music, you know. And, of course, it all stemmed from the fact that when they couldn't have music in England, they were persecuted if they sang. That gave away their identity and that's how the silent worship started. They would be in groups, and then they found out what a refreshing thing it is just to get quiet and shut out the world and stop and think for a little bit.

ARENA: As you know, the particular Quaker church here in Whittier does have music and certainly is not 100 percent silent in its service. From your own experience, does that have any political remifications? I know you have these different theological differences, but do you think that makes any difference politically? For example, whether or not the Quakers in California are more of one political persuasion than another, BECAUSE of some of these religious differences. That might be too technical and maybe too complicated.

PALMER: No. I don't know hardly how to put this, but the Quakers as a whole are very tolerant, and as Nixon looks back over. . . . I think that his best attributes he got from the Quaker church. He picked out the things that the Quakers stood for. We call anything that you disagreed with someone "righteous indignation." Well, you don't get mad at anyone, but just righteous indignation, see? So, the Quaker background like this, they pick out the good things, see? And they see these things. Now the silent worship, that had a reason, see, because they didn't want to reveal their meeting, and the singing was the same thing. But for a while it became part of the established church to have this silent worship, and they found out it was such a good thing that they still continue it in our meeting. But as far as the music, that was absurd, see, because when you're happy you sing. In my time it was just beginning to come in. My dad in 1900 played the organ, and the violin was all right, but not the fiddle. You couldn't play the fiddle in the Friends church. But they had the black uniforms, which were supposed to be a moderation. If you had the money to buy a fancy dress, you had better give it to the missionary cause. All these things formed a background for a Quaker President. And he had been taught in Sunday school. He must know some of the historical facts back about the Quakers. You grow up in a community like that, you just naturally take on these things.

ARENA: Let me ask you your view, how would you summarize him as a Quaker, as one Quaker giving a view of another, which I realize is very personal, and I wouldn't ask it except that it's for the sake of history.

PALMER: Well, Nixon I would say, is a very intelligent man. I don't need to tell you that. And he took out of the Quaker doctrine what seemed to him to be good, see? And you find way back in George Fox's teaching, they were even thinking about equality for the women, 1600's see? The first schools, night schools, the Quakers started those. The first hospital for the insane was in Pennsylvania. And historians have just passed up the Quakers in Pennsylvania.