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Pauline B. Cook (November 15, 1972)

C. Richard Arena
Whittier College

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Oral History Interview

with

MRS. PAULINE B. COOK

November 15, 1972
Glendale, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mrs. Pauline B. Cook. (B, middle initial, stands for Bolt.) Mrs. Cook's full maiden name is Pauline Clarice Bolt. Mrs. Cook's husband's full name is Dr. Wells C. Cook. (C, middle initial, stands for Clifford.) May I ask in what area your husband is a doctor?

COOK: Urology.

ARENA: Urology, thank you. We are in the residence of Mrs. and Dr. Cook in Glendale, California. Today's date, November 15, 1972, Arena interviewing. As I was saying off the tape a moment ago, we do like to have some idea of the background of the person we're interviewing, so could I ask you when and where you were born, and give a brief resume of your educational background.

COOK: I was born in Quincy, Illinois, and we came out to California when I was about eight years old.

ARENA: Right to Whittier, by the way?

COOK: Right to Whittier, and I lived there up until I graduated from college in 1934.

ARENA: Do you remember the schools you attended including, of course, the college?

COOK: Oh, let me see. The elementary school was . . .

ARENA: Would it have been East Whittier, which is the one the President attended?

COOK: No.

ARENA: You would know that.

COOK: No.

ARENA: The ones they have there now are, there's John Muir Junior High . . .

COOK: John Muir Junior High [School] I attended.

ARENA: I don't think it exists any more. I might be wrong.

COOK: No, it doesn't, any more.

ARENA: And just out of curiosity, did you possibly have one of the President's uncles who was in music? His name was Griffith Milhous, who taught music there for a short time.

COOK: No.

ARENA: I recall that Ola Florence Welch did have him for some classes. I just wanted to be sure.

COOK: At John Muir?

ARENA: At John Muir Junior High. He did not teach very long.

COOK: I don't think so.

ARENA: Well, I just wanted to be sure. The other schools in the area that were elementary schools were Lincoln, which may or may not have existed then; and then, I don't know when the Bailey School ceased to exist.

COOK: Bailey I went to.

ARENA: You did attend Bailey. That's one of the old ones. I think it goes back to 1889.

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: Which is no longer there now. There is Lou Henry Hoover School which is recent, possibly in the thirties.

COOK: No.

ARENA: And then, of course, Whittier High School.

COOK: Whittier High School.

ARENA: Did you attend there for the full four years?

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: As you may or may not recall, the President attended only the last two years there.

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: And then, of course, Whittier College. And am I correct in that you belonged to the same graduating class as the President?

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: The spring of 1934. Could I ask you what you majored in in college?

COOK: In education and sociology.

ARENA: Did you go on and teach?

COOK: I taught. It was at the height of the depression; I believe it was, anyway. It was pretty hard to find a job, anyway. But then I taught school in Brawley, California.

ARENA: Where is that?

COOK: That's in the Imperial Valley. And the reason that you could go to Brawley and teach is that nobody else really wanted to teach there, so that the young teachers coming out could go down there and get a little experience, and then they could get jobs in an area, maybe, that they wanted to go to.

ARENA: Did you continue on in any graduate work?

COOK: Yes. I took quite a lot of it.

ARENA: Where would this be?

COOK: [University of California] At Berkeley.

ARENA: At Berkeley.

COOK: Yes. And I went into more of the sociology-psychology field in my graduate work.

ARENA: Did you have, speaking of psychology, a Professor J. Gustav--sometimes called Gussie or Gus--White at that time?

COOK: No.

ARENA: He did teach sociology, and I believe he had some experience in psychology, as well as sociology. Fine. By way of a general question about your overall contact with President Nixon: One, do you recall coming into direct contact with him in high school, either through classes or clubs or socially; not recalling all of the incidents, but do you recall that?

COOK: As I recall, it was mostly in connection with drama.

ARENA: Good. I'll go back to that. How about the college years? Did you come into direct contact with him there?

COOK: That is in drama in college.

ARENA: Also, I see. Then in post-college years; for example, he did go away to Duke [University] for three years.

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: Any chance meeting anytime between '34 and '37?

COOK: No.

ARENA: Fine. When he came back, were you still in the Whittier [California] area?

COOK: No.

ARENA: So there would have been no direct contact there.

COOK: No, not since 1934.

ARENA: I see. How about reunions, including during this period, maybe class reunions of the high school or the college, including the fact that he was a trustee and may have been on hand at some of your reunions, again, during that period?

COOK: I don't recall anything.

ARENA: Then it's a question of concentrating on the high school and college period. And just to be sure, how about direct contact with the store that was out in East Whittier? Did you have the occasion to go out to East Whittier for any reason?

COOK: No, and see, I didn't really know very much about his home life, and I doubt if he knew anything much about mine.

ARENA: Just to be sure, if this is not too personal, any contact through religious institutions, either belonging to the same church or through maybe some Christian Endeavor organization, meetings, and so forth?

COOK: No. The only thing I can ever think that I had belonged to or was active in was the drama part of the college. The classes were often held at night.

ARENA: The drama classes?

COOK: The drama classes, rehearsals. This is partly what Herschel Daugherty was active in, too, and that's why I thought he might be able to help you a lot.

ARENA: I do see his name from time to time, directing.

COOK: The Hitchcock series, too. I think they live right up here on the hill on Mulholland [Drive].

ARENA: Thank you. By way of recollecting names, I would like to put this on the record. I wrote these down off the tape. You did mention that his wife is a Petty. Is her first name Caroline?

COOK: No, her name is Pauline.

ARENA: And of course that would be Pauline Petty Daugherty. Her sister's name is Dorothy, who married William Soeberg.

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: And you also mentioned the name of Ward Glover, who was an Orthogonian, now retired, living in San Clemente [California].

COOK: And I thought he might. . . . He's kind of an uncomplicated person and might enjoy talking about any part of this.

ARENA: Do you recall what his vocation was? Was he in teaching?

COOK: He, I think, was Supervisor of Education in the city schools. I'm not sure, but it was something like this.

ARENA: Would you want to make--and take as much time as you like to answer this--any comments about the type of people you palled around with, given it was a small college at that time, I don't believe more than four hundred, or five hundred at the most, student body? How would you describe persons such as these and the student body in general, from the standpoint of their more or less economic position, their interests; from the standpoint of their reading habits, their attending plays, not only in Whittier proper, school plays, but did they, you, see plays in Los Angeles [California]? As much as comes to mind about the overall socio-economic, even political--from that point of view--thinking of your fellow-students, who were obviously the fellow-students of the President, as well.

COOK: Yes. Well, most of the kids in school at that point were limited financially, that's for sure, so that it was costly to go to plays. And although we got there once in a while, it would be sort of a special date to get there.

ARENA: And by there, Los Angeles, maybe?

COOK: In the city, yes.

ARENA: How about some unusual theatrical opportunities? I'm thinking of the Pasadena Playhouse.

COOK: Oh, yes. Now that was easier.

ARENA: Was that easy?

COOK: Yes, that was easier to get to.

ARENA: Did it have the reputation in your day that it has now? Correct me if I'm wrong, has it gone out of existence recently?

COOK: I think it has gone out of existence. It had an excellent reputation, the best.

ARENA: As a school, yes. That's what I know. And even in your day, the thirties.

COOK: Right. And these young men--I'm thinking of the men--had to make it. There was nobody. . . . Now kids can play around for a few years and not have any particular goal in mind. There's usually someone in the background that makes this possible. But these young boys had to work, and they had to make their grades. Some of them were there on football scholarships or other scholarships. And, although there was a lot of fun on campus, they were going through school and they knew what they were going to do when they were finished. And really, the girls, too. They knew that when they finished they were on their own and had to make their own living and that nobody was going to support them. And that isn't because they were poor, because I think they were just average, middle-class, some upper-middle. And it was a very unsophisticated campus, compared to other campuses, just in dating or anything that you

would find out about, like SC [University of Southern California], UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles], Stanford [University].

ARENA: The fact that, as you know--and this has been written up in so many books and articles--there was no smoking, drinking or gambling. From your contact with other students of other nearby colleges, maybe Occidental [Collegel], maybe Pomona [Collegel], and so forth, was that fairly normal in those days, between '30 and '34, or do you think that Whittier, even in those days, was considered unusual? Of course, smoking Well, I don't know about smoking, but drinking was illegal before '33, anyway.

COOK: They smoked on that campus, and the kids drank at Whittier.

ARENA: They did.

COOK: Yes, and they smoked. And I don't know about gambling; I don't think I knew anything about that. I know there was smoking and drinking, and I don't think it was to any excess.

ARENA: Would this take part in the games, say, someone up in the bleachers somewhere?

COOK: No, I don't think so. I don't know about anything in the bleachers. It was just kind of experimenting, to see what it was like to drink too much.

ARENA: How about your recollections of the faculty, from the standpoint of their teaching ability? Were they approachable?

COOK: Oh, I just thought they were terrific. I remember particularly, oh, Dr. [Albert] Upton, for example.

ARENA: This would be Dr. Albert Upton.

COOK: Albert Upton. He lives at Lake San Marcos [California] now.

ARENA: I've had the pleasure of interviewing him.

COOK: Have you? Well, he was just great. I think for me, Dr. Paul Smith wasn't approachable, but I thought he was a great teacher.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, both he and Dr. Upton gave a course together. Did you take that, by any chance?

COOK: No. I didn't take any more courses from Dr. Smith than were necessary. But I took everything I could get from Dr. Upton.

ARENA: From the standpoint of one other aspect of your college education days, how about town-and-gown relations? How was Whittier community, although you were a resident, and--correct me if I'm wrong--maybe the overwhelming majority were resident students; that is, residents of the town. How was life for a college student living in Whittier, especially one who was a native of the city?

COOK: Of course, I think it was. . . . It might depend on your relations with your family. I was just as much a part of the campus; I just felt that it was my home. I spent almost my entire time there. Is that what you mean?

ARENA: Yes. I'm wondering, for example, in football games, or homecoming events, do you recall that there was a great deal of get-togetherness, we'll say, between the town and the college?

COOK: I think the town accepted the college wholeheartedly, because I can remember after the football games, and all of the students would walk down into the town, and then they'd walk in and out through the theater, and all of this, and everybody, you know. . . . This might turn a lot of towns off. But I think they accepted the students very well. I don't know how it is today. I haven't heard Nancy say. The only thing that she's told us is that the police department just is horrified when these sixty kids get out on bicycles in their bicycling class, you know. But I imagine they still accept the students.

ARENA: For the record, let's have Nancy's full name, including her middle name, if she has one.

COOK: It's Nancy Ann Cook.

ARENA: From the standpoint of your own family relations with the college, if this isn't too personal, did you bring students home from time to time, even have some of the girls sleep over, and that sort of thing?

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: Do you think that was common with the other students, too? Did other friends, girl friends of yours do the same thing?

COOK: Yes, I think so.

ARENA: Especially where the other girls may have been from out of town, and did not go home on weekends or some of the holidays.

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: How would you describe your overall recollections of your experiences of your school days at Whittier College?

COOK: Well, I just think they were marvelous, actually, a wonderful time in my life.

ARENA: Was there any tension from the standpoint of the academic demands being too high, say, maybe in the very beginning when college was new to you? But do you recall anything like that, where you felt uncomfortable?

COOK: With grades?

ARENA: Well, with whatever might have caused the tension, hard teachers, or whatever may have caused any unhappiness, let me put it that way.

COOK: I can't remember much tension. I don't think at that age I was a very tense kind of a person, and I can't think of. . . . Of course, I had, you know, a struggle with some of the courses I took, but it didn't really worry me very much. It should have.

ARENA: If this isn't too personal, did you ever fear flunking out, so to speak? You might have been flunking a

course here and there, but was there any fear that this would be your last year at the college?

COOK: No, I didn't have any fear of that.

ARENA: Now I'd like to ask you about your recollections--and take as much time as you would like to answer these questions--of your firsthand contact with President Nixon. I might begin by asking you if you remember the very first time you did meet him, not only at the college, but maybe in high school.

COOK: No, I don't remember. All of these people I knew so well, and it doesn't seem that I ever didn't know them, all of these friends that I'm talking about. Because we went mostly through high school, and some of us clear through grammar school--Homer Rosenberger, for example. And there doesn't seem a time that you don't remember knowing them. With Richard Nixon, I can remember him mostly in college. I can't really remember him specifically. And maybe it's just because there's so much talk about Richard Nixon. He just fades away in high school. I don't actually think that . . .

ARENA: The fact that you may have had a different major and did not take, say, a lot of history courses, might have made a difference.

COOK: Or different friends, because I don't really remember him, but in college I remember him very well, and I thought he was just terrific, and you just knew that he was going to do something some day. After Wells and I were married, we were back in Washington, D.C., and we--let's see, how did we do it--I think we wired Richard Nixon; we were pretty young. What was he then? I guess he was the Vice President.

ARENA: Was this right after the war? In '52, for eight years he was Vice President, between '52 and '60. Before that he was a senator.

COOK: Yes, it was when he was Vice President. So we got a telephone call back at the hotel. This was about two days later, inviting us over to have lunch at the Senate house or something. Anyway, we were leaving and couldn't go, and I said to Wells, "I think some day he's really going to

be the President." and of course, we both thought he was great. We're both Republicans, although I like to think that I wouldn't vote for him if I didn't think he was great. Specifically, I can't think of any particular . . .

ARENA: . . . first time, as you say. You knew him along with others. You just grew up with him.

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: Just to be sure, did you ever meet any of his close cousins and relatives? I'm thinking of his brother, Donald [Francis Donald Nixon].

COOK: No.

ARENA: You said no. Then there were cousins on the Gibbons side, Mrs. Martha Gibbons, and I believe a daughter named Edith, well, she's now Mrs. Nunes, but Edith Gibbons. There was another lady, older cousin, Mrs. Jessamyn West McPherson. I don't know if you had any occasion to see her.

COOK: No, I didn't know any of those.

ARENA: Then there were the [Oscar] Marshburns, and there were some four children on that side. I don't know if you recall coming into contact with them.

COOK: No, I don't think so. The name Marshburn is familiar, but maybe it's because it's a Whittier name.

ARENA: It is, yes. I just wanted to clear that up. Then, how would you describe your contact with him in the area of dramatics? In other words, were there actual classes you took with him, as well as actual plays in which you appeared with him?

COOK: I imagine we were in classes. Dr. Upton had classes at that time, and another Dr., and I can't think of his name.

ARENA: Could that be a Dr. Charles Cooper?

COOK: Yes.

- ARENA: Who wrote the book on the history of Whittier College, by the way?
- COOK: Yes. No, I think that he. . . . I don't remember whether it was a class. I believe it was a class. Then I think that they helped on production, and we would go at night. Now, whether this class was at night, it just all runs in my mind. And I remember him . . .
- ARENA: But you definitely remember being there day and evening, or late afternoon.
- COOK: Yes, I remember this, and I can't. . . . I remember him more in that category, because I think it's the time when I got maybe to know him better.
- ARENA: Do you recall appearing in any particular plays with him?
- COOK: No, I don't.
- ARENA: But you think you did, but you don't recall the specific play.
- COOK: No, I don't think so.
- ARENA: Oh, you don't think you appeared in any.
- COOK: I don't think so.
- ARENA: Just to be sure, after he left college he continued this interest in dramatics, you may or may not know. He appeared with the Whittier Community Players, which is where he met, of course, the present Mrs. [Patricia Ryan] Nixon. But there was no occasion to meet him, also, during this period, that you remember. You did not see him in any of these plays.
- COOK: No.
- ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you: One, why did you enjoy the drama department and participating in these plays; and two, why do you think he did, or just say the average fellow? What did you get out of it and what do you think he may have gotten out of these experiences in the drama department and

volunteering to appear in plays? For example, was it the personality of Dr. Upton more than anything else? Or did you already have an interest in drama before you entered the college?

COOK: No. In fact, I wasn't on any of the acting end. I wasn't actually in the plays. It was working on the directing, or. . . . I don't mean that I would actually direct a play, except in conjunction with someone else; or the props or all of the things that go into producing a play.

ARENA: The behind-the-scenes part.

COOK: Yes, because I wasn't interested in the other. But I remember that I think that Richard Nixon was. I hate to make positive statements, but I'm . . .

ARENA: No, I think it's pretty definite. He appeared in plays. Oh, yes, there's no question. While we're on that point, and speaking of some of the famous graduates who were in that class and of course, drama is a very important part of their career now; I'm thinking of Mr. Herschel Daugherty.

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: Is there anything that comes to mind regarding his ability at that time?

COOK: Yes; oh, yes.

ARENA: You believe that at that time it was noteworthy.

COOK: Yes, I do. That's why I thought that he would know quite a bit about Richard Nixon, because he was very outstanding at that time, and another person who was very active was Wren Hutchinson.

ARENA: Would Wren be a nickname for . . .

COOK: No, that's her name, W R E N.

ARENA: Oh, it's a she.

COOK: Yes. W R E N. And her middle name was Rucker, and her married name was Hutchinson.

ARENA: I see. Any idea where she may be today?

COOK: Let me see. She's teaching school. She's principal of a school. And she was also back at Washington, D.C. I don't think I have her address.

ARENA: Certainly I could check into that through the alumni.

COOK: I'm sure you could find it through the alumni office. She was quite active on campus and knew an awful lot of people, and I would think that she might be very helpful about him. And also, she was in this same little group in the drama department. I think she'd be good to talk to.

ARENA: Just to be sure, were there any other occasions besides the drama in which you came into direct contact with the President?

COOK: No, I can't think of any. Just as you see people on campus and chat, and walk.

ARENA: Let me ask you, what do you recall about him from that standpoint? Looking back, what kind of an impression do you think that you had--I imagine it's very difficult to separate, but--of him at that time, when you were a student and he was a student? What personality traits . . .

COOK: Well, he had leadership qualities, of course. He was president of the student body, president of our class . . .

ARENA: Were you an officer, where you and he would be together?

COOK: No. Now Wren was, I think, this Wren Rucker that I'm telling you about. I think that he [Richard Nixon] had a marvelous ability to talk to students.

BEGIN SIDE II OF TAPE I

ARENA: I believe we were just discussing your recollections of him as a student leader.

COOK: Yes. We had student body meetings about every week, I think, on Fridays. We had chapel on Wednesdays, and on Fridays we had student body meetings. And his ability to talk and say what he wanted to, to get his point across, I really just think he's about the best . . .

ARENA: From the standpoint of his public speaking ability, thinking back to the period when you were a student, was he outstanding in that category, or were there other students you think equally well; or did you think he really did stand out as a public speaker?

COOK: I think he really stood out, and there were several who were very good, but I thought he was. . . . And his personality came across, too.

ARENA: Excuse me. On that point, public speaking, do you have any recollections of attending any of the debates in which he participated?

COOK: I can't remember. I'm sure I must have. I can't . . .

ARENA: Because some of them would have been on campus, as well as off, of course, as he traveled with the team.

COOK: Most everybody did everything on campus. I mean, if there was something going on. It was a small campus, and everybody got in on it.

ARENA: One building, practically, if I'm not mistaken.

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: Again, I don't want to have you forget what you were starting to say, and I want to say this before I forget it, and then we'll get back to you.

COOK: All right.

ARENA: But his musical interest and his piano-playing ability. But you were about to say something about his personality, I believe. I'm sorry I cut you off.

COOK: Yes. I don't remember. Oh, I think what I was trying to say is something that bothers me and I can't understand. And that is that in the papers they talk about his coldness and his aloofness, which wouldn't be anything like I would imagine him. Now, maybe he's had to build up this reserve and has changed, but he wouldn't have been like that in school. He was a serious student, and much more so, I think, than any of the other boys I knew.

ARENA: Would you happen to recall the fact that his brother died around that time? I think the year was 1933, and this was his oldest brother, Harold [Samuel Nixon]. Did you know that, by the way?

COOK: No.

ARENA: I was just wondering if you may have known that, and that may have accounted for some things.

COOK: You know, you don't really have to account for him, because he was just a great guy. He was just as nice --that's kind of an inadequate word, but I wouldn't think you would have to excuse anything about him. He was not terribly social, as far as parties and things that a lot of kids did.

ARENA: In the sense that he did not attend them, or in the sense that when he was there at an affair he was not social?

COOK: No, no. He was social, if you're thinking of it from that point of view. I think, possibly, he really didn't have time to enter into all the social life of the school. Not that he didn't go to parties. In thinking about him, I think of him in another way, actually.

ARENA: On that point, if you ever did attend any parties with him, do you recall that he did participate in the piano-playing?

COOK: No, I don't remember.

ARENA: Or hear through your friends that he played the piano at some of these affairs?

COOK: I can't remember.

ARENA: Can you think, by any chance--I don't want to belabor the point, but maybe this might spark your memory-- that his music teacher, and maybe she was yours, was Margaretha Lohmann?

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: Do you recall seeing him and her together, for any occasion?

COOK: No. What did you mean? Did he teach piano?

ARENA: No, that he was her pupil, that he did take lessons with her.

COOK: I see.

ARENA: I just thought there might have been an occasion where you were in the same room or in the same class.

COOK: I don't think so. It's hard to remember. That was a long time ago.

ARENA: It certainly is. You're doing amazingly well. How about the sports side of the President? Do you recall seeing him in that capacity in any way at all, sports?

COOK: Well, I remember sometimes we'd go out and watch practice, and . . .

ARENA: You do recall seeing him in practice. You do recall seeing him in uniform, let me say that.

COOK: Yes.

ARENA: What is your recollection now, seeing him in those days? What impression did you have of him?

COOK: Oh, I really don't know what to say.

ARENA: Let me say this--we might both know the answer ahead of time, but we have to put in on the record--did he stand out in sports as he did in speaking and in his winning school campaigns?

COOK: No, I don't remember thinking about him in sports, other than, you know, he's on the B team, or he isn't on any team. It's just that he wasn't a very great athlete, which didn't seem to bother anybody. Nobody would worry about that. I think he was an EXCELLENT scholar, and I'm sure he studied hard, and I think he worked hard. He had a LOT of friends. EVERYBODY liked him.

ARENA: You did mention attending chapel. Do you recall where he may have been the speaker or in charge of some of the programs? I understand that from time to time some of the leaders among the students did have some of the responsibility. I was just wondering if anything comes to mind there.

COOK: I'm sure that he did, but I can't remember. I remember him as being very outstanding, and particularly the last couple of years. He's a little dim in my mind the first two. Whether he just got increasingly to the forefront in school, or whether I became more aware of him, I don't know. But I think he was a very intriguing man, from a woman's point of view.

ARENA: While we're on that subject, although there are pictures of him in many books as he looked, what do you recall of him, from the standpoint of a physical picture of him, his build, his manner, and so forth?

COOK: He was a very nice-looking young man, and a very nice personality. He wasn't as casual as most of the boys I knew.

ARENA: Did it strike you odd in any way that he was an outstanding student, but he hung around, so to speak, with athletes, and the fraternity that he helped to organize, if I'm not mistaken, and may have been the very first president, was made up of athletes again? Did that at that time strike you in any way unusual?

COOK: No. It has since. I thought about it later, but I didn't think about it at the time.

ARENA: On the question of his being an outstanding student, do you recall that when you did talk with him, or saw others talking with him, that there was any gap from the standpoint of his being, to be blunt, an egghead, or his being aloof in that sense?

COOK: None whatsoever. No way.

ARENA: In communicating, no way at all.

COOK: No way at all. He was just like anybody else.

- ARENA: And finally, for the record, if this is not too personal, it is, in a way, going back to his social side, were you ever on any dates with him?
- COOK: No.
- ARENA: Was there such a thing as, again, anything in the way of a reputation, from talking, if you had any sorority sisters, again if this is not too personal, the type of reputation that he had with the dates that he did have?
- COOK: Well, the type of reputation as far as I knew was just I just don't know of anybody he ever dated. He was very friendly. I'm sure he took girls out.
- ARENA: You just don't have any specific recollection.
- COOK: No. And I don't think he was just the biggest dater in school. I don't really actually think he went out to that extent.
- ARENA: Are there any questions or any subjects that I have not brought up in this interview that you would like to bring up at this time, just to be sure we've covered it all?
- COOK: [Laughter] I think you've covered it very well.
- ARENA: I want to thank you for answering all of my questions so frankly and fully, and for allowing me the hospitality of your home.
- COOK: It's been very pleasant to have you.