



3-16-1973

## Evlyn Dorn (March 16, 1973, third interview)

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### Recommended Citation

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Third Oral History Interview

with

MRS. EVLYN DORN

March 16, 1973  
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #3 with Mrs. Evlyn Dorn, Whittier, California, on March 16, 1973, Arena interviewing.

Note: Interview #1 by this project with Mrs. Dorn had been May 4, 1972, and interview #2 had been May 8, 1972.

As you may recall, Evlyn, in our first two interviews we just touched on some of the main things, your recollection of the President coming into the law office where you were the legal secretary of the firm, and so forth. What I want to do is concentrate on that again in this interview, only expand the subject. However, while it is still fresh in both our minds, in view of the interview with Mrs. Julie Nixon Eisenhower, I wish you would go back over that incident where you and the President's mother visited the President's little girls who were in summer camp together, and whatever comes to mind about that incident, to make sure that we don't lose that episode.

DORN: Tricia [Nixon] and Julie [Nixon] were in Santa Barbara [California] at the Montecito Summer Camp for Girls.

Mrs. Hannah Nixon wanted to go up to visit the girls, so I drove her up there, and we spent the day. We drove in and Tricia. . . .

ARENA: Excuse me. Just to be sure, Evlyn, you drove from Whittier?

DORN: Yes, I drove the car from Whittier and took Mrs. Nixon to Santa Barbara. It's just a few miles south of Santa Barbara, at Montecito, and there is a very fine summer camp for girls there. When we arrived we talked with the lady in charge, and she called the girls. They were out on a trail

or something, for the morning. And I remember Tricia and Julie both running down to greet their grandmother. They had on these little white shirts and little blue shorts that all the girls were wearing. It was their uniform for the summer. They were delighted to see their grandmother, and of course, she was delighted to see them.

We arrived about 11 o'clock a.m. and we spent some time with the girls. And then we were told that Mrs. [Hannah] Nixon could take the girls out of the camp for lunch if she desired. We drove from the camp--which incidentally, is a beautiful old estate--to Santa Barbara and we went out on the end of the pier to a very nice restaurant called the Harbor House. It was a delightful time with the girls, and we were able to get a booth that was right in the window that overlooked the water, with a view of boats coming in. After that, we drove the girls back to the camp.

ARENA: Excuse me. If this isn't too personal, because I know you and the Nixons are personal friends, what was the girls' behavior like? Did they nag their grandmother?

DORN: Oh, no.

ARENA: Did they in any way not want to go back to camp? Let me be frank. Let me say: Were they, in any way, a problem for you from the standpoint of discipline or from the standpoint of handling them?

DORN: Oh, no, they were delightful. When we first got in there, there wasn't a table at the window and we got settled down at another table, and then the maitre d' came and said he did have a table at the window, and so we decided we'd move over. It was a lovely luncheon and everybody got along beautifully. There was just chitchat. I think the girls were both a little lonesome. They'd been at the camp some time, and they were very, very happy to see their grandmother. I'm not sure that this was the time, but there was something about it being close to Julie's birthday. And I do remember that as we drove home, Mrs. Hannah Nixon had me stop at a little shop where they sold bits of jewelry that were made out of shells. And I remember that Mrs. Nixon had me go in and she waited in the car, and I picked out a couple of little bracelets or necklaces, I don't remember which they were. But they were little inexpensive souvenir-type of things that she wanted to send back to the girls. Then we came on back to Whittier. I'm sure the trip did a lot of good for Mrs. Nixon, and the girls were delighted to see her. We were shown through this beautiful home that had been a residence on this estate.

ARENA: You did all that driving in one day, by the way, didn't you?

DORN: Yes.

ARENA: Is there anything else about that particular incident that comes to mind? Did they have movies in the camp? Did they have any of their other friends from the immediate area as children to play with, do you recall?

DORN: No, I really don't know anything about the other girls who were there. There were quite a few young girls there. I do remember either Tricia or Julie mentioning that Helene Drown had been up to see them a week or two before that. She is a very good friend of their mother. I don't remember anything particular about the youngsters. They were a fine-looking group of children, and all seemed to be having a good time. It was a beautiful sunny day. They were all enjoying themselves.

ARENA: Now Evlyn, before I ask you some questions about your association with the President and his law practice, did you have anything you want to be sure to include, yourself?

DORN: No. Why don't you just go ahead.

ARENA: Oh, good. Then let me begin by starting with the office itself. In other words, we did touch on the President's coming in and your recollections. What was the senior law partner like at that time--Mr. Wingert--and would you give his full name?

DORN: Mr. Jefferson G. Wingert was the senior member of the firm. He had had this firm with another partner by the name of Judge Madison Owen, who had passed away. (This was before my time with the firm.) Mr. Thomas W. Bewley was taken into the firm by Mr. Wingert, and it was at that time known as Wingert and Bewley.

ARENA: And of course, the time we're talking about when the President entered was 1937.

DORN: Yes, the firm was Wingert and Bewley at that time. Mr. Nixon came into the firm, not as a partner in the beginning. He came in on a salary, and then in a short time he was made a member of the firm. Then the name was changed to Wingert, Bewley and Nixon. Mr. Wingert was an elderly man, a very fine-looking man, and one of the finest people I have EVER met. He was very thoughtful of everybody.

Mr. Bewley was a very fine lawyer. He was a younger man, a hard worker and a very bright man. And then Mr. Nixon came into the firm. It was a small law firm in those days. They didn't do any criminal work. We did probate and general practice. We did a lot of corporate work. Mr. Bewley also was City Attorney, and he was very busy with city work as well as his general practice. And he appointed Mr. Nixon as Assistant City Attorney, which relieved him of some of the city work.

ARENA: Of course, that was not an elected position, so you can't say the President was in politics.

DORN: No.

ARENA: May I ask if you recall what the religious preference of Mr. Wingert was?

DORN: Mr. Wingert was an Episcopalian, he and Mrs. Wingert, Judd Wingert, and they had a daughter Judith [Wingert]. They were Episcopalians.

ARENA: Do you recall if there was any socializing between Mr. Wingert and Mr. Richard Nixon, and maybe with other members of the President's family? Did he get close to him outside of the office, to your knowledge?

DORN: I don't recall that there was anything in particular. I remember that Mr. and Mrs. Wingert attended a dinner party that was given by Mrs. Hannah Nixon later, for the President and Mrs. [Patricia Ryan] Pat Nixon. I was just a secretary in the office, and I don't know that there was any socializing that way. There was quite a difference in ages there.

ARENA: If this isn't considered confidential, what do you recall Mr. Wingert's views of this young lawyer, Richard Nixon, were, and vice versa; what do you recall Mr. Richard Nixon's views of Mr. Wingert were, at any time; in other words, not only at that time, but since he has passed away? Do you recall the President ever mentioning his own views of the character, the ability, anything at all about Mr. Wingert?

DORN: I think Mr. Wingert was very fond of Richard Nixon. I think he looked upon him almost as a son, and he was willing to help him on anything. Mr. Nixon did seek Mr. Wingert's advice on many things. Because Mr. Nixon was so thorough on research, I think that after he had done his own work he discussed it with Mr. Wingert more for Mr. Wingert's sake than for the fact that he needed that advice.

Richard Nixon was very thorough in everything that he did. He did a lot of research and he was an individualist, and very independent. By the time he got ready for a trial, he had all of the facts. When you prepare a brief, you interview your client first, and you put down things. Then, if possible, you interview the witness or witnesses, and he always had this really under control. He really did a lot of work. When he had something to do, he was very, very thorough with it.

I'm sure that Mr. Nixon respected Mr. Jeff Wingert. I don't know if I touched on that story about Mr. Wingert leaving Mr. Nixon the note when he went into the service.

ARENA: Not on the tape, as far as I recall.

DORN: All right. Richard Nixon was going to go into the service. And Mr. Wingert, I guess, didn't want to say good-bye to him. And one evening before he left the office, he had written a note, a short note apparently, to Richard Nixon and left it on his desk. And the next morning Mr. Nixon received the note. Then I heard later--I don't recall if I heard this from Richard Nixon himself--that he carried the note with him during his term of service. I don't know what the note contained, he didn't tell me; I don't think he told anyone, but he really treasured that bit of advice or wisdom, or whatever, from Mr. Wingert.

ARENA: While we're touching on your recollections of this early period, do you have any knowledge as to whether or not the President's father [Francis Anthony Nixon] made any sort of an appeal, any sort of a request to this firm to consider taking on their son, Richard Nixon?

DORN: No. I don't know of my own knowledge. I've heard different stories, but I really don't know of my own knowledge, anything about that.

ARENA: For those who are not lawyers, and those who have not had all your experience of law offices, Evelyn, to what extent could you explain how a case would come into a firm with, in this case, three lawyers, how would it be decided--again, if this is not confidential--as to who should take the case, and how much leeway could he have? In other words, was it expected that Mr. Richard Nixon should seek the advice of one of the other senior partners? Or, if a case came up, did he have the complete say, whether he wanted to get their advice or not?

DORN: With a new attorney coming into an office, of course he doesn't have a following in the very beginning, and very often Mr. Bewley would have a case, or Mr. Wingert would have a case, and perhaps they were very busy, or they wanted Richard Nixon to handle it. So it would be turned over to him to do. He would prepare all of the groundwork on that particular case. I don't think that Mr. Bewley or Mr. Wingert, either one, would ever really boss Mr. Nixon, saying, "I want you to do it this way, or "I want you to do it that way." It was given to him to do. And they knew that it would be done thoroughly and well.

ARENA: You know, nowadays, there is an expression quite commonly used, and in many different ways, generation gap. Evidently Richard Nixon was quite a bit younger than the other gentlemen there at the time. Were there any problems

because of the differences in ages, especially between Mr. Wingert, the elderly gentleman, and the young President Nixon?

DORN: No, I don't think so. I will have to say, in the years that I was in that firm, that I had never heard unkind words spoken between these three men, never. And I'll also have to say that I never saw anything dishonest done in that firm.

ARENA: This might be the right time to bring up the question, just to clear the air while we're on the subject, once and for all: I'm sure you've heard the expression "ambulance-chasing," which has all kinds of connotations, some good and some bad. A young lawyer or a law firm running after business, so to speak. Was there any of that in the make-up of any of these three gentlemen?

DORN: No, none. That was one of the things that was the policy of the office, no ambulance-chasing. That was one thing they were VERY particular about. This firm worked on an honest code of ethics. The integrity of the three men was really outstanding.

You asked me about Mr. Nixon and his share of the work. It wasn't very long before he, in his handling of things, had a very good clientele of his own.

ARENA: Does that mean that people would come in and ask for Mr. Richard Nixon?

DORN: Oh, yes. And most of the time when people came in to the firm, they knew who they wanted to handle their case. They would come in and ask for Mr. Wingert or Mr. Bewley. Mr. Bewley, I would say, at that time had the majority of the cases that were coming in. Mr. Nixon had not yet become well enough known. Mr. Wingert was not carrying as heavy a load as Mr. Bewley was.

Mr. Bewley was City Attorney, he was very active in the Friends church. And of course, that brought the firm some business. And he had attended Whittier College and he had business from there. When you live in a small town, you sort of seek out somebody in the professional world that you would like to have handle your affairs. You go to a certain doctor; you go to a certain lawyer, if you know them, or if you hear that they are the kind of person that you want to handle something.

We wrote a lot of wills, and when a person dies and his will has been written by a certain attorney, it usually comes back to that firm to be probated. You don't make your money by writing a will and getting fifty dollars or twenty-five dollars or two dollars and fifty cents for a will. It's when the will is probated that you really make the profit.

- ARENA: For the uninitiated, would you explain the idea of a probated will?
- DORN: When a person dies, the will has to go before the court for probate so that the property can be distributed.
- ARENA: Any particular court?
- DORN: It goes before the Superior Court of the county in which the property is located or the person was living. It used to take six months before the property, real or personal, could be distributed, unless it was something like an automobile that is standing idle and depreciating, or a business, then the court can be petitioned and asked that that be released immediately. But it takes this long because a notice to creditors has to be published in a local newspaper for so many days, so many times a week. This gives people a chance to protest, or sometimes it's hard to find legatees, who may be out of the country. I'm not sure if it still takes six months, but it used to.
- ARENA: A moment ago we were talking about the idea of ambulance-chasing, and to clear the air of the other aspect along those lines, was the President very ambitious socially in a very obvious way, to drum up business, we'll say? Was he that type of a person during this period?
- DORN: No, he was not. He was a very serious man who did his work carefully. He put in long hours. No, I would say he was not a social climber, at all. He and Mrs. Nixon had their little group that they used to pal around with. They'd have dinners in each other's homes and that sort of thing. Some of these were people who were teaching in the same high school with [Patricia Ryan] Pat Nixon. And they had a nice social life that way, but he was not a social climber.
- ARENA: And just to clear up the air once and for all, would you touch, from your own personal knowledge, on the subject of the President's ethics as a lawyer and as a person at this period in his life, as a young lawyer?
- DORN: I'm not sure I know what you mean.
- ARENA: For example, do you have any knowledge, or does anything come to your mind about his taking on a case for a client where the client was wrong, or notorious, or there was something below board, and that sort of thing?
- DORN: Not that I know of. I don't recall his ever handling a case that he didn't fully believe in. As I said before, he did his own work as far as preparing his cases. He was very scientific, and was not flamboyant in the courtroom. His work was carefully prepared.



ARENA: Do you know if ever there was any question about the professional association, where he came up from the standpoint of being examined or being criticized by his fellow lawyers in any way at all?

DORN: Do you mean the Bar Association? No. None at all. Mr. Nixon did his own independent thinking, but in the firm there was a teamwork sort of thing. He would prepare his brief and perhaps discuss it with one of the other men, but he did his own individual thinking, and did it well.

ARENA: Did he ever give you the impression of being nervous before, during or after a case, and to what extent? In other words, I'm sure that everyone is a little nervous getting before the public, but I was just wondering, was that a noticeable feature in any way of his personality?

DORN: No, it was not a noticeable feature. I would say that he was very serious before a trial, and he knew his case. And then after it was over, Mr. Bewley and Mr. Wingert and Mr. Nixon would discuss the points of the case, and relax, of course, more than in the beginning.

But I went to court with him once, to take notes, Mr. Bewley, Mr. Nixon, the defendant and I; and I was very impressed with Mr. Nixon. He handled the case well and knew exactly what he was doing. And I remember that we went in just in the nick of time. We didn't go in and sit in the courtroom for an hour. It seemed to me that Mr. Nixon almost knew the next thing that was going to come up. He was always ready with an answer, which proved that he had done his homework on it.

ARENA: To what extent during this time that he was in the law office did he discuss politics, with anyone?

DORN: I don't think I ever heard him discuss politics at all until he was asked to be a candidate for Congress. I don't recall any discussion of politics in the office before this.

I remember that when he'd come in in the morning sometimes he'd tell us little things, like all of us do, little jokes or little things that might happen at home, and I recall he was particularly interested in the health of his younger brother Edward [Calvert Nixon].

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: You were discussing your recollections of the President's attitude toward his family, and particularly toward Edward, his youngest brother.

DORN: Yes. Sometimes when he'd come in the morning he'd have little stories to tell. Eddie was the little brother, and he was interested in Eddie's well-being. One morning he said that Eddie had been sick and that he, himself, had sat up most of the night with Ed, and the night before Donald [Francis Donald Nixon] had done the same thing, and they were taking turns in making sure that Eddie had care if he needed it. Eddie was the little brother, and when Pat [Patricia Ryan Nixon] and the President were going together, they used to take Eddie with them places, and were very interested in him.

ARENA: What do you recall of little Edward yourself, when he came to the office, when the President brought him, or when you saw him, maybe, in the President's home?

DORN: Well, I don't remember that Eddie was brought into the office. But I remember Eddie when the family moved up on Worsham Drive [Whittier, California]. Mr. and Mrs. [Francis Anthony] Frank Nixon bought that lovely home on Worsham drive, and I was at that home a time or two and I remember seeing Ed Then. I may have seen him out at the store a few times, because I did go out there to buy meat from Donald.

ARENA: While we're on the subject of this particular brother, Evelyn, do you recall any of the family speaking about the deceased brothers of the President, Harold [Samuel Nixon], the oldest, and then the younger fellow, Arthur [Burdg Nixon]?

DORN: I didn't know them at all. I knew that there had been two brothers that had passed away, but I really do not recall how I learned it. I must have heard it from the Nixons, but I did know that that was a fact.

ARENA: Was there any other incident that you wanted to record at this time, before this session comes to a close?

DORN: Getting back to the law office, I remember when the President was Assistant City Attorney here. We had a case that was disturbing certain people in town, because Whittier was a pretty tight little town so far as drinking and that sort of thing went on. And very close to our office, about a half block away, was a little restaurant, it was knowledge around town that they were serving liquor there. And the city had to prove that it was too much of a nuisance. I think it was Mr. Nixon who contacted the police department, and they stationed a police officer close to the door, and as people came out of this restaurant that they found had had a little bit too much to drink, that person was questioned. It ended up that they got to be such a nuisance, the police department stopping the customers, that the place finally closed. And we took credit in the firm for having closed the only bar in town!

ARENA: I want to thank you very much, Evlyn, for again answering ALL of my questions so frankly and fully and competently, especially where these legal technicalities come in, which is most helpful. Thank you.

DORN: You're welcome.