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Jack A. Drown (August 17, 1972)

C. Richard Arena

Evlyn Dorn

Oral History Interview

with

MR. JACK A. DROWN

August 17, 1972
Rolling Hills, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena
Mrs. Evelyn Dorn

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mr. Jack A. Drown. Jack is not a nickname. The middle initial A stands for the name Ankrom, a family name. Mr. Drown is of Rolling Hills, California, and we are in Whittier, California, Arena and Dorn interviewing. Today's date, August 17, 1972.

Mr. Drown, or Jack--and please call me Dick--may I begin by asking you where and when you were born, and a summary of your educational experience and your career history to date--only a summary, you need not go into detail.

DROWN: I was born at Kansas City, Kansas, on May 20, 1914. My parents brought me to California when I was six months old. I attended public schools in Long Beach [California] through junior college, where I graduated in 1932, and then entered Stanford University and graduated there in 1934.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you your major?

DROWN: I think it was social science. And then I went to West Point for the purpose, I thought, of playing football. When that disappeared I came back and entered UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles], where I met my wife. From UCLA I entered USC [University of Southern California] Law School, graduated and passed the Bar in 1942. I've been engaged in the publisher's distributing business, which was a family business, ever since that time.

ARENA: Would you mind giving a summary, and then we can go into detail, of your firsthand, face-to-face contact

with President Nixon and his immediate family; in other words, his parents if you met them, his wife, his brothers and his immediate relatives? I'm thinking, for example, of such relatives with whom he had frequent contact during his lifetime as the Marshburns, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar [Marshburn], and maybe Mr. and Mrs. [Philip] Timberlake of Riverside [California], just to kind of place you in the overall setting of his life.

DROWN: My wife [Helene Drown] taught school in Whittier and began her teaching career in June of 1940. We moved to Whittier at that time. [Patricia Ryan] Pat Nixon and she taught school together. We commenced to see the Nixons in 1940 because of that, and double-dated (if you want to call it double-dating, married couples) on many occasions. My first impression of the now President, I suspect, was that he was a serious-minded but fun-loving person, and we had some great occasions together, social occasions. I met his brother, Don [Francis Donald Nixon] through him. He was unmarried at the time and seemed like a great big affable fellow, which I think he still is, lots of charm and lots of fun. At that time [Edward Calvert] Ed Nixon, Eddie as they called him, was rather small. How old is Eddie now?

DORN: Forty-two.

ARENA: He was born in 1930, so that would make him about that.

DROWN: That's right, so this made him about fourteen, fifteen years old at that time.

ARENA: He was very definitely the kid brother, in other words.

DROWN: Very much the kid brother, and we met his parents. I was always impressed with the simplicity of his mother [Hannah Milhous Nixon], and her warmth and humanness and her great ability to make a person whom she'd never met feel at home. His father [Francis Anthony Nixon] was an outspoken individual, I thought, who called a spade a spade, and believed in the idea that work was one of the great values and purposes of a man's being here, and who had worked hard all his life and was still working hard at the time I met him. As far as the other families you mentioned, I met them only at occasions when we might have been invited, but we certainly were not close friends of the Marshburns or the Timberlakes.

ARENA: Now, what has your firsthand contact been with the President and his family since that time? Are you in touch with him now? Have you been in touch with him over the years.

DROWN: Yes. Because of this association in Whittier, where we lived for better than a year, and the fact that we

kept in touch, particularly with Pat Nixon while she was in San Francisco [California] and the now President (we called him Dick then, obviously) was overseas, we maintained this friendship. When he came out of the service, we continued it. When he ran for Congress in 1946, I wouldn't say we were of any great help because we weren't particularly interested in politics. But after he went to Washington and broke the [Alger] Hiss case, I think I suddenly became greatly interested in politics. I recall writing him a letter in which I stated, in my rather blunt style, that while the rest of them have been sitting there doing very little, you've been accomplishing something.

When he came out to California to run for the Seante, my wife and I both became involved in his campaign. We'd never been involved in a campaign before, but in Long Beach, which was at that time the 18th Congressional District, we became his chairmen and enjoyed it thoroughly and worked hard as volunteers, which we wanted to do. And then after he was elected to the Senate, we saw them frequently, and we were at the convention with them in 1952. He saw to it that I was a delegate, apparently. At least, I'm sure that his hand must have been in it, the '52 convention. And Chicago [Illinois], even though I had declared for General [Dwight David] Eisenhower as one of the Eisenhower volunteers, I became a member of the [Earl] Warren delegation, but they knew it. So, at the convention we saw a great deal of them, because he was Senator Nixon then. And then I had the pleasure of being his train and plane manager in 1952 as we traveled about the country, mostly by train. It was probably because I knew very little about trains that I was appointed train manager! [Laughter] And my wife traveled with Mrs. [Patricia] Nixon a good deal on that trip.

In '54 I was an advance man and traveled around the country while he was campaigning for congressmen and Republican senators. In 1956 I was train and plane manager again. In 1958, at his behest, I became Southern California chairman for [William] Bill Knowland, who was running in a very difficult race, as we know. In 1960 it was my privilege to be again the trip manager, I guess, or I think we called it transportation manager when he ran for President. My wife joined us on some of those occasions.

This sounds like a political dialogue, but it does indicate that we were seeing a great deal of them. We did go on trips with them, one to Nassau [Bahama Islands], I think it was in '54, and other shorter trips on various occasions. We were in their home on Forest Lane and saw a good deal of them over the years. In '62 we were active in his gubernatorial campaign, and in '63 we went to Europe with them for a period of about eight weeks, which was a very exciting trip. And we saw them a great deal in California in the intervening time. We've seen them considerably since. And I think this is confidential, I hope, but the girls [Tricia Nixon Cox, Julie Nixon Eisenhower] and Mrs. Nixon have been guests at our home as recently as a month ago. That is never published, thank goodness, or they wouldn't be able to come. And we do see them at San Clemente [California], so that's the background, for what it's worth. You may have to delete some of that.

DORN: May I interrupt here? Jack, do you recall, was he a congressman or a senator when he and Pat took a trip on a ship--I guess he was a congressman--and they pulled him off the ship?

DROWN: On the Hiss case.

DORN: On the Hiss case; yes, it was. Were you with them on that trip?

DROWN: No.

DORN: Because they brought him back. They didn't bring Pat back, did they?

DROWN: No, they took him off the ship. That was in '48, I think. When did he break the Hiss case?

ARENA: He was a congressman the years between '47, when he was sworn in . . .

DROWN: 1947, I think, or '48.

DORN: Yes.

DROWN: Or maybe '49, but we weren't with them then.

DORN: I see.

ARENA: From the standpoint of the needs of the future researcher who is going to go into this and maybe look you up again, and even for the Richard Nixon Foundation, which as you know is trying to not only build the library but collect manuscripts, would you mind giving a summary of the correspondence or any papers or documents that you may have as to, more or less, the date, including this very early period when you met the President, coming up to the present time, and where these papers are? What I have in mind, as I say, is to help the future researcher.

DROWN: Well, Dick, I might put it this way: I write very few letters. Most of my own business is conducted on the telephone. Maybe it's an old habit, or something. I have some letters from him, mostly of a very personal nature. I think probably one of the most beautiful letters he ever wrote, or at least I've ever seen, was when my own father passed away.

ARENA: May I ask when that was?

DROWN: That was in 1961.

ARENA: And your father's full name?

DROWN: Earl Emery Drown, and when my mother passed away in '67, I believe it was . . .

ARENA: And her full name?

DROWN: Blanche Ankrom. That's where that came from. Both of these are handwritten letters. I still have them. I treasure them. They're beautiful letters. I've had, oh, occasional correspondence but very little, actually, because most of our rapport, I guess you'd call it, has been of an oral nature, by telephone or when I've seen him. Oh, I wrote a letter not long ago to one of the news magazines. It happened to be Newsweek. We're getting into the political area now, I guess, but the title on the cover was--this was about two years ago--"Nixon in Trouble." My feeling was that they hadn't even given him a chance. So I wrote to the president of the company, whom I know because we're in the distributing business, and it was a pretty severe blast. I wrote it, slept on it, slept on it again, and then I still sent it because I meant it, and sent a copy on to Rose Mary Woods, never expecting the President to see it, but he did, and he wrote back an absolutely beautiful letter. I know it came from him because I know his language pretty well.

And when our daughter was married in 1968, he wrote a handwritten letter to her, which she treasures. It was a beautiful letter, showing the warmth and the humanness of the man. You know, you can't publish those things, but they're gorgeous.

DORN: I know how you feel about your letters, because when Larry [Lawrence M. Dorn] passed away, it was November 23, 1970, he wrote a handwritten letter, and it touched me that he would sit down in his busy schedule and handwrite it, and I treasure it, too.

DROWN: He does it beautifully. But as far as any correspondence that's going to reveal changes in history, I can't think of anything I have; but then, who knows? [Laughter]

DORN: That's right. Jack, you know, he's always been this way about being warm, because my daughter Virginia [Dorn Buckman] has two children, ages fifteen and seventeen, and when both of those children were born the President wrote her a handwritten letter, congratulating her on the birth of her children; so he's this kind of a person.

DROWN: Well, he is. He is, as we know, a very private person. You know him probably as well as anyone, certainly. Wouldn't you say so, Evelyn?

DORN: Yes, I would.

DROWN: He's no back-slapper.

DORN: Oh, no.

DROWN: He doesn't enjoy running around and kissing babies. He's just what he is. I don't think you can project him as the great, warm--well, let me put it this way--the great, convivial, jocular person that some people wish he were during political years, you know. He isn't like that. He does his job.

ARENA: On that question, or on that subject, and without wanting to get into politics directly, you pose a very interesting question about the man's personality. And history, especially nowadays, is interested in the overall person, not just changes, but his personality. Are you saying, in effect, that he's not one person before the campaign and another person after the campaign, that his personality is pretty even, from your own firsthand observation?

DROWN: I think I could be challenged somewhat, probably, on that; because during an election, particularly when he's been out campaigning for other people--and he's done that to the point that I think is almost unbelievable in the past--he's gone into practically every district in the country, and I think he's tried to be outgoing almost to the point of being aggressive, in carrying the message. But as far as his own contact, I think he's attempted to point out the record as best he can. Sure, he's been accused of being a--what was the term they used to use--a hatchet man, and that kind of thing, when he was carrying the ball for the Eisenhower Administration. But I know he didn't like it; I can give you a chapter on that one. I think he didn't enjoy that role particularly, but he felt that the strategy was that he had to do it; someone had to do it, and he was very effective at it.

But I think, to get back to your question, I honestly believe that he has a temperament that he attempts to project at all times when he is making talks or speeches. And I would surmise that if the theory holds in this campaign that that will be the attempt, at least, that he will be the kind of campaigner--if you want to call him that--as he has been President. He's not going to go out and get into a brawl with George McGovern, for instance. Don't you think so, Evelyn?

DORN: Yes, I do.

DROWN: They'd love to have it.

DORN: Yes.

DROWN: But I don't think he'll do it.

ARENA: While we're still on that subject, bearing in mind your own observations, your own recollections of the President's parents, and as you touched on their personalities,

the mother being gentle, the father being outspoken, I'd like to ask you to comment on that. Thinking back, knowing the President's personality from firsthand observations as you have over the years, how do you see the parents as a source of the personality traits and character of President Nixon, bearing in mind your limited contact with them, but bearing in mind that you did have some contact with them over the years?

DROWN: Actually, we knew his mother better than we did his father because we saw more of her and, of course, she outlived the father. But I would say that he's a rare combination of both. I think there's a gentleness that his mother had, at least from my observations of his mother, a sweetness about him that doesn't always come out in his public efforts, but I think it's there. I've just cited a couple of instances and I can think of several others. But again, I'm not that much of an authority on his father, but when I did talk to him he was always sort of, well, let's say it the way it is, let's get it out there, let's tell them, and get in there and fight, Dick! So I think there is something of a combination, which I suspect is not too unusual. Don't you agree with that, Evlyn?

DORN: Yes, I do.

DROWN: Because you knew his parents much better than I did.

DORN: Yes, I did know them well. I think the President has said in one of his books that he got his temper from his father but his ability to control it from his mother. I think that was very well said.

DROWN: Well, I've never seen him lose his temper publicly but once, and frankly, I'm not too certain but what he did that deliberately, and that was there at the press conference there at the Beverly Hilton [Hotel] that morning. [Raymond] Ray Arbuthnot was a close personal friend of ours and a close personal friend of the President's, and of course, of Evlyn's. But it was a bitter, bitter thing to have been nominated for President and to have possibly even won the presidential election; because there are a lot of us who will probably always feel, even though the history books won't show it, that he really was elected, but that's past history. In other words, if there had been a different count in Illinois, possibly, and a couple of other states--you know what I'm talking about.

Anyway, then to come to California and run for governor, and it was humiliating, you might say. But these things happen. It happened to [Winston] Churchill and some of the others. But when we went up to his room that morning, Ray and I, to see him, he was not going to talk to the press that morning. And I didn't blame him a bit. But we prevailed upon him, in our rather peculiar way, that if he didn't come down and talk to them,

they would probably hound him from then on, because already a press conference had been announced. So, as we came down you could almost see the temperature starting to boil, and I think he was working himself up. But you know, I have a copy of that whole thing, as you probably have. It was one of the most beautiful elocutions on foreign policy that I've ever read. The press never bothered to print any of that. It was only the fact that, "You won't have Nixon to kick around any more," the one line that they picked out of it. But he was upset, and I think it was probably justified. That's the only time I've ever heard him do it publicly; privately, I've heard him say a few things. [Laughter]

DORN: I have, too.

DROWN: Well, I'm rambling here. You want to ask something else?

ARENA: Not at all. What you say is very pertinent, particularly to a historian. I'm glad you're putting it on the record. Going back to this period, pre-1945 now, I'll give you an idea of the direction I'm going so you can kind of anticipate the subject. I'd like to go into your recollections of him from the social side. As you say, you double-dated, and I'd like to get that side of him. Then, like yourself he's a lawyer, and I don't know how much contact you had with him in the professional, legal status. Of course, Mrs. Dorn had quite a bit. But again, maybe you've been with him at Bar Association meetings or things like that. But I'll ask you to go into the professional side. Then I'd like to ask you to go into his social side, not with you directly, but where you could be the silent observer, his social contact with others, including his family when you were with them, his treatment of his family as seen by an outsider. And beginning with that first general subject, how YOU recall the President in his social personality, his social actions, from experiences involving you directly. And take as many experiences as you want and as much time as you have.

DROWN: As much as I can remember. [Laughter] As I get older, I discover my memory plays tricks on me, I guess. At least I use that as an excuse. I think the first remembrance, I guess you would call it, that I have of any real social outing was when we went over to the Philharmonic [Auditorium] in Los Angeles [California] on a very rainy night to see "The Chocolate Soldier." This may have come out in something else; I don't know whether [Bela] Kornitzer used it or not. I know we talked about it one time when Kornitzer was writing a book. And the thing was that neither couple had a great deal of money. I was going to law school and he was practicing law, and the two girls were teaching, which was the real reason that we got together, because of their contact. My wife and Pat Nixon were teaching.

ARENA: For the record, what would be your wife's full name?

DROWN: Helene Colesie Drown. We have some real monikers, don't we? Anyway, we enjoyed the show even though the seats weren't very good. I think we were sitting behind a post, but the music was good. We'd been to dinner at a Spanish restaurant first, because in those days--and I guess he still does--he loved Spanish or Mexican food, and so did we; we liked it, too. And so the thing that's always stayed with me was that I knew, even though he was jovial at "The Chocolate Soldier" or the musical, that something seemed to be bothering him. But we had gone in their car and it was raining pitchforks. So I went with him to get the car while the girls waited in the driveway there, under the protection of the marquee. And when he was driving back he said, "You know, I just don't know why those people had to get that divorce." He said, "I did everything I could today to talk them out of it." But that had been troubling him. You must have seen lots of this sort of thing.

DORN: Yes, I did.

DROWN: But I thought well, isn't that interesting. Here he is a lawyer, and in my naive way I thought lawyers are paid to get divorces, aren't they? I was teasing a little when I said so. And he said, "No, I think it's the other way. We should do everything we can to keep people together." Well, that was one instance which I've always remembered. Then . . .

ARENA: Excuse me, but while we're on this point, something comes to mind, and I want to raise it before I forget it. Bearing in mind now that he has the number one executive position, not only in the country but in the world; from the standpoint of your social contact with him, especially around that time, was he a leader in the sense that he wouldn't let anyone else talk? Did he want to dominate the conversation? Permit me to be this blunt, as an objective historian.

DROWN: Oh, sure.

ARENA: How would you describe him in this type of a conversational situation?

DROWN: Oh, I think he liked to exchange. He certainly was a good listener. He was extremely interested in athletics and I guess he still is, and I had been fortunate enough to have played some football at Stanford with a team called the Vow Boys. I transferred in and I had known most of them; and apparently he had seen some of us play, because he seemed to know every football player in the United States and maybe Canada, I don't know, but he had apparently heard my name

because of a Rose Bowl situation which I guess he'd gone to, and so he liked to ask questions about that kind of thing, liked to talk about it. He seemed very interested in that kind of thing, plus the fact that there was interest in music, there was interest in the law. We didn't talk a great deal about the law because he was practicing and I was going to law school, and I think when we went out socially it was more fun to get into other areas of conversation. I can't recall any particular political discussion in those days. This was, as I say, in about 1940.

ARENA: How about his joke-telling during the social get-togethers?

DROWN: I'm not sure that I can recall any real. . . . Well, I know he didn't tell what you'd call off-color jokes, but he liked situation humor, I think, something funny that had happened, you know. He wasn't vicious in this type of humor, but I don't recall that he ever came out with, "Well, I heard a great one today," or something of that kind, at least not in that initial situation. Then we did have another outing, I remember. There was a chap with whom he had gone to law school. I think his name was [William R.] Bill Perdue. Does that name strike a chord?

DORN: Yes. Dr. Arena has interviewed him.

ARENA: Yes.

DROWN: Anyway, I haven't seen him since. He came out here so we all went over to Earl Carroll's. We had saved our money and went over there. We had a big evening. I think we had the blue plate special, or something, at Earl Carroll's. But I can recall that the girls were all very pretty, and we were young enough (maybe we're still young enough --I shouldn't say that), but anyway, we were young enough to appreciate this beauty. And one of the acts in the show--I can remember this vividly--they would lie down and put their legs up, one leg, I mean, and then they'd call some of us out of the audience and we had these hoops and we'd throw them to see if we could . . . The one who could put the most hoops on the legs won the champagne. And Perdue, I think, won the champagne. It was either Perdue or the now President. I think I came in third. I was too interested in watching the legs. [Laughter] But it was fun, you know. I mean it must have been, or I wouldn't have remembered it.

DORN: Earl Carroll's at that time had a little dance floor, I recall, that was elevated just a little bit. In that interview with Harold Smith he recalled the time that Dick and Pat were with us and another couple and the Harold Smiths were down from Seattle [Washington]. This was just

shortly after the President and Pat were married, and we all went to Earl Carroll's. And I remember that Mr. Smith was just smitten with Pat Nixon and he would take her up on this little dance floor and dance. That was quite a place to go.

DROWN: Well, let me say this. This is supposed to be about the President, but the first time I saw Pat Nixon I thought she was probably the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. I mean that, and I told Helene. And she said, "Well, if she weren't my friend, I'd slit your throat," I think was the expression she used, but she's still beautiful, an absolutely beautiful woman.

DORN: She is.

DROWN: But she was so gracious--still is--sweet, lovely, kind. And yet at the same time she has a mind of her own, as we all know, and you don't push that Irish gal around very far. When she makes up her mind, that's it, and that's great.

ARENA: Were there any social affairs at home, either yours or the President's, during this period?

DROWN: Well, you see, we both lived in apartments at that time. They lived in an apartment. Do you remember, Evlyn, the address? I can't.

DORN: Well, when they were first married they lived out in La Habra [California] over a garage. I have been out there.

DROWN: Helene would remember, but I don't.

DORN: Then they lived on Beverly Boulevard in what they called a bungalow court.

DROWN: We were up there a couple of times, I remember that, but really not for parties.

DORN: They were small houses.

DROWN: They were small. We lived in a little apartment, I think it was on either Greenleaf [Avenue] or Bright [Avenue], and gee, you got three couples in there you practically had to move out. And then we moved into one on Greenleaf the next year and that was even smaller.

DORN: Yes, there weren't very many nice apartments in Whittier in those days.

DROWN: Well, we couldn't afford it, and I don't think they could either. You didn't go out and rent the most

expensive apartment. But we didn't have too many of those. I think we did have one or two dinners, potluck suppers at our house, and I think one or two up there. To be very honest, I can't remember too much about it. Let me put it this way: I'm amazed that I can remember as much of it as I can, because . . .

ARENA: With Evlyn and me after you . . .

DROWN: No, here's the thing. I've tried to look at it like this, over the years: I had NO idea that he was going to be President when I met him. I'm not one of those who say, "Yes, when I met him I knew he would be." Sure, he was impressive. I thought he was very intelligent and a lot of fun, and he had the ability to express himself, but I had NO idea, so therefore what we did wasn't indelibly etched on my memory like now, possibly, if I talk to him, I can almost remember it like that, because I guess we're all human. If you're talking to the President of the United States, you'll probably remember what he says, or pretty well remember, except that you're now supposed to forget it. [Laughter] Do you follow what I'm saying? I don't have that kind of a memory that I can say, "Yes, I remember exactly what we did, because I knew he was going to be President, therefore I wrote it all down."

ARENA: Frankly, I'm grateful you're remembering as much as you are.

DROWN: Does that make any sense to you?

ARENA: Oh, yes. Before we leave this social situation, are there any other experiences such as the two you've already recounted, the one at Earl Carroll's and the one attending the operetta; any others that come to mind?

DROWN: Well, now, this gets beyond the '45 era, but--I'll boil this down--we went with them to the Coconut Grove the night after the Dewey-Truman fiasco, and Hildegard was singing there at the Grove, and so of course, we'd had a good deal of champagne before we went. I don't think I'm a heavy drinker; in fact, I would not classify myself as anything but a social drinker, but I had had enough that night so that I was feeling no pain, which was in '48. So I walked up to Hildegard, after the head waiter had tried to restrain me, and I said, "We have a great statesman in the audience tonight, Congressman Richard Nixon." She looked at me, and apparently she had heard of him because of the Hiss case, so to make a long story short, they had a great blast of trumpets and she came out and said, "We have a great statesman in the audience, Congressman Richard Nixon. I'd like to have him come up!" So he responded, you know. Of course, all the people were laughing because he was a Republican, but I'll never forget, he said, "You're all having so much fun, I almost wish I were a Democrat!" That

brought the house down. But he said, "I'll tell you this, my lovely wife, Pat"--and he had brought her up with him--"was a Democrat when I married her." And he went on from there. Well, you've heard him use that line, Evlyn, that Pat Nixon was a Democrat. So I remember that vividly. We had a great evening. That was in '48, because that stood out as a significant thing. But we saw them, I know, over at the house they had over here.

DORN: It was on Walnut Street.

DROWN: It was a little house they lived in over there, I can't remember the address.

DORN: Yes, it was on Walnut, I think; a little, tiny place.

DROWN: We'd go over there occasionally and see them, and then we'd take off from there and go some place. We'd have dinner at the Green Arbor--was that the name of it?

DORN: Yes, it was. It's no longer there, but I'd forgotten about the Green Arbor, down on Painter Avenue.
[Laughter]

DROWN: Helene could remember these things better by far. You really ought to talk to her.

ARENA: We'd like to, very much.

DORN: We hope to, yes.

DROWN: She has a memory like that for certain things.

DORN: Jack, did you and Helene ever go ice skating with them down to Artesia [California] when that new rink opened down there? Because we used to go down on Thursday nights, and Pat was an excellent skater. That was the first time I'd ever seen her, and I, like you, thought she was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. She really was gorgeous. And Dick was not a skater. Pat had skated in New York, I guess, and coming from Northern Canada, I was a skater, and so she and I would skate around together, and Dick was pulling himself around the edge on the banister, and we'd just laugh at him and go on our merry way. [Laughter] But he didn't give up; he kept on.

DROWN: Well, I was in the same boat for another reason. I couldn't skate. I know we had talked about it, but I had--not to bore you with it--jammed up my knee at West Point trying to play football back there, which is the reason I resigned and came home. That was the end of my football career. So of course that ended my ice skating. I had enjoyed it up to that time, but every time I tried it my knee

would jump out and I'd go off in a different direction. But we did enjoy bowling together. Even in those days he enjoyed bowling.

ARENA: Did he make out better in bowling than in ice skating?

DROWN: I've never seen him ice skate, but apparently he must have, but he was pretty good at it. And then--well, this gets into another era, too, this gets into '50-- I remember this, because during the break in the senatorial campaign we went down to the La Grilla Gun Club (just over the border in Baja, California) and then came up to Rancho Santa Fe, and while we were there we went out on the golf course, and he said that he'd never been on a golf course before. And I said, "Well, I've been four times, so I'll teach you how to play golf." It was a case of the blind leading the blind. I was, and probably still am, one of the world's worst golfers, but we sure had a lot of fun, that little respite between the primary and the general senatorial campaign. But again, that's getting into '50. But I was trying to think of some other things that we did in that period between '40 and '45.

ARENA: Did you possibly go out to that so-called gambling ship off of Long Beach?

DROWN: Not together, I don't think. Of course he was gone, you know. He entered the service in '42. And then we saw Pat on occasion, because she was with the OPA [Office of Price Administration] in San Francisco. She went up there and worked for a while.

DORN: Yes, she did work. I don't believe it was the OPA, but I've forgotten what it was.

DROWN: Something of the kind, and we saw her several times. We flew up. Well, in those days, flying to San Francisco was a major project, but we went up there and we had some great times together, just the three of us, my wife and Pat and I. Let's see, there was a short period there, actually from '40 to '42, then he came back from service.

ARENA: We're very grateful that you're remembering what you are. From the standpoint of his legal education and career, and seeing it from your vantage point, as Evelyn and I mentioned, we have interviewed together his fellow classmates. What do you recall of the reputation of Duke [Law School], which he had attended, because we have asked the students themselves what they thought of their education? But I'm just wondering, from someone out on the West Coast, what did you think of the law school training that he was subjected to, and were you aware of any of the professors that he had who now--

I'm sure you are aware--for example, David Cavers and Lon Fuller are at Harvard [Law School]. I'm just wondering, at the time did Duke have a reputation out on the West Coast?

DROWN: I can't answer that, really. I certainly knew of the school in a favorable light, but being sort of a provincial westerner, I just thought well, I'd like to go to law school out here. Of course, USC was the natural school for most of us who lived in the area, and I don't know of any of my classmates who had thought of going to Duke, which would not relegate Duke to any unfavorable position at all. But I can't really answer that. All I know is that it was considered a good law school. He got a fellowship, didn't he?

DORN: Yes, he did.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: Just to touch again on the legal career and legal experience of the President, from your vantage point, how would you assess him, bearing in mind you were not with him--or maybe you were? Let me just ask you, did you ever see him, so to speak, in action in any of the courts?

DROWN: Never did.

ARENA: Would you want to make any comment concerning him, his legal mind, concerning him from the standpoint of his legal know-how, and if there is such a thing, his legal personality?

DROWN: I wouldn't be able to shed any really very cogent light on his actual trying of cases and that kind of thing, but in conversations I was ALWAYS impressed by the ability he had to get right to the heart of an issue. In other words, he could sift out all the flack, or whatever you want to call it, and even in a conversation if you were discussing something, he could come right to the point without any difficulty at all. These were the things that I noticed about him when I watched him make two or three talks. In fact, I came over one time with Helene when she was teaching at Whittier High School and heard him speak to the student body.

ARENA: Do you recall what the occasion was, a graduation or a club?

DROWN: I don't know what it was. It was an assembly of some kind.

ARENA: This was certainly before 1945.

DROWN: Oh, yes. It was while he was practicing law in Whittier.

DORN: He had a reputation at that time as a speaker, because I remember that he would be called upon by many organizations, including schools, the Catholic school, to make a speech.

DROWN: Right. And he had a great deal of humor, I thought. I could not honestly tell you what the topic was, but I was impressed by the general overall humor and the ability to--I guess the term now is to relate to the student body. And the students seemed to respond; they loved what he said, and yet he was able to make his points and at the same time bring in some humor. Now unfortunately, I cannot tell you what the topic was. I can't remember that, but I had an overall impression that here's a man who can really speak.

DORN: What impressed me about those speeches was that, about 12:30 he'd say, "Oh, gee, I've got to speak at Whittier High School at 1:00 o'clock. Let's see, now, what am I going to speak about?" And then he'd make a couple of notes and away he'd go.

ARENA: On that same subject, as an extemporaneous speaker, and as a speaker speaking from a prepared text, would you want to make any observations from your firsthand knowledge of seeing him in both situations, if you have seen him deliver a prepared speech? And I don't know if this would be in the category of a prepared speech, but on the stage, did you ever attend any plays in which he acted?

DROWN: Never saw one.

ARENA: Which is rather interesting, because he met his wife through the Whittier Community Players.

DROWN: That's what I understand. That was before we knew them, however.

ARENA: But you don't recall seeing him in any plays. I was just wondering, he did appear, and maybe your wife saw them appear in some plays with the Whittier Community Players.

DROWN: You would have to ask her that, Dick. I'm not sure whether she ever did or not; I never did. But to get into prepared talks and extemporaneous talks, I'd have to bring it further forward into the years of his campaigning, and as Evelyn probably knows better than anybody, when he got up to speak during the time he was running for Vice President, he was always well-prepared then, because he had outlined it on those yellow pads; remember, Evelyn?

DORN: Yes.

DROWN: I have some of those someplace. I guess I'll save those for a while. But even on the Fund Speech, he outlined that whole thing. I was looking at some of those notes the other night, and he knew EXACTLY what he was going to say. He had not only written the notes out in long-hand and studied them, but he had probably even gone through them as a preliminary rehearsal of what he was going to say, but when he got up to say it, it sounded as if it were extemporaneous. He does so much better when he delivers them that way. But now that he's President, I know there are periods when he has to read a prepared text, although I marvel constantly at his ability to handle press conferences.

DORN: Oh, yes.

DROWN: I don't know how he does it. Well, he does it because he's a very intelligent man, but also because he's had so much experience; don't you think so? And he's able to handle these things, but he PREPARES for these things, too. And he can anticipate questions, because they're certainly not prepared questions. They're not, as some of the uncharitable people have indicated, questions that somebody feeds to him.

DORN: No.

DROWN: They're not that kind. I have a replica, I guess you would call it, a photostat of an article that he wrote for National Library Week when he was Vice President, and the gist of it is, "Be lucky, but be prepared," and if you're prepared, your luck will probably break properly. It's beautifully written. You probably have it in your archives. If you don't, I'll send you a copy.

ARENA: I would appreciate it.

DROWN: Because to me it epitomized the way he's conducted so much of his political life. You know, you've heard the old saying that when he was in law school it wasn't that he was so brilliant but because, as Bill Perdue said, "Nixon had a hard butt, and he sat there and he studied."

DORN: Yes, and he had a self-demand.

DROWN: And he did, right. And he didn't say this in the article because it was written for National Library Week, but he was prepared, and he still is, and I think this is why he has accomplished so much, don't you, among other things?

DORN: Yes, I do. I can remember him making a statement one time in the law office where he said, "Never make a statement that you can't back up."

DROWN: That's right. Well, this was why he--again I'm getting into the political area, too; not really, but this was why I thought that his approach to the Hiss case was so effective, and also in the Newbold Morris case, where, if [Joseph R.] McCarthy, the late senator from Wisconsin, had taken some of the now President's advice, perhaps the country would have been better off, because, let's face it, I know that Dick (as we called him then) counseled McCarthy constantly, but he couldn't slow him down, because the whole approach was different, wasn't it? I mean, here was a case of a man, Joe McCarthy, who at the beginning had a whole lot of charisma--if you want to use such a word--and he also had a lot of facts, but he shot from the hip. The President doesn't do that, and this is why I think he's so effective; he's prepared. How'd I get into this area? [Laughter]

DORN: Jack, I want to ask you a question. When you meet him now--when you're just together, of course, I know it's Jack and Dick--but if you would be at a state dinner or at The White House, and you meet him, how do you greet him?

DROWN: Mr. President . . .

DORN: Mr. President, yes.

DROWN: . . . as I should do. [Laughter]

DORN: You do that?

DROWN: When I meet him at functions.

DORN: I mean if there's somebody around. [Laughter]

DROWN: Oh, yes.

DORN: Yes, yes. I know, because Roberta [Dorn], my younger daughter, you know, is with the Justice Department in Washington, and of course she's known him since she's been a toddler, but she called me the night from the Waldorf-Astoria and she was just, oh, so thrilled. It was 1 o'clock in the morning here, I think. No, I guess it was 11 o'clock. It was 1 or 2 o'clock back there. And she said, "Mother, I have just been up to the (whatever floor it was) and I have just met the President of the United States." Up to that point it was Dick.

DROWN: Sure.

DORN: She was just thrilled. And then she attended something at The White House.

DROWN: What do YOU call him?

DORN: Well, I haven't come face to face with him yet. I would call him Mr. President, of course. In this letter that he has written to me, he writes, "Dear Evlyn" and signs it "Dick."

DROWN: Sure.

DORN: So it's a little hard.

DROWN: It's the same thing.

DORN: Yes, but of course I would call him Mr. President." Well, I shouldn't say I haven't come face to face, because I was at that . . .

DROWN: Sure you were; you saw him.

DORN: Yes, but I didn't have . . .

DROWN: Oh, to me, I think there's something about the office that demands that kind of respect.

DORN: Oh, yes; I do, too.

DROWN: Privately, sure, if you're sitting around, maybe down at San Clemente, or something; but even then, and naturally. . . . You know, there've been some cartoons. I think you saw the one where Pat came into his office--did you see that one?--she looked at him and said, "You're still Dick; I will NOT call you Mr. President," or words to that effect. [Laughter] With her, naturally, it's Pat and Dick.

DORN: Sure.

DROWN: And with the children, it's Daddy. I think even [Charles G.] Bebe Rebozo and Bob [H. R. Haldeman]. . . . We've been in groups where they've been, and I suppose Bebe's one of his closest, if not his CLOSEST friend . . .

DORN: Yes.

DROWN: . . . because they see each other a great deal, but it's Mr. President, as least when we're around.

DORN: Did Mr. Rebozo know him before his political career?

DROWN: I think they met in 1950.

DORN: I see. Because I remember being at a cocktail party down there in Miami [Florida] and Mr. Rebozo was there, and I asked him at that time where he got the name Bebe,

and he said he was the last of a long line of children. He said his name was Charles.

DROWN: He's a great guy.

DORN: Yes.

DROWN: He really is. But that's just an aside, so anyway, well, let's see, you asked a question and I wandered away from it.

ARENA: No, you didn't, and the more wandering, the better. Before we do leave the area of the legal side of the President, is there anything I haven't brought up or cited or touched on that you would like to mention?

DROWN: Oh, I can't think of anything, Dick. As I say, this period is not a long one, but it was, as Evlyn so ably pointed out, the reason that we still see them, because that was the initial contact, when we were a young couple.

ARENA: One thing comes to mind. You were a student at the time, a law student, if I'm not mistaken.

DROWN: Going to law school.

ARENA: Yes. Did that give rise to any special conversation, bringing up any special points of law, maybe?

DROWN: I don't recall really ever discussing much law with him, because he seemed to like to--except on that one occasion where he was so concerned about the fact that he hadn't been able to get these people together again--discuss sports or plays or music or what have you, and very little of the actual law phase of it. The girls were always having a good time. We just seemed to enjoy ourselves like, I guess, four young people would have. See, that's been thirty-three years ago, thirty-two years ago.

DORN: We handled very few divorce cases over there in that office, anyway. We used to call Mr. [Jefferson G.] Wingert, the senior partner, Cupid, so probably some of that rubbed off on to the President. [Laughter] He handled divorce cases the same way, because he would try to talk them out of it.

DROWN: That's great.

ARENA: But let me go into that final area I said I was going to look into; first, the idea of the personal contact between you and him, the law side; and second, his contact with others as you saw that contact, his civic and community interest. As you may or may not know--of course, Evlyn knows

because she made all the appointments for him--he was a joiner. He spoke at so many service clubs and service-oriented groups. He, himself, had been a member of such things as the 20-30 Club, and that. What of that side of him did you come into contact with, directly or indirectly?

DROWN: Not really any, because my wife taught school in Whittier. I was driving in to USC every day, so I really had very few roots in Whittier, as such. I don't suppose we met, other than the Nixons, another half dozen people, or I didn't, while we lived here, because it was a different kind of situation, you see.

DORN: I'm sure you and Helene were their closest friends.

DROWN: I really don't know, but we seemed to see them at least as much as anybody else, because he was busy and so was she, and we enjoyed each other.

DORN: He worked long hours in the law firm.

DROWN: Oh, right. I know he came up to that apartment two or three times and we'd sit around and talk about various things. But I can recall two or three instances where he indicated that, as you say--you triggered my memory--he had been working hard all that week on something, and Pat was laughing and saying, "Well, I had the Pep Committee last night, so it didn't make any difference because he was working and I was on the Pep Committee." [Laughter]

DORN: Yes, she was chairman of the Pep Committee.

DROWN: Not to be too repetitious, but I suspect it was a good deal like any two young couples in that era, where you were not in the upper economic strata, and certainly not in the lower, either; you were just having fun together. It was lighthearted, not serious, conversation. That came later, after the period that we're talking about now. Then it became much more serious.

DORN: He used to come to my house and dictate to me when he was running for the Congress, and we had Republican Headquarters in Whittier. At the headquarters the phone would ring and there were people around. It was one great, big room; there was no privacy, so he would come down to the house and sit there for an hour, dictating to me. I'd transcribe it and bring it back up to him. That was his way of getting away from all of the hullabaloo that was going on.

DROWN: He still likes to do that.

DORN: Yes.

DROWN: His office is across the street there, the old State Department Building where you go, then he'll go to the Lincoln Room in The White House. I think that's the only way you can close out all the flack, isn't it?

DORN: Yes.

DROWN: As he said one time--I think most president's probably have said it; at least it's been recorded as one of the great problems--you have to have a FEW minutes to THINK. You can't just go . . . [Laughter]

ARENA: Maybe we can wind this up with something you referred to, and maybe you can think of something else, the married Richard Nixon. Whay type of a husband, from your vantage point, was he, in the sense that you saw him in his home, you saw him with his wife on many occasions?

DROWN: That's a tough one for any male to answer. You'd probably do better with Helene on that. But it seemed to me that he was very, very considerate of Pat. I think he sort of enjoyed looking at her, as we all did, because--I'm not embellishing this--she was absolutely beautiful. The first time I saw her I did a double take. As I say, I think she's still beautiful, and as I was kidding her not too long ago, I said, "You can't help it, you were born that way!" She laughs about it, but the thing is . . .

ARENA: It's not hard to be nice to someone so beautiful.

DROWN: I never saw him, in our contacts, be anything but gracious and kind. I don't think he was the type who was outwardly, you know, when they were out together, he wasn't pawing her or--what's the word they use--smooching. He didn't believe in that kind of affection. It was a private thing with him, I think, although I never discussed it with him.

ARENA: For personal reasons, I'd like to ask this question: Did you see him help with the dishes?

DROWN: No. [Laughter] But I never saw him NOT help, either. I think at our house one time we both did 'em, as I recall.

ARENA: How about cooking, in view of the fact that one of his brothers, I know from firsthand account, likes to make up special dishes? How about Richard Nixon, himself?

DROWN: I never saw him cook. I've seen him put together cheese sandwiches, a la delicatessen style, which we both did together on two or three occasions. I've

never seen him cook. Have you, Evlyn?

DORN: No, I haven't. I've carried many a hamburger and pineapple malt upstairs to him, when he'd be too busy to go out for lunch.

DROWN: And cottage cheese and chili.

DORN: Yes, that. But during the law firm days there was a drugstore downstairs, and he would have an appointment at 12 o'clock, clear through, you know, and I'd just bring it in and put it in front of him, with his client sitting there, because he had to eat.

DROWN: Well, he disciplines himself now, as you know; he watches his weight.

DORN: Oh, yes.

ARENA: Well, may I thank you very much for honoring us with your time and your very good memory.