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Patricia Reilly Hitt (May 17, 1972)

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

MRS. PATRICIA REILLY HITT

May 17, 1972
Washington, D.C.

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mrs. Patricia Reilly Hitt; also and frequently called by her friends Pat Hitt. This is May 17, 1972, Arena interviewing. We are in Washington, D.C. Mrs. Hitt, may I begin by asking you your official title?

HITT: Assistant Secretary for Community and Field Services, Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

ARENA: Thank you. And to more or less orient the interview with the life of the President, may I ask you where and when you were born?

HITT: January 24, 1918 in Taft, California.

ARENA: And would you give a brief resume of your formal educational background and your career since your formal education ended, including your move to Whittier, California?

HITT: Well, my mother and father moved to Whittier when I was about two years old, so I grew up there. Went all the way from kindergarten through high school in Whittier. Then, I went to USC, University of Southern California, where I graduated with a bachelor of arts in education. I never practiced that education to any great extent. I was married right out of college, had two sons, and for the most part I spent my life in a combination of volunteer civic and community activities and volunteer Republican campaign and political activities.

ARENA: As you know, this Richard Nixon Oral History Project deals with the President's pre-political career, so 1945 is the cutoff point, except where there are questions not dealing with politics, such as his personality, his parents, whom you may recall from certain instances after 1945. Let me begin by asking you your first recollections of President Nixon that come to mind, where and when, and your description of the event, if it was an event, including maybe just a spaghetti dinner at home.

HITT: Well, my first recollections of him are more of hearing about him than actually knowing him.

ARENA: And what did you hear about him and where; what was the occasion?

HITT: When I was in grammar school, of course, he was in high school, so I knew of him at that time. It was Whittier Union High School--one high school--which took care of the whole district, including East Whittier.

ARENA: Excuse me. Was that still the case when you went through high school?

HITT: Oh, yes, it was. So when I was in grammar school I heard of Richard Nixon as president of the high school student body. Then when I was in high school, he was then president of the student body of Whittier College, so I heard of him that way. Also, I knew of the Nixons' market in East Whittier. So I knew of him by name long before I ever met him or knew him as an individual.

The first time that I ever met him or knew him as an individual was in 1946, and that was during the time of his first Congressional campaign. And as a matter of fact, that's how I got into politics in the first place. I might very well NEVER have become involved in politics or campaigned had he not run for Congress, because it was a home-town boy. Also, the fact that my father was involved in that early campaign and in our family anything my dad did, it got the whole family into it. So that was the first that I remember meeting him was at a kickoff rally in Pomona [California] in 1946. Or I think that's my first. It's a long time ago and it's fuzzy. But at that time I knew OF him, but I didn't know him, but I did work as a precinct worker or a block worker in that '46 campaign. Then, of course, in '48 I took on a precinct. I graduated from block to precinct as a doorbell ringer, and by 1950 I was doing several precincts in the Senatorial race. And In '52 I was very actively involved on the Orange County [California] level in the Eisenhower-Nixon campaign.

ARENA: Would it be accurate to say that you have been in touch with him over the years since 1946?

HITT: Yes, our paths have crossed and I've been in touch with him, both he and Pat [Patricia Ryan Nixon], off and on through the years, and I think one of the things that surprises me the most is the incredible memories that the two of them have.

ARENA: Could you give some examples of that?

HITT: Well, for example, I remember, after all, there were many, many, many block workers and precinct workers involved in both of the Congressional races and in the Senate race. And there was a fairly long period there from 1952, and I had not known the President or Pat well. I knew them socially, but didn't know them well at that point. My dad did. I didn't. So that from 1952 to 1956 I had very little contact with them. Most of my contact with them personally has come since 1956, and it is entirely possible that I didn't even see either one of them between '52 and '56, because I don't remember that I had occasion to come to Washington or that I had an occasion to see them in California. That's a fairly long period of time. Yet in 1956 he and Pat came to Santa Ana [California] for a rally and they had no idea necessarily--I don't know that they knew at that time I was living in Orange County--they had no particular reason to be expecting me. However, I was given the honor of pinning a corsage on Pat on the courthouse steps and I was stunned when I walked up to her and to the two of them and said, "It is my pleasure to present you with a corsage." And both of them called me by name instantly. And as I said, I am quite sure we had had no contact. I hadn't seen them for four years and our contact before that had not been so close or so intimate socially that we were what you would call close personal friends. It's just that they both have an unbelievable facility for remembering names and faces.

ARENA: Was it the fact that he may have been told or was aware of your growing up in Whittier that may have made your name stand out, do you think, especially when you were in Pomona, and did that subject come up--common teachers, for example, at Whittier High School and common experiences in Whittier? Do you recall that you and the President, especially on that first occasion, had any particular type of conversation or was there so much confusion being a political campaign?

HITT: There was so much confusion--no, we didn't. As a matter of fact, I think the first time I was introduced to him I was introduced as [John Bernard] Johnny Reilly's daughter, and if there would have been an association it would have been the association of my father and not common experiences at that time that we had shared.

ARENA: Historians, of course, are always interested in not only the things that happened in the past but how things change in the past, and knowing the President as you did as far

back as 1946 and knowing him as you do today, would you comment on what changes or what lack of changes, from the standpoint of personality, from the standpoint of habits, including, say, his public speaking style, comparing 1946 with today from your personal recollections?

HITT: Well, it seems to me that what changes have occurred are more or less the typical kind of changes that occur with almost anyone with maturity. As a younger person maybe you are a little more bombastic or a little more flamboyant, not only in your speaking but in your approach to things. When you are young, you are much more apt to think or believe there are easy solutions, but I would say what changes I have seen in him have been primarily the kind of changes maturity brings to most anyone. A little deeper thinking, a little calmer approach, a little more control of reactions, a realization that there are indeed no easy solutions to anything, less of an inclination to make sweeping statements, a very great deal more, I think, compassion for people. Humility was always there, and I don't mean to imply that there was a lack of compassion as a younger person either, but that's mostly what I would see, the kind of general mellowing that comes with the years as they come. Not a change in philosophy necessarily--basic philosophy--but a little more mature, mellower approach to things. A little bit more capability to roll with the punches, to take adversity, not to let it get you down quite as much, to expect it, to accommodate to it, and a certain amount of patience. You find that things can't be done overnight or changed overnight.

ARENA: Since we are in a building dedicated to education and ideas of education in our country, I can't help asking you to comment, to the best of your recollections, on the educational background of the President on the local level, which in a way was similar.

HITT: Yes.

ARENA: Both of you went to Whittier High School. Knowing the President as you do, knowing his educational background, which most people would not know firsthand as you do, of course, to what extent would you say Whittier High School was in the President today? Or to what extent would you say that he was prepared for the subsequent events--historic events--and Whittier High School's role in that, in shaping him, his mind, his thinking, his personality?

HITT: I would say it was probably considerable from the standpoint that those were the days when there was a good deal of emphasis on basic education. However, we were still getting social studies--many integrated things--but the days when he went to school and I went to school we were still doing exercises in penmanship, this kind of thing. Great emphasis on spelling, on reading, on writing, on geography, on history,

and I am sure that has had a basic influence on him and as it has, I suppose, on me or anyone else. We have a greater interest in, a greater knowledge perhaps, of history--basic history--of geography. I certainly feel that while my children had a much broader knowledge, they knew a whole lot about more different things, they didn't have quite the in-depth knowledge in the old basic academic subjects. And I'm sure that is reflected in him in that he has such a tremendous interest in history, in countries, which to some extent is geography. Now maybe he would have had anyway, but I am not so sure.

I think, too, socially, from the standpoint of social consciousness or let me say a tolerance for minority people, for example, Whittier High School--all the Whittier schools--had a considerable enrollment of Mexican-American children. We had very little blacks. I don't remember a Negro. I don't remember being aware of it or don't remember because Whittier by its nature, I don't think there were very many. The large number of minorities were Mexican-Americans. We grew up with them. I don't think anybody ever stopped to think that one person was Anglo and somebody else was of Mexican descent. It was just all mixed in together, and I know that that has had considerable influence on him as it has on me, because both of us share a very deep concern and interest in the Mexican-American people. But this is what we were raised in. We lived in the neighborhood. They were part of our social life, our school life, our athletic life--whatever it might have been.

ARENA: As you know, the President did go to Mexico for his honeymoon. And from conversations with him, do you recall that he did have any special reasons for going to Mexico or would it just have been a logical reason that he grew up in a Mexican-American culture as well as--today we use the term Anglo--an Anglo culture, and that was a natural desire on his part to see the real Mexico, so to speak?

HITT: I think it probably was. Of course, I didn't discuss where he was going on his honeymoon either before or after [Laughter] but I would guess, too, that Mexico was close to the United States and if you wanted to go some place that was a little special or wasn't [Santa] Catalina [California] or Santa Barbara [California] or San Francisco [California]--places you had lived all your life--for example, if you wanted to take your bride on something a little more romantic and be out of the country, Mexico would be the place you could go that wouldn't cost. . . . It's very interesting, it's fun and, of course, he happens to love Mexican food. Everybody says it and I know it. As we get farther on, don't let me forget and I'll tell you how I know it, as a result of a Mexican dinner at my house one night.

ARENA: To make sure you don't forget it, why don't you tell us now. And by the way, before I forget, does Mexican food like the President?

HITT: Yes, obviously it does and I think you'll see why. I remember shortly after the 1962 Gubernatorial race and just before they were moving to New York, I wanted to have some kind of a special farewell party for Rose Mary Woods, who through the years had become one of my dearest and closest friends. So I decided I would have a party at my house at home in Orange County for all of what we call the old Nixon group--the friends, the people who had worked for him through the Congressional, Senatorial and Vice Presidential days. And I decided I would cook Mexican food. Well, as it happened, the President came. Pat was already back in the East and couldn't. And that night we had thirty people and I was thinking I could take care of any eventuality. I remember well that I had fixed 99--as it turned out--enchiladas. Now, how it happened to be 99 and not 100, it was just the way it divided up and rolled out, but for thirty people I had 99 enchiladas and they were pretty good size. Rarely do women eat more than one and possibly two. The President went back three times for second helpings of those enchiladas and the last time, the girl I had helping me in the kitchen was just frantic, because we were scraping out the last of the crumbs and everything that stuck to the side of every one of the pans to get another plateful out to him. So I said that's my own experience with how well he liked Mexican food.

ARENA: We were speaking of the common experience you both had in Whittier High School. Having had the teachers' training that you have had, looking back upon reflection, how well prepared were your teachers, and therefore the President's, more or less, when you were attending high school? Were the academic preparations, do you think, as demanding on your teachers as they would be today? And I realize this is conjecture on your part.

HITT: Yes, it is a little hard to answer because teachers, just like curriculum, in those days were highly specialized. The curriculum wasn't as broad, it wasn't as far reaching. They didn't get into as many different kinds of subjects, both formal and peripheral. I could say this, as I look back on it, I was very fortunate. I had wonderful teachers, very, very fine, top-notch teachers all the way through. Whittier had a very, very good school system. It was a nice place to live. They could draw the cream of the crop. Many of them had been there for many years. Some of them were second generation. So I would say, yes, without doubt the President, just as I did, had excellent teachers. I cannot truly remember a loser.

ARENA: Is there any particular reason for that, that you can think of? Why a small rural community should have such possibly an outstanding, certainly a good educational system, for a rural area? And correct me if I'm wrong, it was, even more so than today, of course, it is outside of Los Angeles [California] and is all merged as you know as the one city, but at that time it was really outside Los Angeles and was a rural community.

HITT: It was rural. However, it was not the country school kind of school system as we think about it--one teacher and two class--or any lack of the finest kind of facilities. The facilities--the buildings--were top-notch. The schools in Whittier were well supported, enthusiastically supported by the parents, by the taxpayers. It wasn't until recent years that we ever had any trouble passing school bonds, for example. Also, while it was a rural community, the town of Whittier, which wasn't very big, maybe eight or ten thousand people, drew from that whole rural community.

So, when we talk about Whittier Union High School, it was the one high school for Whittier, South Whittier, North Whittier, East Whittier, clear over into Fullerton [California]. So the enrollment was about--at the time the President graduated from Whittier High School, which was a few years earlier than I, but wouldn't have changed that much--it was fifteen hundred to two thousand, so that is not a little country school, and drew from all over. The working conditions were good. There were outstanding administrators and an outstanding school board. Of course, those were the years, too, before our school board became so fraught with inner strife, and there was much more of a community relationship toward the schools, I think, than we find in many areas today. The schools were a part of the community and there was great pride in it, and it was a good place to work. It could draw good teachers, good administrators, because it was a wonderful, small town to live in.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if you are of the Quaker persuasion?

HITT: No, I am not.

ARENA: Did you suffer do you think, in any way, because you were not, since this had been a Quaker-founded community, although numbers-wise, the Quakers had dwindled as more and more people settled there? At that time it was even more Quaker than it is today. And I would just like to have that on the record. There was no persecution or no students making fun of you because of your not being a Quaker?

HITT: No, absolutely none. As a matter of fact, I would guess that in those days that the minority of the students were actually Quakers. As a matter of fact, I was at

least a senior in high school and might have been out of high school before I even knew that the Friends Church was a Quaker church. It was called the Friends Church there in Whittier and I didn't even put the two together. No, there was no consciousness of Quaker, Protestant, Catholic, Hebrew, or anything. There simply was no consciousness on the part. . . . Nor was there a minority, non-minority consciousness--no way.

But as I say, Whittier was a very religious town. At that time there were more churches, more different churches of different denominations in Whittier than any other city of its size in the United States. So by that very fact, the majority of the people in Whittier were NOT Quakers. Now the Friends Church was probably one of the three or four largest denominations, but there were others that were as big or bigger, but diluted by some 33, 34 or 35 churches, and it was only one. It would probably be a very small percentage.

ARENA: Although you said you did not know the President personally before 1946, but you saw him at a distance. I was wondering, did that distance include you, we'll say, as part of an audience in which he was in a debate and one of the debaters, in which he may have spoken for student government, running for the office of student government? Did your distant contact include that, and could you describe him, if it does, as a speaker and in that sense?

HITT: Only on one occasion. I can remember when I was in high school on one occasion my civics teacher took the entire civics classes--ALL of her civics classes . . .

ARENA: Do you recall her name by any chance?

HITT: No.

ARENA: Excuse me. This would have been high school?

HITT: It would have been high school.

ARENA: It would not have been Mrs. Jennie Lavin?

HITT: Yes, it was.

ARENA: Whom I had the pleasure of interviewing some time ago.

HITT: At that time--I would never have remembered.

ARENA: And you remember this field trip with Mrs. Lavin?

HITT: Yes. What it was was a field trip and we all went up to Whittier College to be in the audience of one of the intercollegiate debates and, of course, the President

was on the debate team. That's the first time that I remember seeing him and it is the ONLY time that I remember seeing him and it is the ONLY time that I have any memory of seeing him or listening to him or anything before 1946, and I think it probably might be the only time.

ARENA: What do you recall of him as a speaker at that time?

HITT: Well, tremendous. Of course, Whittier College won that debate and I can't remember whether it was Pomona [College] or Oxy [Occidental College] or who--I only remember that it was Whittier College. They won the debate and the President was one of the foremost leaders. He was the wrap-up, so to speak, and I remember being very impressed and thinking, "How can he possibly remember all of that and have it right at the tip of your fingers to come right back," because they were not allowed to use notes or anything.

ARENA: I was going to say, he did not use notes, and you recall that?

HITT: No, one of the rules was--and I think that's one of the reasons she wanted us to see it, I don't know--but I do remember that one of the rules was, no notes, no preparation. Of course, neither debater had any idea what the other one was going to say. And I remember thinking, "How could you possibly stand up to that withering rejoinders and remarks, and have all of that flow at you and be able to respond." I could see how you could prepare yourself for your own arguments and presentation, but how could you possibly be able to respond right out of the blue--being terribly, terribly impressed.

ARENA: The President, even today, is known for his ability to think on his feet. Thinking back also, do you recall ever seeing him where he presented, you might say, formal speeches or even formally prepared speeches in the sense of a play? Did you ever see him in a play?

HITT: No. I know that both he and Pat were members of the Community Players, but by that time I was out of Whittier --gone away to school. No, I never did see him perform.

ARENA: Finally, I would like to ask you, if you wouldn't mind, recalling your days of entry into politics as a backer of President Nixon. And this is not to get into politics per se, but to get into an understanding of the politics of his era in which he grew up himself in a way. The notion that politics is dirty, the notion that politics was run by men smoking black cigars in a back room. That is the stereotype that I think a lot of people still carry with them. From your own firsthand

inside experience, and there is no question, you were not going in as a machine politician, how did you find politics of Southern California, of Whittier itself, as an actual participant yourself?

HITT: In the earliest days?

ARENA: Yes.

HITT: More like a kind of a fun call on your neighbor sort of thing. No, I didn't have the feeling it was dirty. It was exciting, it was fun. You got caught up in the crowd. At the time I was doing precinct work in the first two campaigns, I was just ringing doorbells. In the first one, I had one son in a baby buggy and another in a stroller. And so all I was doing was knocking on doorbells, and if someone would come I would introduce myself and say, "I am your neighbor. I am working for Richard Nixon for Congress and I would appreciate it if you would take these things and read them." And I would strike up a little conversation and it was a fun, social kind of a thing. And the rallies were just great. You know, it was exciting. And as a matter of fact, through the years I have never had that feeling. I have been, through the years, I suppose in what some people would call smoke-filled rooms and I can tell you, it ain't like it's thought to be.

ARENA: This interview is continued on the other side.

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ARENA: We were discussing the matter of your recollection of politics during this transition period when the President was in Whittier and Whittier was about to have its own famous son become started on the road to international history.

HITT: Yes, and I was speaking about it being fun and being exciting, and it was because the President and Pat were so excited. They were so full of vitality. They had this awful old beat-up car, and I'm sure other people have said the same thing. I remember because my dad was in it--how little money there was. You know, they get a few dollars in at a rally and run out and print up something and load it in the station-wagon or the car and they would travel around. But they worked harder than anybody else--night and day. But they never seemed to be tired. They always were full of enthusiasm. And I think earlier you made reference to the courtesy of the President and
...

ARENA: I would like to make that clear on the record. This was by a gentleman who is a Democrat, but he does recall that when the President appeared before him--he is a judge, he was a judge at the time--he remarked how much he was impressed and still is by the courtesy of Mr. Nixon before the court.

HITT: And I said, that was Hannah [Milhous Nixon], that was his mother. I knew his mother better than his father [Francis Anthony Nixon], but she was an incredible woman, one of the strongest--morally strong, individually strong, committed to her ideals and beliefs--one of the strongest women I have ever known, but with it all she was gentle and loving. And I can't imagine Hannah Nixon ever raising a discourteous child or permitting a child to be discourteous to anyone, because she practiced the Golden Rule in its finest sense and she instilled this in her children, and a great deal of courtesy is just that.

ARENA: On the subject of your not knowing Mr. Frank Nixon as well as Mrs. Hannah Nixon and regarding the influence of both on their son. You may have heard, as I have--since I did not know the gentleman personally either--that he loved to argue politics and one may assume from that, that the love and zest for politics may have come from Mr. Frank Nixon. In view of your firsthand knowledge of Mrs. Hannah Nixon and possibly your discussion of politics with her, would you say that she had no interest or that she may have had more influence in shaping some of the political ideas and maybe even some of the political ambitions of the President than appears on the surface, in view of this idea that it was Mr. Frank Nixon?

HITT: I think possibly. Now, as I said, I don't know whether he enjoyed political discussions or not. I do know, and I don't think Hannah--she would never have pushed her children in or never. . . . If they'd said when they were born "What do you want your children to be--any one of them?" she probably might never have said a politician or in politics or President of the United States, but I think she had tremendous influence on his political life, because I think she shaped his character, his response, the humility that he has, the great tolerance that he has for other people. I think Hannah probably had a great deal to do with that; certainly the courtesy, the training, because as I understand his father was probably a little more bombastic. That I couldn't say. She would always have wanted and encouraged her sons to do anything they wanted to. And I am sure that from the moment that he expressed any desire or interest in a political life, she would have been behind him 1000 per cent. And I think her personal philosophy of life certainly had an influence on his philosophy and thinking, both politically and--couldn't help it.

ARENA: Having been a history major and having had some introduction to the history of the Friends, or as they are known in U.S. history, usually referred to as Quakers. Whether it's on the public school or pre-college or even college level, I don't think there is an American who has not heard of the Quakers and the founding of Pennsylvania, for example. What comments would you make, we'll say, about the stereotyped notion, the textbook description of the Quakers as they appear in the ordinary history books and your firsthand knowledge of them, especially someone like Mrs. Hannah Nixon and the President himself?

HITT: I really don't think there's all that much difference. I could talk to anybody for an hour or two and if they didn't tell you they were a Quaker I don't think you would. . . . I don't think it's that identifiable.

ARENA: Did you ever hear of the "thee" and "thou" terminology between say the President and his mother?

HITT: No.

ARENA: Or with the mother with anyone else?

HITT: No, I didn't. Now it's possible that it was used, but not at the time that I knew them later in life. No, I never heard the two of them use those expressions together, but I was never privy to private conversations between the two of them. Whenever I saw the two of them it was in a large group or a more public group where they might be less apt to, and it was later in life, too. So I just don't know.

ARENA: As you may know, Mrs. Hitt, you would know being from Whittier, the Quakers took a very dim view of smoking, drinking, gambling was forbidden, for example, in college when the President was there.

HITT: Plenty of them did it though, I'll tell you. [Laughter]

ARENA: Oh, they did. And yet the President I won't say is fanatic with any of these habits, I think it's been known. And since the trip to China we know he does drink socially. What about that?

HITT: I think that probably as a young man he did not. When I said plenty of them did, there were just as many wild oats sowed in Whittier and Whittier College as any place else, and I am sure they were by Quakers as well as non-Quakers, but I don't believe he ever had an intolerance for it. And I have often wondered--and this only a conjecture--if the fact that he had a very serious youth. . . . He was a very serious youth and he wasn't terribly socially inclined. I don't think

he sowed any wild oats or anything, but I have often wondered whether it was his Quaker background or because of the fact that he just plain worked. He didn't have very much leisure time. He was a serious student and he worked in the store practically all of the time that he was in school, so I am not really sure in my own mind whether the fact that he had a more austere youth socially and that way is probably a combination of both, and there wasn't time to party and have fun. When he wasn't in school or studying he was working.

ARENA: Speaking of your acquaintance with him around 1946, do you recall his personality concerning such things as dancing and social occasions? For example, do you recall that he did dance, that he did enjoy it, that he did not enjoy it, or you just don't recall one way or the other?

HITT: I don't recall that he had any hangups about it, but I don't recall that he did. As a matter of fact, the first time I believe--the second time--that I ever saw the President on a dance floor was at Julie's [Julie Nixon Eisenhower] wedding. The first time was about four or five years before that at a large Republican fund-raising dinner in San Diego County [California]. He was there and in the spirit of the moment or without realizing that the President wasn't all that crazy about getting out on the dance floor, perhaps with anybody, but certainly not with strangers, during the evening one of the things they raffled off or something was drawing a prize of a dance with the President. He was not the President then, but a candidate for either President or Governor of California. (I'm not sure whether it was 1960 or 1962.) And I remember that all of us in the campaign were just stunned when the announcement was made from the podium that the next number drawn would be a lady and she would have the honor of the first dance with Richard Nixon, who was at that time a candidate. And as I said, those of us who were involved in the campaign and knew him were kind of speechless and stunned. I am sure he was quite set back. Nobody had any warning and it is kind of an unusual thing for him, but he carried it off beautifully. He got right up and went to dancing. But by his own choice, the first time I ever saw him on a dance floor was at Julie's wedding.

ARENA: Just for the record, have you ever danced with him yourself?

HITT: No, I never have.

ARENA: I was going to ask for some firsthand experience.

HITT: No, I haven't, but also part of this doesn't necessarily mean that he didn't dance, because most of the times I saw him or was with him through those years were political activities, political campaigns where they just weren't

dancing, or if there was dancing, he and Pat didn't. Yes, many times there were fund-raising dinners and banquets, but they just didn't dance. Now whether he just didn't like it or self-consciousness or what, I don't know. And too, he would be in a peculiar position there. In an event like that, if he were to get out and dance with Pat, he would then be obligated to dance with umpteen other people who had any part in planning it or could be construed as hostesses. And I think it was probably easier not to do it at all than to be in a position where if you left somebody out, they were gravely offended.

ARENA: Although you haven't danced with him personally, you have been in his company in social situations and as an overall comment, as an overall summary, how would you describe his personality in this sense, as a social human being, about which much is written but not so many people, including those who are writing about him, have had your firsthand experience to see him?

HITT: I would say that by no stretch of the imagination would I say he is an extrovert. At the same time I don't think he's an extreme introvert. It's strange. He's better, I think at least he seems to respond better and be more comfortable in either very large crowds--a rally type thing or a large audience kind of thing--or in very small groups of people he knows very well. When I've seen him, he seemed to be less happy or pleased or comfortable in kind of the medium-sized group, the thirty, forty, fifty, one hundred people. I don't think the so-called cocktail party has ever been his meat.

ARENA: Where there are a lot of strangers there.

HITT: Yes, or where you have to make a lot of chitchat. Now, the President is just not at his best, he is just not very good at social, inconsequential chitchat. When he talks he wants to talk about something challenging or deep, or be stimulated. And many people are like that. I'm not the best at that myself. I can understand it.

ARENA: Does he in any way, when he is with a strange group, because of his law education, his extra education and his international experience, even going back to 1946, have you found that it is difficult for him to speak to people without equal education and without equal experience? Have you found that he might be at a loss for words, say, with a carpenter and could only be at ease with a lawyer or professional person?

HITT: No, no, I don't think so. I don't think it has anything to do with what the person's education or background is. I think it has to do with whether a carpenter or anybody

else, if they had something serious to say and worthwhile to say, or a thought or an idea, I think he would be just as stimulated as he would if it were a lawyer. And I don't mean to He's not uncomfortable, he's not a social outcast. Even in the days before I ever saw him take a cocktail, he had no hangups about anybody else. It was anybody else do what they wanted to. I have never seen him overindulge.

But another pet story of mine to a certain degree, which is indicative of his and Pat's thoughtfulness about people, evolves around cocktail glasses. When he was Vice President I made many trips back and forth to Washington, and I'd see Rose and I'd see him and occasionally I'd see [Robert H.] Bob Finch and people on the staff. And one day I was here talking to Rose in the office and she said, "Come on with me, the Vice President (or the boss) is having a group of senators in his reception room--more formal office--in the Capitol building and let's go up and get it ready, they will be serving cocktails, let's get it ready for them." So I said, "Fine, I'll go up and help you." So we went up and Rose was getting out the mix and the wherewithall so he could offer everyone a drink, and I said that I would get the glasses and things out. And I opened up the cupboard and I have never in my life seen such a conglomeration of odds and ends of glasses. Everything from jelly glasses, I don't think any two matched, no two were the same size. It was just the darndest--well, I just don't know what else to say--conglomeration or mess. And I said to Rose, "Are these all the cocktail or highball glasses or water glasses he has." And she said, "Yes." And I said, "You mean you're gonna serve--the Vice President is going to serve a group of senators with this--no two alike?" And she said, "Well, we've needed them for a long time but nobody has any chance to go get them." So I said, "Okay, as of tomorrow, something's going to be done." So the next morning I went down to Woodward & Lothrop's first thing and bought him a set of a dozen old-fashioned, dozen highball and a dozen tall glasses that all matched and looked reasonably good and had them sent up with a little note to him saying that I think this looks a little bit more becoming to the Vice President of the United States, and had a wonderful thank you note from him and everything like that.

Almost--now let me think--this would have been no less than four years and it might have been six years later, during the Gubernatorial campaign in California. This was either the end of his first term as Vice President or the first year of his second term. I am not real sure when. But at the time of the Gubernatorial campaign a number of us who were active in that campaign in leadership, we met regularly with him on the campaign. And one morning they asked us to come to their house there at Trousdale Estates for breakfast, rather than just having a meeting at the California Club or in the headquarters. Trousdale Estates is where they had built their home after they had rented Holmby Hills for a while. They built their first home in California after the '60's, when they moved back to California after '60 and before they

went to New York after '62. But anyway, he said, "Let's have this a little more social and we'll have breakfast." And there were about four or five of us there. We talked a little bit and visited before breakfast and then Pat came in and said, "Won't you all come to the table." We walked in to the dining room table and there were the glasses on the table. The water goblets were some of the beautiful Waterford, I believe it was the Waterford, that they had been given by the President of Ireland when he made a trip with the Vice President, but the orange juice and those that wanted milk were in those glasses that I had given him at that time. Now this was not accidental. NO WAY would you have accidentally used part of one set of glassware and part of another. It was obviously intentional--nobody said anything and I didn't either. I didn't even act like I noticed it at the time but in a way it had to be the intentional, thoughtful kind of thing that he and Pat remembered that I sent them those glasses. So anyway, at least four and maybe six years ahead, and they wanted me to know they still had them and appreciated them. And this is typical of the thoughtful kind of things they do. Imagine how pleased I was to know that they had wrapped them up and brought them back to, California. But they remembered where they came from and would be thoughtful enough to use them. As I say, it had to be intentional, because they didn't match.

ARENA: Speaking of thank you notes you received from the President, from the standpoint of the professional historian who likes to know about the numbers and locations of correspondence, would you give some general idea of the correspondence you do have, if you can at all on the spot here--some general idea of the personal correspondence you have with the President and where it is located for future historians to look into, with your permission, of course?

HITT: I would say that probably--I can't remember whether I have any correspondence from his pre-Vice Presidential days. There might be a thank you note from him. I don't believe so because I wasn't that involved. I would say from the Vice Presidential days I probably have eight or ten or maybe a dozen letters or notes from him and four or five, maybe more, from Pat. From the time between '60 and '68, I don't know, maybe two or three. As President of the United States I have six, eight or ten, maybe. But they are my most prized possessions. Some of them are framed. Some of them are put away in a very safe place. I expect those to be handed down to my family. And one of the reasons they're prized is because they are from him and I've never thrown away a note from either of them. But one of the reasons they are particularly prized is that they are all personal letters.

ARENA: As this interview comes to a close, if there is any topic or any question that I have not raised that you would like to raise at this point, feel free to do so. Anything I left out.

HITT: No, just generally I would say that one of the things I remember most--think most--when I think of both of them is their cordiality, their kindness, their thoughtfulness of other people. It has been exhibited by many things. For example, after the '60 campaign, in January before the Kennedy Inauguration, they were having a series of thank you dinner parties at different clubs here in Washington. And I know they were all planned, the seating was arranged and everything. But they found out that I was in town rather unexpectedly a day or two before I got a call, "Couldn't I please come?" And I said, "I would love to." And I was seated at the President's table. They were done in four tables of tens. Pat presided over one and he presided over another. And you know, at the last minute to include me would have been enough, but to have me sitting at his table and when he made his remarks afterwards, he made remarks about the old-timers and people who had been in it a long time, and that meant a tremendous amount to me. But it's typical of the early years of this administration.

Both of them went overboard or made a very great effort to include my husband and me in things that meant a lot, like the first surprise birthday party for Pat at the White House. But the first time I was in the White House after he was President was one evening when there were just the President and Pat and three others--myself and two others because my husband wasn't here--in the family dining room upstairs. That was the first time. So it's that kind of thoughtful thing that I feel is one of the greatest characteristics and greatest attitudes.

ARENA: Would you say that this expression of appreciation and thoughtfulness goes beyond the mere and normal expression and courteous expression of appreciation by a person to another person? You are saying it goes beyond that in this case.

HITT: Oh, yes. Far beyond that. It's not the normal kind of, "Well, thank you, you did something." No, it's a very deep feeling of wanting to include people in things that are special to them. I didn't do all that much that either of them owed me anything. I never looked at it that way. It's an innate desire to go beyond the usual, expected courtesy or the duty courtesy or anything like that--just to do nice things for people.

ARENA: I certainly want to record here my personal appreciation for your hospitality, your willingness to receive me for this interview, and I know I speak for future historians, that you have so fully and so frankly answered all of the questions I have put to you. And I think the President, like yourself, a former history major, will belong to that category of historians who will appreciate that. Thank you very much.

HITT: Thank you.