



7-10-1972

Josephine L. Harrison (July 10, 1972, interview one)

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

MRS. JOSEPHINE L. HARRISON

July 10, 1972
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mrs. Josephine L. Harrison
(Mrs. William H. Harrison) of Whittier, California.
Today's date is July 10, 1972, Arena interviewing.
Mrs. Harrison, may I ask you for your full maiden name?

HARRISON: Josephine Amelia Lewis.

ARENA: And would you mind stating the place and date of your
birth?

HARRISON: Wabash County, Indiana, April 1, 1897.

ARENA: Just from the standpoint of coincidence is that area
near the area where the Milhous family lived, which
you may recall is North Vernon, Indiana, near Bloomington
or near the southern, eastern section of Indiana?

HARRISON: Well, Wabash County is in the northern part of Indiana.

ARENA: I see. Would I be correct in that the first time you
did come to California was with your husband, Mr.
[William H.] Harrison?

HARRISON: Yes.

ARENA: And he did explain the circumstances, so we won't go
into that again. But also I would like to ask you if
there had ever been any direct contact between you
and any of the President's family, either the Nixons or the
Milhouses, before you did marry?

HARRISON: No.

ARENA: Mrs. Harrison, would you mind giving a brief and general resume of your formal education and any special interests--
I realize your basic occupation was housewife--but if there were any special interests you had or any materials you may have written, bring us up to date on that, but your formal education and then any special interests you may have had.

HARRISON: I went to grammar school in Wabash and high school there.

ARENA: Excuse me. Just to be sure. These would be public?

HARRISON: Yes, in Wabash, Indiana. My father was County Superintendent of Schools there. When I was a sophomore in high school we moved to Indianapolis because my brother was ready for college and they knew we all would go to Butler College. We were affiliated with the Christian Church and Butler had offered my father an Honorary Doctorate, which he didn't take, but he had a very warm feeling for the college. We went to college at Butler in Irvington, a suburb of Indianapolis. I graduated there with an A.B. and a major in English, and then I went back for another half year and completed a mixed major in sociology and philosophy. I taught three years and then I went into social work and I was a school attendance officer for several years.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you, in view of your father's own interest in that school, his full name and the college he attended and was he also a native of Indiana?

HARRISON: Yes. He was John Wesley Lewis and he was first, of course, a principal in high school and then in Indiana County Superintendent was an elective office. I remember when he ran for the office. His office was in the courthouse in Wabash.

ARENA: And his education?

HARRISON: He went to Marion College which was a small school in the small town of Marion, Indiana, and it was not a church related school. But my folks were very active in church affairs and Butler was the college that belonged to the Christian Church, so we all went there. My father would have preferred Butler but it was farther from Marion where he could go and sort of live at home.

ARENA: I know from my own experience that you are active in various organizations. Would you mind giving us some idea of some of the organizations, including the highest offices you have held in some of them.

HARRISON: Well, I was president of PTA's [Parent-Teacher Association] from elementary all through elementary, junior high, high school and the council.

ARENA: Would that include PTA's in Whittier as well?

HARRISON: Yes, in Whittier, the whole area, and I think at the time there were about sixty schools in the Whittier area that participated in the Council. And I was president of that. Then I was president of the American Association of University Women, the Whittier Branch, and I was president of our PEO Chapter, and I was clerk of the Friends . . .

ARENA: Excuse me. You said PEO. Would you mind explaining a little more about that? I have heard of it.

HARRISON: That's an educational and philanthropic organization.

ARENA: Is it a national one, Mrs. Harrison?

HARRISON: Yes.

ARENA: And you are speaking about one of several local chapters too, of course?

HARRISON: Yes, there are several chapters in Whittier and I was president of our chapter and then I was also president of the Reciprocity, which includes all the chapters. And then I was clerk of Ministering Council in First Friends Church and I held various jobs there from time to time.

ARENA: Just for the record, have you ever attended the Friends Annual Meetings that would be held in Whittier?

HARRISON: Yes, many times, always while I was active, and I was president of the Friends Women's Society two different times.

ARENA: And may I ask while we are on that particular subject to tie that directly in with the President's family. Do you recall attending meetings where there were Nixons and Milhouses? I am thinking in particular but not only of the President's mother, Hannah Milhous [Nixon].

HARRISON: Yes.

ARENA: And I would like to go into that later.

HARRISON: The Milhous sisters had a reunion every Yearly Meeting [Laughter] and we all ate together and talked together and I was with them then--Edith and Hannah and Martha and Jane.

ARENA: You may recall there was a meeting very recently and Jane, who is Mrs. Jane [Milhous] Beeson, as you know, the particular aunt who taught the President his piano, and I did have the pleasure of meeting her. She still is hale and hearty. The eldest sister, if I'm not mistaken, is Mrs. Edith Milhous Timberlake who is quite ill and has been quite ill for a long time.

HARRISON: And in a rest home.

ARENA: In Riverside, California. Well, I want to look into that a little further but I just wanted to clear that up. Were there any other organizations that you have not mentioned that you want to cite at this time?

HARRISON: Oh, I don't . . .

ARENA: Would you mind explaining the Book Reviews Group or book review interest that you have because I do know you do offer book reviews to which the public is invited in this area.

HARRISON: Well, I did it for the organizations that I belonged to. I've reviewed some books as many as eight or ten times because somebody would hear it and ask me to go to another group and give it, and I gave them at churches and clubs and various societies in town.

ARENA: Although you are not a graduate of Whittier College, do you happen to belong to any organizations that are affiliated with the college or are an alumnae through a member of your family, for example? Are any of your children graduates of Whittier College?

HARRISON: Yes. Our daughter graduated there and our son-in-law got his master's there.

ARENA: Would you give their full names, please?

HARRISON: Martha Jo Harrison Hubbard.

ARENA: And her husband's name?

HARRISON: Howard Newton Hubbard and he has his doctorate in education and is one of the consultants in the Long Beach schools. He supervises math and science in all the schools in Long Beach [California].

ARENA: As you know the President is a graduate of Whittier College and his family has been connected with it over the years. I'm thinking of his grandfather who was one of

the contributors of the original founding of the college and so forth, so I'd like to correlate the years of your own family with the Presidential years. Just by way of review, you probably know this anyway, the President graduated from Whittier High School in 1930. He graduated from Whittier College in 1934, on to law school from which he graduated in 1937. Now what were the years that your daughter was in attendance there, including possibly Whittier High School? Did she attend the high school too?

HARRISON: Yes, both of our children did. Martha Jo graduated in 1943.

ARENA: So anyway we know that was after the President. She would not be a contemporary of the President's.

HARRISON: No, not at all. And Bill [William Lewis Harrison] was younger. He was four years younger than she and he went to Whittier College two years. She graduated there and then went to Stanford [University]. And Bill went two years and then he started to [University of California] Berkeley and from there he enlisted in the Air Force.

ARENA: So he had graduated before the war years very likely but not necessarily while the President was still there between '30 and '34.

HARRISON: No.

ARENA: However, the President, you may recall, was a member of the Board of Trustees after the war and I'm thinking in particular of his Vice-Presidential years and possibly their paths may have crossed, although she was a student and he was in the administration, so to speak.

HARRISON: Well, I don't know that they did anything together around the college. I don't know that they did.

ARENA: But at least there was that coincidence and I did want to get that down. How close they got is something else.

HARRISON: She was very interested in him and, of course, our Uncle Clifford Johnson who built the house where we live now and *Frank Milhous were active on the college board at the same time and the Milhouses were seeing that their children all went through Whittier College, and so was Uncle Cliff, so he made a contribution expected to cover tuition for a scholarship for Martha Jo and for Bill too. But it was so small by the time our children were ready for college that it paid only about half the tuition. (*Bill Harrison questions whether F. Milhous was on the Board or just interested.)

ARENA: I would like to get the position and the background of Mr. Clifford Johnson a little more clearly. He is an uncle. Would this be on your side or on your husband's side?

HARRISON: On Bill's side.

ARENA: It is on your husband's side, but you recall him as well as your uncle.

HARRISON: Oh, yes.

ARENA: Did you happen to know him before you were married as well?

HARRISON: No.

ARENA: Did he, for example, come from your area originally?

HARRISON: No. He came from Iowa and we really didn't know him very well until we moved here. Of course, the aunt, Susan Johnson, was Bill's father's sister so that's the way we got acquainted with him.

ARENA: Do you recall Mr. Frank Milhous, and correct me if I'm wrong, but this would be Franklin Milhous, but he was known as Frank to the immediate members of the family and close friends?

HARRISON: Yes.

ARENA: Do you recall him, Mrs. Harrison?

HARRISON: No. I remember Almira [Burdg Milhous] very well.

ARENA: What do you recall about her. Take as much time as you like.

HARRISON: Well, she was a very alert person. She gave a prayer in our meeting at the church when she was past ninety or nearly ninety, I don't know which it was, but it was a beautiful prayer. And she wrote several little books of poems. I would call some of it doggerel, but they were religious in content and kindly and sweet. She had lots of company and we were invited sometimes there. Oscar seemed to be the head of the house by the time we were going there. But I remember being there one time . . .

ARENA: Excuse me. By Oscar, you mean Mr. Oscar Marshburn who did live in the home after he married the daughter.

HARRISON: Yes, after he married Olive [Rose Olive Milhous]. But he was head of the house because I think the father was gone. But I remember being there one afternoon when someone came to the door with a box and asked if she could buy a box of oranges. And Mrs. [Almira] Milhous [Laughter] said, "Go out and pick all you want to fill your box but don't take all the big ones." And she charged her 50 cents. And I remember when she had Christmas affairs there and would have all the family there. They brought parcels of food and all ate there.

ARENA: Excuse me. Number-wise, how many do you think would attend these affairs?

HARRISON: Oh, I don't know. There must have been thirty or thirty-five as I remember it.

ARENA: And would they be from out of Whittier proper?

HARRISON: Yes.

ARENA: Would they be from the different parts of the state and the country?

HARRISON: Yes, they would come from farther away. I know that she wanted all the children to perform some way or other when they had those big affairs and everybody listened [Laughter] and that's when we heard Dick play the piano and heard other children do things too.

ARENA: Do you recall about how old he was, the President, when he did play the piano, or was it more than one occasion more than one year that you saw him?

HARRISON: Probably more than one year. Maybe he was fourteen or fifteen. He was one of the older ones who could do things and he was always very intent on doing it well. [Laughter] He sat down the right way. He put his hands on the keyboard the right way and waited a moment and started and he was very accurate with everything he did.

ARENA: Do you recall other aspects of that. I'm thinking for example, although I realize it's going into detail, but just to be sure, do you recall how he was dressed; do you recall anything about his nervousness in front of the audience; do you recall that he enjoyed it, although he was intent, did he seem to be enjoying it? Anything like that that comes to mind.

HARRISON: Yes, he enjoyed doing it well and he tried hard to do everything well. It seems to me that he had on a pair of long stockings and kind of knickers-type things.

ARENA: How about a suit? Would he be wearing a jacket and tie do you recall?

HARRISON: Yes, I think he had a jacket on. I don't know about the tie but I suppose he did.

ARENA: Do you recall or was it the custom that the audience would show its appreciation through applause? [Laughter]

HARRISON: Oh, yes, yes, we did.

ARENA: And although you might not recall, do you recall in comparison with the others the applause he received? He's a special person. That's why I'm asking these questions of you.

HARRISON: Well, I think the applause was special and they would look at each other and appreciate it, you know how glances go around when somebody does an extra fine job.

ARENA: Do you recall that his mentor, Mrs. Jane Beeson, the President's aunt, and you ever discussed that together and some of her comments?

HARRISON: No.

ARENA: Do you recall seeing her present though and they say sometimes expression can speak louder than words, maybe her expression . . .

HARRISON: I don't remember her especially. But I remember particularly our sister-in-law, Elizabeth [Milhous Harrison] there.

ARENA: This, of course, would be an aunt of the President, one of the sister's of his mother, Hannah.

HARRISON: Dick once said over radio or television, I forget which, that Elizabeth was his favorite aunt, and she was a very very fine person, outgoing and friendly and somewhat of an artist. We have some clippings that were written about her when she died that tell some of the things she did. She went to the Soldiers' Home and she went to hospitals and took gifts, but she wasn't very intellectual. She was just a lovely housewife and mother.

ARENA: Had she gone on as did the President's mother to some part of college? If I am not mistaken, Mrs. Hannah Nixon did not complete but she had entered the college.

HARRISON: I think she had one or two years and I think probably Elizabeth [Milhous Harrison] was a sophomore when she

got married. We have one of Aunt Susan's, Susan Johnson's, grade books in which Hannah Nixon is listed studying Latin.

ARENA: And she was a Greek and Latin teacher at the . . .

HARRISON: At the college. She taught there for several years with no pay at all.

ARENA: While we're on that subject, do you recall what correspondence or documents--it might not be a letter, it might be an item such as you mentioned, a roll book--what items like that you have in your possession and where they would be? For example, would they be in your home in Whittier; would they be in a vault? And the reason I am asking this is so that historians who will be looking for such documents would know who has what and where these items would be. Whatever comes to your mind.

HARRISON: They are at our home. We have a long correspondence--I don't know just where this part of it is, but we read it all after it was left to us by Uncle Cliff and Aunt Susan--a long correspondence between Uncle Ed Evans in Indianapolis and Uncle Clifford Johnson and Mr. [Franklin] Milhous in regard to Russell [Earl Harrison, Sr.] and Elizabeth [Milhous Harrison].

ARENA: This Mr. Milhous would be Franklin the President's grandfather?

HARRISON: Yes. Edward D. Evans was quite a wealthy man in Indianapolis.

ARENA: And you have that correspondence?

HARRISON: Yes. Elizabeth and Russell [Harrison] were married very hastily, and they didn't quite get adjusted here until Russell craved going back to Indiana. He thought with quite a few relatives back there he would find something that he wanted to do and liked to do. And they pulled up stakes here and went to Indiana. They didn't get adjusted there either and the uncles and Mr. [Franklin] Milhous all went together to have them moved back to California and established here. They made a place for them in Yorba Linda [California] and bought a little ranch that they gave them.

ARENA: Just to be sure, I know that you know the President was born in Yorba Linda and grew up there before coming to East Whittier. Did you or your husband ever reside in Yorba Linda?

HARRISON: No.

ARENA: But do you recall and were you living in the area when your brother-in-law and therefore sister-in-law, Elizabeth and Russell, were living in Yorba Linda? Do you recall visiting Yorba Linda at that time?

HARRISON: No, we lived in Beverly Hills [California], and by the time we were out here, we came in '27, they were living back in Whittier, out on Whittier Boulevard.

ARENA: And by way of giving a general summary of these documents that you have, that's one source, this correspondence. Is there another general source or even some specific letters that you recall? I'm thinking, for example, if you have any correspondence directly between you, or you and your husband, and the President himself?

HARRISON: Well, it's been all in the latter years, I think. Bill sent him the pictures of the auditorium where they are having the Whittier High School Hall of Fame, and we have had correspondence over that.

ARENA: Excuse me. When was that built, Mrs. Harrison, and you are talking about the auditorium of Whittier High School which the President attended?

HARRISON: That's right. [The auditorium was built in 1940.]

ARENA: I am sure Mr. Harrison has that on his interview but I just wanted to tie it in with some other items. For example, do you think it was before World War II or after the war?

HARRISON: It was before World War II, but they made up this Hall of Fame afterwards. Hall of Fame 1971 (Richard M and Patricia Nixon, Major General James Ferguson, Admiral Pugh, Robert Blake, Patricia Riley Hitt.)

ARENA: And that correspondence would be after the war.

HARRISON: That would be after the war. Well, Dick dedicated the City Hall and we had correspondence over that. We had correspondence several times when we thought he had done particularly well and he often answered because we had written to him.

ARENA: Not that you recall every detail of these letters, but I am wondering that in these letters he would make personal family references, that is to periods before 1945; in which he would say, "I remember when we were at Aunt Almira's reunion." I am wondering if there are any personal references along those lines from time to time. Not that you remember every single letter.

HARRISON: Not in any of the letters that I remember. Of course, Dick and Pat [Patricia Ryan Nixon] were married rather privately, but we were invited to the reception that Frank [Francis Anthony] and Hannah [Nixon] had.

ARENA: Did you have the opportunity to attend also?

HARRISON: Yes, we went to that and we saw him once in Washington. Of course, we know Ed [Edward Calvert Nixon] much better than we know Dick because Ed's the age of our son.

ARENA: As you do know from the standpoint of this project, we are interested in all of the members of the President's family. Of course, we want to be sure to exhaust your recollections on the President personally, but we will go into your recollections about Edward too. While you have brought up the subject of the reception, would you mind describing that reception? For example, about how many people were there? Who the people were? Your own feelings about it. Was it not successful or unsuccessful but was it an enjoyable time for you--that is your own personal reaction to it as well as the more or less formal descriptive matters about it?

HARRISON: I don't remember any of the details about it except that we knew many of the people there and visited with people, and it was a nice reception in a kind of homey way.

ARENA: It was in a private home?

HARRISON: Yes, it was in Frank and Hannah's home up in College Hills. They moved there after Dick was in the law office of Wingert & Bewley. It was about the first time they had much of a home. You know they lived out on the boulevard with their business.

ARENA: How would you describe, thinking back now, how would you describe the bride at that time?

HARRISON: Pat, you mean?

ARENA: Yes, Mrs. Richard Nixon.

HARRISON: Well she was a very, very lovely young girl.

ARENA: Had you met her before or is this the first occasion on which you met her and what did you and she talk about, if you can recall?

HARRISON: I don't know what we talked about at the reception, but we had them to our house for dinner a little while afterward and had them with another young couple, the Brannons.

ARENA: Excuse me. Would Mr. Brannon's first name be Herman?

HARRISON: Yes, Herman and Agnes Brannon. And I remember one thing Pat said that night. She said that twenty years makes a difference in the generation. You belong to a different generation if there is twenty years difference in your ages. And it impressed me so much because they were so young and, of course, we were middle age.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: I believe you were just discussing your having the young married couple, Richard and Patricia Nixon to your home for dinner. Do you recall anything else that came up by way of conversation at this time, anything in the way of your asking them about their future plans, about their future residence or anything that they brought up, such as that interesting comment made by Mrs. Richard Nixon about what separates generations?

HARRISON: Bill had designed a house for the Brannons. Mrs. Macy Smith gave her daughter and the man she married a trip to Hawaii and when they came back she gave them a sum of money to start a home, and the conversation was wrapped around the Brannon house because they were all interested in it. And I don't remember any particular things we talked about.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, where did that house get built eventually and where is it?

HARRISON: It's on Whittier Boulevard. You remember where the big square Nixon house was. That was Mrs. Smith's house before the Nixons bought it. She gave a portion of her ranch property to Agnes that faced the boulevard and their house was a little stone front house that Bill [William H. Harrison] designed some years ago. It's a beautiful house.

ARENA: Just to be sure, this would not be the home that was owned by Mrs. Hannah Nixon in her later years and is now the smorgasbord restaurant?

HARRISON: Yes, that's the house that Agnes Brannon's mother owned. That's where Agnes grew up.

ARENA: I see. And the home that your husband designed is next to it and is the stone one.

HARRISON: It faces Whittier Boulevard. It's across a little ravine.

ARENA: But it's on the same lot, so to speak.

HARRISON: It's on the same ranch, not on the same lot--on the same ranch.

ARENA: I see. But not directly next to it.

HARRISON: No, not right next to it.

ARENA: But around the corner so to speak. Fine. Well, what I was wondering, for example, do you recall that the President and Mrs. Richard Nixon showed any particular preference in the way of style, for example, Spanish or Georgian? Do you recall anything along those lines? Maybe Mr. Brannon said he would like Spanish style and the Nixons had some of their own ideas that may come to mind. I realize this is really getting down to details.

HARRISON: No. They were so young at that time and they neither one had been accustomed to living in a house of any particular style. They didn't know anything about the design of houses. We were living then on East Philadelphia Street in a house that Bill [William H. Harrison] designed and we built and they liked it and they were interested in our antiques and they talked about it, but they didn't know very much about houses.

ARENA: If I could get a bit philosophical and maybe a bit intellectual for a minute, you are in a very interesting position, Mrs. Harrison, in that the President after all is a member of the family, you are family through marriage, and at the same time both you and he have college educations. I would like you for a moment to step aside but at the same time not too far aside. How would you describe him in those years, for example, as a nephew who was doing rather well in school? He had received scholarships to go on to Duke [Law School]. How did he hold himself as a young man and as a nephew? Let me ask bluntly, for example, was he smart-alecky; was he duly respectful to his elderly aunt and uncle? Whatever comes to mind along these lines, and then describe his personality.

HARRISON: Well, we're not uncle and aunt to Dick at all. We're only friends. William Harrison's brother is his uncle by marriage.

ARENA: Well, it's true you are related through marriage but in a way of comparable age to his aunts and uncles. I'm thinking, for example, of his aunt who was your husband's sister-in-law.

HARRISON: Yes. He had a certain deference toward older people that was remarkable, I think.

ARENA: Well as a matter of fact, how did he call you and your husband; was it aunt and uncle or was it Mr. and Mrs. Harrison or was it auntie and uncle, do you recall?

HARRISON: No, I don't know what they called us. [Laughter] I don't think they ever had to call. I think he said Bill and Jo, because he signs his letters that way. If he writes to Bill, he says "regards to Jo" or something like that. I don't remember hearing him call us anything when we were together. Although at the Don Nixon wedding when Lawrene [Nixon] was married . . .

ARENA: Lawrene would be the President's niece.

HARRISON: Yes. They were there and we talked to both of them and I think they called us Jo and Bill then. But Dick is the age of Russell and Elizabeth's [Harrison] children and they were used to calling us Uncle Bill and Aunt Jo so they just took on the Jo and Bill.'

ARENA: If you don't mind my going back to the idea of his personality as a young man who did visit you. In asking questions, in discussing things with you as an Aunt, where he obviously did not have the experience or the education, how did he handle himself in asking questions? Was he argumentative? Were his questions good questions for the layman, we'll say, from the standpoint of house building? Did they seem reasonable? Did he make conversation just to make conversation. Anything along those lines?

HARRISON: Well, he was interested in learning everything. He wanted to know about everything.

ARENA: From the standpoint of making conversation at all, did he, we'll say, steal the show? Did he carry his own? Was he prone to telling some funny stories? Was he at ease and did he put others at ease at this time when you knew him, especially at this time when you had him for dinner, shortly after the marriage reception?

HARRISON: Well, I think he felt young and inexperienced in our presence, but he was careful and he carried his own in the conversation. He had plenty to talk about and was able to carry on a nice conversation.

ARENA: If this isn't too personal, realizing as he I'm sure did, that he was a young lawyer, did he try to entice you and your husband into being his client for any occasion?

HARRISON: No. We were just naturally his clients. Of course, Bill had known [Thomas W.] Tom Bewley for many many

years because Tom visited them back in Indiana and Dick was in the firm with Tom Bewley and that was just a natural thing for us to go to their office for legal help.

ARENA: As a matter of fact on that point of the President as a lawyer, how do you feel that he conducted himself as a personality, how was he to get along with; and secondly, from the standpoint of professional competency in handling you and your husband's legal affairs?

HARRISON: We thought he was competent. We had no doubts about that.

ARENA: Again, if it isn't too personal, do you recall any cases in which he was involved for you and your husband or any cases at all in which you could see him in action? Did you ever attend any court . . .

HARRISON: No, no. All we had was our wills and he was to be administrator at that time, but after he went to Washington we had to make other plans because he was gone.

ARENA: And you needed someone that was right there, of course. And may I ask you the same questions about Mrs. Richard Nixon, Pat [Patricia] that I just put to you about the President. How was she, from the standpoint of a dinner guest and one who had just entered the family, in making conversation and being able to ask questions and so forth?

HARRISON: Well, she was completely pleasing from our point of view.

ARENA: Knowing the both of them now as you did at that time, may I ask you to what extent seeing them in social situations today and other situations, to what extent would you say they have or have not changed personality-wise? As you know our project is not interested in politics per se, but from the standpoint of biography, people are interested in change of a person's personality. Was there or has there been in your view significant change in their personalities, the President and his wife, Mrs. Richard Nixon?

HARRISON: No, I think they have the same qualities but they have matured with it, and they are very careful to be pleasing and agreeable and it's natural to them.

ARENA: May I ask too, Mrs. Harrison, from the standpoint of a long range observation which a person like you could make, since you knew the President and his family and his grandmother personally and you know him, to what extent are the Milhous characteristics, whatever these may be, to what extent

is the training of his mother as you knew she trained him, her personality, to what extent are these evidenced in the President's personality and bearing and handling of himself? To what extent are these in evidence now?

HARRISON: Well, they're all very genuine people. I remember our sister-in-law, Elizabeth [Milhous Harrison], was very worried when she found out Hannah was having another baby.

ARENA: To be sure now, Elizabeth is Hannah Nixon's sister, the President's aunt.

HARRISON: Yes. Elizabeth was very worried about her because it was very late in life. I think Ed [Edward Calvert Nixon] is seventeen years younger than Dick, and Don was between, but Don was close to Dick. Elizabeth felt that Hannah should never have had another child and it worried her terribly. She was worried because she was afraid it wouldn't be a successful venture. She said so many times children born so late in life are mentally incompetent and she really had a serious worry about it. And Elizabeth always felt that our children, mine and Bill's, were so much brighter than theirs because we had them later in life. We were nearly thirty when we had our children and they had theirs very young. And she had this awful misconception of what makes for a good personality, and she thought that Ed would be a complete failure and she asked me how we fed our children. We had a pediatrician.

ARENA: And by she, this would be Mrs. Hannah Nixon?

HARRISON: No, Elizabeth.

ARENA: I see. She was the one who was really concerned.

HARRISON: Elizabeth would relay all this information to Hannah. She thought Hannah didn't have what was necessary. She didn't have a specialist for birth and she didn't have a specialist for her children . . .

ARENA: Excuse me. Wasn't there also the fact that two children had died, as you know, Harold [Samuel Nixon] and Arthur [Burdg Nixon]?

HARRISON: Yes. I didn't know them at all. I remember when Hannah was away in Arizona with one of the boys. But Elizabeth had absolutely unscientific knowledge of these things but she was trying to help her. And during that time I had a kind of empathy with Hannah. She was so complacent about it all. She didn't worry. She wasn't afraid. She had her faith and she went right through it without any worry.

ARENA: Could I dwell on that just a moment more--the character and personality of the President's mother. It is a fact that we noted earlier that she had gone on through college, although she did not graduate. She married a man, as the President has said, who did not have more than a sixth grade education. And although it is said that opposites attract, in this case they really were opposites. How is it that a young girl who came from a fairly well-known local family in the sense of them being one of the near pioneer families, they lived in a nice home and he was successful, and she married, in a way, a man who came in from outside. How does this tie in with your assessment of Hannah Nixon's character and personality?

HARRISON: I think she was probably swept off her feet, the way Elizabeth was swept off her feet in the same way. Of course, Russell had a great deal of background with parents who had graduated from college and were outstanding citizens, but Russell and Frank were both dashing young men. They were quite sporty for that day and I think it was new to the girls. And Frank and Russell seemed at first to be very good friends, but they got so they weren't after a while. But Hannah imparted her concern for her family to me several times. She said, "This is no way to bring up a family," the way she was doing it, and she seemed to admire the way we were doing it. And she thought I stayed home and kept the house and reared the children, but of course I didn't because I also was active in what Bill had to do. A professional man has to have a wife that will take all these activities and be somewhat helpful.

ARENA: And was it not a fact that Hannah and her husband, Frank, were much more on the move than you were too. They did make a trip up to Indiana--I think that may have been a honeymoon trip--but they did go to Indiana shortly after their marriage. But they definitely lived in Lindsay [California] for a while and lived in Yorba Linda [California] for a while.

HARRISON: And in Pennsylvania.

ARENA: And in Pennsylvania many years later, of course, but in the early years they seemed to move around so much. In the President's own lifetime, of course, it was Yorba Linda and East Whittier. And she was aware, you are saying, that the family did not have roots, and that could also have been one of the reasons possibly why she envied you.

HARRISON: Yes. She would confide to me that she wasn't doing for her children what she ought to do. But I felt that she did. The essential things she looked after.

ARENA: May I ask you now, Mrs. Harrison, about your direct contact with Mrs. Hannah Nixon and her work in the community and especially through her church. First of all,

did you have any contact with her outside of the church? I am thinking of organizations such as the PEO or the Woman's Auxiliary of Whittier College or any of these other organizations. That's just the simple question: As far as you know, did you and she belong to such non-religious organizations?

HARRISON: I know she was not a PEO, in any chapter. Membership is by invitation. She came to college auxiliary, I know that. I was loan chairman there for a number of years and she would be at college auxiliary meetings sometimes, but part of the time it was just impossible for her to do anything.

ARENA: Why would that be?

HARRISON: Just tied down to the store. She kept all the books. She was there whenever you went in. She did all the telephoning, and she smoothed out all the customer problems.

ARENA: Do you recall any incidents where you saw her engaging in pure physical labor around the store? I am thinking of heavy physical labor?

HARRISON: No, unless it was in making pies by the dozens for people. I know she did that. But I never saw her do it.

ARENA: For example, I'm thinking of one person who mentioned in an interview that he saw her carry a slab of beef because Mr. [Francis Anthony] Nixon was suffering from the gout, as he put it, and he just couldn't do it. And he recalled seeing something like that. And I am just wondering if you actually ever saw anything like that?

HARRISON: No, I never did.

ARENA: Could you believe though that that could have happened that she could have engaged in such heavy physical labor?

HARRISON: She would have tried if it seemed necessary.

ARENA: May I ask you too on the question of her participating in these different organizations, again non-religious, I'm thinking of the one you just mentioned, the Whittier College Woman's Auxiliary. Do you recall her contribution when she did attend? Did she speak up at the meetings, we'll say, or was she not the type to speak up at meetings?

HARRISON: No. No.

ARENA: Now may I ask you the same thing regarding Mrs. Hannah Nixon and her role in the different church groups. One thought comes to mind. The President mentioned, and I believe this was in his book, Six Crises, and referring to his mother that she had hoped when he was a youngster that he would some day be a missionary in Central America. I don't know if you recall that statement or not. But I do know he quotes that and he said that himself--the President. Do you recall that she ever evidenced such an interest for her children, including the President, that he would be active in the missionary arm of the Quaker church?

HARRISON: I think every Quaker mother had the idea that she would turn out so many ministers or missionaries. That's the way they used to think. But I didn't hear her say anything about that.

ARENA: May I ask you what you do recall about some of the committees, possibly jointly, some of the committees in which she participated.

HARRISON: No, she was in the East Whittier church and we were in the First Friends.

ARENA: How about the Yearly Meetings where possibly you did get together.

HARRISON: No, I don't think she did any committee work that I know of.

ARENA: Is there anything else about Mrs. Hannah Nixon that I have not asked that you would like to state for the historical record, anything that I have not mentioned from your firsthand recollections?

HARRISON: Well, Ed used to be at our house quite a lot and when she cooked for her family she would likely use what they weren't going to be able to sell and sometimes she would send up a pan of squash already cooked or something because Eddie was staying up there and being under my care quite a bit and she wanted to help out. And she would call and say, "We're coming up now to the bank, would you like for Ed to come home while we are up there?" They would come to the United California Bank, then the Whittier National Trust and Savings Bank. And she'd say, "We'll bring him home now if you want him to come." But we were glad to have him and enjoyed having him. And Bill [William Lewis Harrison] would stay out there sometimes, too, but their fare was quite different from ours. She cooked, as I say, what needed to be cooked and my cooking was different and my serving was different, but our Bill always enjoyed being out there with them. She did it the easiest way possible.

ARENA: You mentioned that she did have a hard life. At the same time was she able to stand up on her own? I was thinking, for example, if there were differences between her and her husband about the store, about the children. Can you recall any incidents where her own firmness, her own determination made itself shown, if you know what I mean?

HARRISON: Well, I don't altogether.

ARENA: I'm wondering, for example, if there may have been arguments between Mr. Frank Nixon and the sons; would she be on the sidelines completely; would she try to interfere and how would she interfere from the standpoint of maybe bringing the argument to an end; would she take a side with Mr. Frank Nixon or one of the boys, if you ever saw anything like that?

HARRISON: No, I don't know what she would do in a case of a difficulty like that. I remember Frank was a little hard on the boys. Our Bill helped out there sometimes. When Eddie needed to work, Bill worked too.

ARENA: Excuse me. By Bill you're talking about your son?

HARRISON: Our son. And they had an idea one time that the store room needed reorganizing, so they went to work and put all the pop bottles that were outgoing in one area and all the things that were coming in in another area and they cleaned it up in good shape. Frank didn't like it because he said he couldn't find things. And it was probably true. [Laughter] So the boys didn't know what to do. But I remember that Hannah was afraid that Frank had scolded the boys too hard for it. She called me in apology, for fear Bill was hurt.

ARENA: The first interview has come to an end. I hope you will grant me a second one in which we will concern ourselves directly with your contact with the other members of the President's family, especially Edward. Thank you very much.