



10-10-1971

Raymond Irving Burbank (October 28, 1971)

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

MR. RAYMOND IRVING BURBANK

October 28, 1971
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is an interview with Mr. Raymond Irving Burbank of Whittier, California. The date is October 28, 1971, the interview in Whittier, California, by Arena. Shall we begin, Mr. Burbank, by my asking you where and when you were born and your present position, so that we have some idea of your own background before we go into the interview?

BURBANK: Yes. I was born in 1914 in Huntington Park, California, just at the beginning of the first World War, and currently I'm living in Whittier, teaching in the East Whittier City School District, at the Granada Intermediate School, where I teach literature and Spanish.

ARENA: Would you mind if I ask you if that school was in existence at the time of the President's attending the East Whittier Elementary School?

BURBANK: No, it was not. This school is much newer. He attended the East Whittier School which is now ONE of our intermediate schools. We have three: Hillview and Granada Schools are much more recent. This school is only about twelve or fourteen years old.

ARENA: I see. Would you mind giving--again from the standpoint of your own background coming out, so a student of history can have a better appreciation of your remarks,

knowing something about your education--a resume of your own, say, professional and personal background, as much as you care to.

BURBANK: I'm glad to. I grew up in this area, this neighborhood, where I knew Richard Nixon in the church, in the Sunday School, as we were teenagers. And then I worked in the local area in agriculture for several years before going to college. I attended Asbury College in Kentucky and also the theological seminary there, in preparation for the ministry, particularly expecting to go into foreign missionary work, which I did, after several years of pastoral experience in California. We went with our family to Honduras, under the California Friends Board of Missions, where we spent five years in the mission field. Returning on furlough, we spent a year here where I ministered with the Mexican church of Friends in West Whittier. Then, taking up education, I went into the teaching field in elementary school, teaching for nine years in elementary, and now have taught for six years in the intermediate, going there for the Spanish program and now, the last two years, I've been in the field of literature, having specialized in reading when I was in elementary. And my special interest all along has been communication through language, spoken and written.

ARENA: From the standpoint of further potentially helpful interviews regarding the President's life, and I want to remind you--I might have mentioned this earlier before the tape was on--that this particular project deals with the period of the President's birth, which was almost the same as yours by the way, 1913 until the time he enters into politics, which was 1945. The reason I mention that is that you may think of persons of your generation, which is the same as that of the President, including neighbors, whether they were personal friends or acquaintances, and certainly people of all ethnic backgrounds, such as the Mexicans, who made up the community in your generation and that of the President. So, if there are any names like that, whether they can speak English or not, because language would not be a deterring factor, we would like to meet those of Spanish-speaking ability, and in some cases of the old-timers it might be their only language. But whether it is Spanish or Spanish and English, by all means please bring them in and, hopefully, we could ask them questions which would throw light on the President's personal history.

Could I ask you this overall question before we go into detail regarding your personal contacts with the President? Would you summarize your direct contacts with the President as much as you can? For example, did you play with him before entering school, maybe in

Sunday School, or maybe playing with him at the store; your religious contact with him from the standpoint of Sunday School or choir during regular service, as many of the experiences regarding the religious aspect as possible, the formal education, in the sense of attending Whittier Elementary School. And then, of course, some of the indirect things, such as attending some of the debates in which he participated on the high school or college level, which were open to the public, although you were not a student, necessarily, in the same school, but possibly you attended some of these functions where he appeared.

And finally--this is by no means exhaustive, but these are points that readily come to mind and you might think of others--his appearance in plays that were put on by the college, which might have been open to the public, as well as the Community Players of the city of Whittier, who put on plays in which he participated. A resume, as much as you can, before going into detail. A general resume of your direct contact with the President over the years.

BURBANK: Well, I first knew Richard Nixon when we were probably young teenagers there in Sunday School. I didn't know him until I started attending there in East Whittier. He and his brother were in the Sunday School class.

ARENA: His brother, excuse me . . .

BURBANK: This would be Donald [Francis Donald Nixon]. Now Donald and I were in school together at the Lowell School.

Richard was attending East Whittier School. Why the two brothers were not attending the same school I don't recall, and I did know, but I was aware of this as a fact. So I had heard Don speak of Dick before I even met him, because Don was one of the gang of boys that I played with. Then in Sunday School, I guess we were really in high school before I knew Dick. And we were not really close. There was another group of fellows that I ran with more, to the beach, played sand-lot football on Sunday afternoon and so forth. We sometimes played out in front of the Nixon place there on the Leffingwell Ranch. Dick seldom participated; he was busy with his studies and doing his homework. And these are some of the things that I remember. He was fairly regular in Sunday School, sometimes stayed for worship, sometimes not. He was very infrequently in church for the Sunday evening events, begging off for homework, studies. He was very disciplined. He was always consistently tough on himself, but I don't remember him being other than generous and gentle with other people at that time.

ARENA: Would this be too difficult for you to answer? Your subject compels me to ask the question. Do you think that the discipline was coming from himself or from the outside, namely, his parents or someone else? Or could you not tell from that experience?

BURBANK: I'm quite convinced that it was self-motivated, that he had this inner urge and drive to excel, and he was very businesslike and very organized, and he wanted to do a good job. When we did get him to a social event, he would enter in and be the life of the party, because he was clever, he was witty and he would participate and people enjoyed having him there, because he added a lot of life to the party. So I remember a few times when they were the social times when he participated. Usually he wasn't there because of other commitments--debating or his homework and studying--so that he was not one for a lot of social life at that time. When he had a commitment at the church, was asked to participate in something, he did a better job than the average person because he would work at it enthusiastically and do research and put the thing over. So this was characteristic of him as long as I knew him. In the Sunday School class I remember there were discussions that would come up and, while some would echo other's viewpoints, he was always an individual. He thought things through himself.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask who the teacher was, of the Sunday School class?

BURBANK: There were various teachers at different times. Robert Sullivan was his teacher for a time, also Robert Brokaw.

ARENA: And by the way, if you recall, if it comes to mind where these persons might be now, it would be helpful.

BURBANK: Yes. Robert Sullivan is still out there at the church. He is elderly. I know he has been interviewed before. He and his wife are very gracious and would be helpful. I remember one, Robert Brokaw, who is no longer with our church. I don't know whether he is still living. I remember when he was the teacher of the class. I remember another man whom I know is deceased.

ARENA: If I'm not mistaken, and this might come to mind, I believe I've read in articles by his cousin, Jessamyn

West, that her father [Eldo R. West] was the President's Sunday School teacher for a while and his father [Francis Anthony] Frank Nixon was her Sunday School teacher. Does that come to mind?

BURBANK: I believe I've heard that. I remember having heard that Eldo West was at one time a teacher of the class.

ARENA: You weren't necessarily in that same class.

BURBANK: Well, I wasn't at that time. Now I was only in the class briefly with Mr. [Richard] Nixon, because very early in my Sunday School career I was hauled out to be a teacher, and I taught in the junior department and then in the junior high department, so that I was in Christian education and only occasionally was in the class.

ARENA: Can you recall possibly Richard Nixon himself becoming a Sunday School teacher?

BURBANK: This was later. I was told that after I had left. When I went away to college, and I guess he was practicing law here locally, he became a Sunday School teacher. This I have heard from some of my other associates. And I think it was during this time that he was known more for playing the piano for the opening exercises of Sunday School, which has been mentioned to the public, although I remember him playing some.

ARENA: Would that have been noted, and was noteworthy, because he did it and it was not usual, or was it usual for a pianist or someone with a musical instrument to conduct Sunday School classes in that fashion, as far as you can recollect? For example, in your own case, did you have a mastery of some musical instrument and use that during the Sunday School class?

BURBANK: No, my musical inclination was vocal, and I don't remember Dick singing, but he took lessons and played the piano quite well.

ARENA: I was just wondering if that was unusual at that time, that a person would play in Sunday School?

BURBANK: No. Further back in Quaker history it would have been more unusual, as Jessamyn West writes in Friendly Persuasion, but at the time that I began attending the

Friends, we had a piano and later an organ. But the piano was used regularly for song services in the Sunday School.

ARENA: Would you mind if I asked you--and don't answer if you have any objection at all, of course--are you a birth-right or a convinced Quaker?

BURBANK: I'm a convinced Quaker. I came to this church from a different background. I came because I was invited by a peer, and I began attending, and my parents did not attend there until later. They followed me there. I came through association and then I stayed with it by choice.

ARENA: My reason for that question, by the way, is not merely out of personal interest but, as you know, another famous Nixon became a convinced Quaker and that was the President's father, Frank Nixon.

BURBANK: Yes.

ARENA: So I would like to explore, with your permission, the life of the convinced Quaker, with the idea that this isn't necessarily what happened to the President's father, but it would give some insight, possibly, into his own personal life.

BURBANK: Yes. I understand. The Quaker persuasion has been mine because of the particular emphases in the church that appeal to me more than some of the other denominations, particularly the individual responsibility to God and to the Bible, rather than subscribing to a particular creed set up by a denomination. There has been a freedom. . . . There are a number of emphases in our church such as the peace emphasis, against war. However, a young man in our church may take the conscientious objector position and have the support of the church and go that route and do alternate service; his brother may join the Army, and both are equally accepted in the church. Neither one is frowned upon. It's their choice. It's their individual choice, according to their individual conscience. This is the emphasis of the church that particularly appealed to me.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you what your previous denomination had been?

BURBANK: My parents were in the Baptist denomination.

ARENA: It might be of interest, I don't know if you are aware, but Mr. Frank Nixon had been a Methodist.

BURBANK: Yes. I had attended a number of Baptist churches and the Brethren, Christian Missionary Alliance. It didn't matter to me as a child.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you at what age you did become a convinced Quaker? By age, I don't mean year but . . .

BURBANK: I went in as a teenager and lived there and attended the church quite regularly for a period of time until when I went away to college, I was twenty-three.

ARENA: Again, from the standpoint of understanding the Frank Nixon situation, what would the formal process if any--
I assume there would be--what would the formal process of your becoming a convinced Quaker consist of, so that if one would want to find the evidence that Frank Nixon at a given time and place, and under a certain circumstance, became a convinced Quaker, I would have a basis for doing it. Because as of now I don't know and I would like to track that down.

BURBANK: Yes. The practice now is, of course, when a person attends our services and indicates a preference for our particular church and would like to become a member, then he is interviewed, usually by one of the pastors, the pastor or associate minister, and enrolled in a membership class. And the names of applicants for membership are brought to the Ministry and Counsel which, back in the history of the church, was called Ministry and Oversight or Elders and Overseers and, incidentally, I serve on this body of the church, Ministry and Counsel. In the later years of Hannah Nixon at the church, she was on that body and we worked together.

ARENA: In addition, as you can suspect, to asking you about your direct contact with President Nixon, I would also like to know your direct contact with the other members of the President's family, including Mrs. Hannah Nixon.

BURBANK: We were very good friends, and while I'm on this point, I recall so many times she was very faithful to the meetings. She would be there for Ministry and Counsel and would seldom say anything, seldom speak up during the meeting. You could tell she was listening very intently, and then she would

nod approval, or when we decided something should be recommended to the monthly meeting, she would give her approval. But after the meeting, on more than one occasion, she came to me--I was clerk of the Ministry and Counsel--and she would express to me personally her appreciation of the way the situation had been handled.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if clerk in this sense would be chairman or the person in charge?

BURBANK: Yes.

ARENA: I see. And that is still the expression?

BURBANK: That is the term we use. The plain speech idea of the Quakers rather than president or chairman. We have tried to use the less auspicious, the less important-sounding term.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you what her coming up to you and giving her personal feelings like that meant to you at the time?

BURBANK: It meant a great deal, because she carried a lot of weight with me as a person, even before she became so much in the limelight as the Vice President's mother. She was just a very stable and staunch character and deeply spiritual and thoughtful. This was her character, and so I appreciated very much her viewpoint.

ARENA: Did you ever meet her mother by any chance, Almira Milhous, the President's grandmother?

BURBANK: No.

ARENA: Of course, she belonged to the other church in Whittier, the First Friends, but I thought they might possibly have been together.

BURBANK: I remember the name, but I don't recall having met her. I might have seen her but not a real face-to-face presentation.

ARENA: Well, if you don't mind continuing with this general survey of your overall direct contact with the President including, which is very important, this religious

contact, please continue with that subject, and if you can think of any more incidents--not incidents in detail now but general contact and then the other areas as well.

BURBANK: Yes. Well, my main contact with him was, of course, at church, because he attended the other school. I was not aware of him in high school at Fullerton. I understand that he attended Fullerton High School for a year or two and then came to Whittier.

ARENA: It was two years, and if this might help you in your recollection, setting the time, he graduated from Whittier High School in 1930, so it must have been 1926-27, those two years, beginning there, and then he transferred . . .

BURBANK: Yes. So he was in high school two years ahead of me if he graduated in 1930. That's why, because I attended Fullerton High School, but the two years he attended were just before I entered and then he switched to Whittier. And that's why I was not a schoolmate with him at any time. So our contact was entirely through church, and there it was in the Sunday School class in a few social events connected with the church. Occasionally I would see him at his house, if I dropped in with some of the other fellows. We were closer, really, with Don, who was my contemporary. I made a few stops in the store. Sometimes I'd see Dick in the store, the meat department, or whatever. And his dad was there and, of course, the boys drove an old Dodge pick-up delivery truck. I remember some scary rides in it with Don. I don't recall ever riding in it with Dick. I just remember him being there and the things that I've mentioned.

His character stood out to me because he was striking against the others in his attitude. I remember in Sunday School class, some of the discussions, for example. We were in high school, and before we'd get into the Sunday School lesson the boys were talking about everything. One day, for example, we were discussing foreign language. It was a requirement and some of the boys were taking Spanish because it was the easiest. Dick was going to take four years of Latin in high school, and somebody said, "Why?" "Well," he said, "with a basis of Latin you can understand the derivations of all the languages and, besides, it's good training for the mind." This was his attitude toward education.

ARENA: How old was he at that time?

BURBANK: A high school boy, maybe sixteen.

ARENA: If I'm not mistaken, you do have a personal interest in language studies. Isn't that still one of the main arguments, one of the main classical arguments, for the study of Latin, as a basis for, especially the romance languages, and the other being that you must put in regular hours, not necessarily regular, but you must put in time, and that involves discipline in order to succeed in it. And I do know, as a student of Latin myself, that that was one of the arguments.

BURBANK: The study of foreign language involves discipline and drill, which I find many of the modern students aren't ready to make that effort. And, of course, for Dick Nixon there was no stinting on effort, and then the idea of the disciplined mind. My concept of education is not the gathering of information but training the mind and developing skills, and it seemed to me that Dick had that concept and was doing this to himself, consciously. He was rather precocious in this, because as such a young person he disciplined himself in his study habits and his organization. Now, I was aware that he was outstanding as a debater, and I would hear them talking about some of his triumphs and winning a debate. I never did hear any of the debates. I'm sorry that I didn't, but it was quite well known at that time that he was a speaker and was training in that field.

ARENA: To complete that overall survey, even if it's negative, I did want to find out if you did have contact with him in a direct way even after the high school period. For example, did you see any of the football games in which he participated, although he sat on the bench most of the time? And even, say, during the law school years where he might have popped in and out of Whittier from Duke [Law School], and what happened during the period after that, say, becoming a lawyer in 1937; and again, of course, going off for military duty, which brings us back to 1945.

BURBANK: Well, I can give you just a couple of incidents that are very clear in my mind.

ARENA: Good.

BURBANK: One--I believe this was after I was out of high school and he was probably in college. I didn't go to college until five years later. I went to college in 1937, and

so I left this part and was not around when he started his law practice. But when we were just young fellows, a group of us from the church--I can remember there were seventeen of us--chartered a boat down here at Long Beach [California] and went deep-sea fishing, and Dick and Don were in the group. We were out all day. There were about four or five of the fellows that were quite affected by the motion of the sea, and two of them who were quite sick were Dick and Don. And I remember Don--this is what I would have done if I had been sick--I remember him lying over the big tanks there, mid-ship, where there was the least roll, and kind of taking it easy and waiting the thing out. Dick was in the prow of the boat, where it goes up and down the most, and he would alternately feed the fish and then catch them. And someone suggested to him, "Why don't you trade places with me, I'm not the least bit sick, come over here in the middle where the motion isn't so violent?" He said, "No, I'm all right." He'd stick it out where he was. He had paid to go fishing and he was going to fish. He fished all day in spite of his many upheavals and feeding the fish. We knew he was miserable and sick, but he tried to pretend he wasn't. If it hadn't of been for the regurgitation, we wouldn't have known he was sick, because he was determined he was going to fish, and he did. I think . . .

ARENA: I assume he didn't ask that the boat return.

BURBANK: No. [Laughter]

ARENA: He was going to stick it out.

BURBANK: In fact, I have thought of this. I have often marveled at men who will go on with their work when they're sick and have a headache. When I feel bad, I want some time off to recuperate. But I recall when I found it necessary to keep going, I was a long ways from home, in the forests and jungles of Honduras on a mule, and I was sick and I couldn't quit. I was sick but I had to keep going. And I remembered that occasion with Dick out on the fishing boat. So this, of course, is an interesting insight into his character. Tough, he's tough on himself. I don't remember of him ever making fun of anybody else for being soft or lazy. I understood, or I had heard, that there were arguments between Dick and his brother, over little things like the funny paper on Sunday morning, but I just don't recall in any of Dick's contacts with other people anything other than a generous and looking-for-the-best-in-the-other-fellow attitude.

ARENA: And again, to make sure, there was no attendance on your part at any of the plays in which he participated.

BURBANK: No.

ARENA: Were you aware that he had this interest in acting and in drama, even though you didn't attend the plays?

BURBANK: I just don't recall that ever, but the debating, and I knew he went out for football, but I really wasn't aware of the drama side. Now another little incident that came up. After he was in his law practice and had gone into the service during the second World War, I had come from my training and entered the ministry in Yorba Linda [California], his birthplace. That was my first stand as a pastor, the Friends Church in 1942. I took that post in September. Early in the next year I came down with an illness that put me in the hospital for a while, and Dick was out in the Pacific somewhere, a Lieutenant Commander, and he heard that I was sick, and he sent me a gift of money at that time. I hadn't been in touch with him for several years. But this was his response when he heard through some mutual friends that I was ill. This, of course, was very touching and shows a loyalty of friendship that is way beyond. If you're close in, it's nice to help a fellow out, but this showed a thoughtfulness that is out and beyond. And this was very meaningful to me, the thought even more than the donation. But, you see, there were years in between when we had not been in contact at all.

ARENA: Now, if you don't mind, I would like to retrace our footsteps and try to ask questions that will deal with some of the general areas that were brought up earlier, where I had asked you not to go into detail, so that we could go into detail now. For example, the period of playing around with Donald and, though you say you were not on a close level with the President, nevertheless, what you recall in the way of the description of Donald and the President, the types of games that were played, and when they were played. Were Donald and the President expected to come directly home after school and finish certain chores? Did you and Donald play immediately when you came home from school? Were you invited to eat with the family during any of this period and, if so, what can you describe in the way of food that was offered and so forth?

BURBANK: No, I did not have that experience of eating in the home. I'm not too clear on the details. It seemed to me that I remember Don needing to get home after school to the store to help. I know the boys were in the store quite a bit in the afternoon.

ARENA: Do you recall, possibly, if they handled money at that point? This would be still the elementary level.

BURBANK: Oh, yes. I'm sure that they would wait on customers and take care of that. Don was driving the delivery (truck) really before he should have been, I think even legally. And then I remember Miss [Elizabeth] Yoder down there at the Parnell School on Scott Avenue talking about Don coming by and back-firing, and getting the attention of the girls at the girls' school there. Let's see . . .

ARENA: Whatever you can recall in the way of activities involving, but not necessarily, the President, but to get an idea of his home life as you recall it.

BURBANK: Don was more rambunctious and he worked, I think, more in the store. And Dick would do his part; I'm sure he didn't shirk. I think Don hung around the store more because he was not as academic, and Dick would do his hitch and get off to his studies as quickly as possible. This was characteristic of his nature. I'm trying to recall some of the social times, like a New Year's Eve party, where I remember Don making a lot of noise. We were all doing noise-making, but he was back-firing that old Dodge, making it pop, because it was loud. He would go out and do that, whereas Dick would kind of look on, amused, but not as much a participant in that sort of thing, just making noise for noise sake. Now at a party, I remember games, thought games, where you were trying to guess where it was or what was the answer. Dick was very adept at this. He could throw out a question that would stump somebody else, and he'd have a clever clue. This sort of thing he was very good at.

ARENA: At these parties, may I ask, including the New Year's one, were these family-type affairs where the parents as well as the brothers [the Nixon brothers] were together and other families, or were these teenage parties, so to speak?

BURBANK: They were largely teenage parties. There would be some adult sponsors. Some of them were held in the basement of the church. Some were in a home where the parents of the individual there were present. I can remember a couple of these situations. But, as for the outdoor games, I remember playing softball and touch football with Don, as I say, often right in front of the Nixon house. We played on the street that is now Santa Gertrudes [Avenue] right by Whittwood Center. It was just a little oiled road going down to Leffingwell Ranch, and we could play in the street with very few interruptions by automobile traffic. And I remember Richard coming to the door, calling Don in for something or other, and the fellows talking to him and wanting him to come out and play, but he was busy studying. I remember this, on Sunday afternoon. I just recall that we frequently played there on that street because it was the gathering place for the kids in the neighborhood. There would be five or six or seven of us there.

ARENA: When he did come out to play, he seemed to enjoy it, because I believe you said earlier, he put everything into it.

BURBANK: Well, I recall this at parties. I don't remember him coming out, really, to play with us on that basis. He may have when I wasn't there. I wasn't there as often as some of the others, because this was after I was sixteen and had my first car. Oh, I may have been over there a few times bicycling the three miles but I wasn't over there every Sunday, by any means.

ARENA: What was your impression regarding Whittier and East Whittier? Was Whittier the big city or was Whittier just another East Whittier and Los Angeles [California] was the big city? Did you feel as though you were a country boy, or was there so much contact between you, the people in East Whittier and Los Angeles, that there didn't seem to be any separation of that type?

BURBANK: We were definitely country people. The Nixon store was the only store between La Habra and Whittier. La Habra [California] in those days was very small, all localized in one place. And Whittier was uptown, of course; this was before the Quad and all of this, and from La Habra to Whittier was all citrus groves, sparsely settled with houses. I remember going up and down Gunn Avenue when there were only three houses between

Lambert [Road] and Whittier Boulevard. Those houses are still there. I just live around the corner. And I used to come there to work on the Sharpless Ranch, so that it was definitely rural. There was one brief period that I worked on Leffingwell Ranch, after I was out of high school, it was depression, and we did what we could find to do. But it was definitely country, open country and the store had quite an advantage because it was the ONLY store between those towns, and they began to expand and have their little bakery shop, and you could stop in there for a donut and a cup of coffee. This was added later. And then, of course, it went into the restaurant business. But I do remember going into the store occasionally. It was an old country store with a great variety of merchandise for farm people.

ARENA: How would you describe Donald as a youngster, going to school with you, bearing this in mind: Did he suffer by contrast, in that Richard was so outstanding, that if Donald were just average he would look less than average because his brother was so good? Or was he really not interested and, let's say, even hostile to books and study? Now, whatever you care to say about that situation.

BURBANK: Yes. Well, I remember in the classes that he was a very slow reader, and I can remember one little interaction between Donald and the teacher when we were preparing a play and the parents would be coming, and he was resisting and not behaving too well, and I remember the teacher asking him, "Do you want this to be a success or a flat failure?" Well, of course, she had riled him up, so of course he said, "Flat failure." And he was not too much given to the studies and the books. Looking back on it, of course, I suspect that he was, at least subconsciously, very much pushed down by being the lesser student. His business ability showed up later, but in those years, like in seventh and eighth grade, when we were in school together, he was not a bright star academically. He was one of those below the middle of the class in reading.

ARENA: Was there ever any occasion where you were present that you heard anyone, the father, the mother, an aunt or an uncle, a minister, some older person, saying to Donald, "Why don't you be like Richard," or something like that in effect?

BURBANK: No, I don't recall hearing that. I've heard reports of the father's temperament and disposition from other people.

ARENA: But you've never witnessed anything firsthand about the father's temper, or disciplining of the boys, or yelling to them to come back in and help in the store, while you were there or anything like that?

BURBANK: No, I don't recall that. I could assume a lot, because Don was kind of happy-go-lucky, where Richard was self-motivated and very organized, and so you can see what would naturally happen.

ARENA: Did you EVER see Richard lose his cool as the modern expression goes, lose his temper, get excited, under any circumstances, all the time you've known him? Not just in this early period but anywhere along the line, and the occasion that motivated that.

BURBANK: No, I haven't. He may have lost it but kept it hidden. But I've never seen him lose his self-control.

ARENA: Did he ever get into a fight with some of the other boys?

BURBANK: I haven't seen this. I've seen Don scrapping with other boys over something very small, but I never did see Richard Nixon involved in that sort of thing.

ARENA: Did you ever see Richard working for others during this early pre-high school period? Did he do jobs for, maybe, some of the farmers, cut grass or anything along those lines?

BURBANK: He may have. I was not a witness to anything of that nature. We were really early teenagers when we got acquainted and most of our contacts were at church events.

ARENA: Then as we go into that next phase, I would like to go into detail now.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: So, with your approval, Mr. Burbank, let us go more into detail into the area discussed generally a moment ago, the question of religious background, religious activities

and beliefs of the President as you recall them. First of all, if I can be a bit philosophical, bearing in mind that the President was serious--you noticed that he thought a great deal, he did stick to his books, and that you, as it turns out, had in mind a missionary bent and a missionary aim--did you and he ever get together on serious subjects during your acquaintanceship with him and philosophize?

BURBANK: No, I don't recall doing that on a one-to-one basis. I just recall some of the brief discussions in the Sunday School class, and I recall that the boys--you know how teenage boys will raise questions that kind of challenge the establishment--and Richard, I remember, was consistently thoughtful. He didn't come up with an answer without first thinking it through, and he would make a very definite statement, and he was always on the side of the Bible, the church teaching or whatever was considered to be right. He had thought it through and was on the side of what was considered by the major group to be right. He was on that side, very definitely. And he would make a very definite statement that would sometimes conclude the argument. The kids would raise very flimsy things, as young people will, and he didn't show a great deal of impatience, but he just didn't have time for the flimsy. He would make a definite statement as though he had thought it through and he believed it. I remember this as being very characteristic.

ARENA: Do you recall, possibly, that this positive attitude of his, where there were differences of view, took place between him and the Sunday School teacher and what happened?

BURBANK: I remember more his giving support to the teacher's statement when the other kids were more questioning or ". . . but what if this . . ." you know, and he would have the answers practically as well as the teacher. He was kind of an in-between; he was way ahead of the rest of us in understanding and firmness of belief.

ARENA: From the standpoint of filling in the background, would you mind describing what might be called a typical Sunday School class attended by Richard Nixon, the typical book or books that were assigned, typical amount of time that was spent, both at home and in the Sunday School class; how long did they last?

BURBANK: The Sunday School class would probably last forty-five minutes. There would be a fifteen minute, fifteen or twenty minute opening exercises when we all met in the main sanctuary. Oh, yes, I remember they would ring the bell--the old bell that we still have there, it can be heard in the community--and someone would ring it long enough so that if you were in the church yard you could get in before it quit ringing and be counted on time. They made a great deal of taking the roll immediately, and each class would answer how many they had on time. And there were those, of course, that were always very close. Of course, Richard would be one of those that was on time. I don't remember him particularly getting after others that were late or slow, perhaps looking their way, but he, himself, was very punctual. Then in the class discussion . . .

ARENA: Excuse me. On this physical arrangement, was there more than one class meeting in the main sanctuary, meeting in clusters?

BURBANK: Yes, there would be several classes meeting there for the opening. Then after the opening song, the roll was called and the number in each class on time [reported], then we would go to our separate classrooms. I can remember meeting when the class was fairly large in a basement room. I can remember when the class was small, for some reason or other it wasn't as large at that time, meeting up in the prayer room next to the belfry. I remember sitting in there. I remember seeing Dick sit there discussing things.

Then in the class session, of course, we would study from a quarterly, a little printed material that would, perhaps, take up the life of Christ, a book of the Bible or the journeys of St. Paul or something of this nature. And sometimes the teacher would have us each read a verse. That was an old method that was often used. There would be a little bit of giggling over the mispronunciation of a word or something. And some of the boys tended to take it a little bit lightly, where Richard did not participate in that. He was all serious. He wasn't unpleasant or gruff, he just didn't bother with that. But, of course, when it was his turn to read, he would read with emphasis and good diction and expression and make the most of it.

Then we would discuss; the teacher would bring out questions and ask questions--what do you think about this and that? Richard would reserve a little, and then he would cap things, occasionally, because he knew the answers. He could have come right out with the

answers at the beginning, but he wasn't one to parade his knowledge. He gave the other fellows a chance to speak up. And if he held off silent for a while, he would probably be asked what he thought about it, and he would always have an opinion, an answer that was thought through.

ARENA: Do you recall that the Sunday School classes would take into account what today are called relevant questions, social questions of the time, possibly the economic aspects of the depression, international problems? Did they tie in current events in any way? Was that common or rare?

BURBANK: This would come in, not as much as it does now where it's almost the total content of many class discussions in church now. We got more into the historic background of how the scriptures were produced and what happened then, becoming familiar with the Bible stories, but there was application to contemporary living. Of course, there was a lot of discussion about the games and the world situation, whatever interested the boys. There would always be some discussion before we got into the lesson that was entirely irrelevant as far as the Sunday School lesson [was concerned], and then the teacher would kind of allow this and get us into the lesson as soon as it could be done without straining the situation too much. So, I remember some talk about the league standings, yesterday's game. The other fellows were more with it. There were more of them from the Whittier High area and sometimes I would be the only one from Fullerton [California], so I was not as much with it as the other fellows, didn't know what they were talking about.

ARENA: Were you attending from Fullerton because there was not enough Sunday School participants for Fullerton; is that why you came to East Whittier?

BURBANK: No. I lived in La Habra [California] which was close to the boundary between Whittier and Fullerton, and so I attended Fullerton High School, but I was on the west side of La Habra, three miles from the church, and I started by riding my bicycle there and later I got my car. So I came from that direction, where most of the fellows living around the church went to Whittier High School.

ARENA: Do you recall if, possibly, there were any unusual Sunday School classes, any emergency that developed, a special guest speaker, a special program, along these years?

BURBANK: Only special events sometimes in the opening exercises. Sometimes more time would be taken from class for everyone in the sanctuary to hear a missionary or a WCTU [Women's Christian Temperance Union] speaker or something of that nature, when the whole group would be assembled in the main part of the church. I recall some of the various, oh, not so many of the missionaries, but perhaps the president of the Missionary Society making an appeal. During the depression it sounded pretty bad. They didn't have the best tactics then. They would appeal and tell about the missionary being two and three months behind in their salary because the giving wasn't up to what was needed. But I remember this. I don't remember discussing it particularly in class but it had its effect on me when I felt a call to the mission field. I had a rather negative feeling about my own denomination. I made application to another society at first and hadn't really thought about going out under the Friends board. But I was in a Friends pastorate when an opening occurred, and the superintendent approached me about going into the field at that time, which we did. But the background, the Sunday School left a negative feeling with me about the missionary enterprise. It seemed like there was too much of a negative appeal and, of course, I don't know what Richard thought about it, but he was there. And there were other things that came up as I say. The WCTU had a pitch and this was during prohibition, of course, and they were pretty strong to try to keep it when it was tottering.

ARENA: This would be another general question. Did the Sunday School classes have a set format which predominated the ongoing Sunday activity, or was the Sunday School class really affected fundamentally by the personality of the current Sunday School teacher? For instance, I'm thinking of the fact that the President's father was a Sunday School teacher for a while and so was Mrs. Hannah Nixon, and I can see the same person having those two different teachers. Just whatever comments you would like to make on that situation.

BURBANK: Yes. I would say that the personality and inclination of the teacher would make the difference. The presentation of the material was not so structured by the Sunday School; it was left more to the individuality of the teacher, however he was able to present it or chose to present it. And some teachers would do more lecturing and others would do more questions and answers. I recall some of both.

ARENA: Could you recall a particularly stimulating Sunday School teacher, one who especially brought in such things as the missionary role of the church, the public service goals of the church, in which not only you but Richard Nixon himself, as best as you can recollect, participated in attending that class?

BURBANK: Well, at one time there was a younger man who came and directed the choir. He was a Moody Bible Institute man and had had training there. He was working in a bank, but he came as our choir director. His name was Win Haslett. He's not living now. His first name was Winfield and they called him Win. He came. We were having some special meetings, had a special speaker, don't remember who it was, but I remember the big thing then was the organization of a youth choir. And Richard was not in it nor did he play the piano, but I was in it, and a number of the young people of the church, and there was new enthusiasm, so this man became teacher of the class for a time, and he brought in more of the current issues, contemporary things and the application of our teachings in Sunday School to the contemporary scene. I just remember this more or less in general. I don't remember any single particular thing coming out of it, but that was our experience for a time.

A little sidelight on this. When this came to be, some of the people thought it would be great to have this young fellow. He had come as song leader during these evangelistic meetings. He was a song leader and very enthusiastic. Some of the people in the church thought it would be great to have him as the regular choir director. For years we had had an elderly gentleman, who's getting elderly now, Griffith Milhous, who is related in some way to the family, I don't remember how.

ARENA: Actually an uncle, one of the brothers or possibly half-brother of one of the brothers of the President's mother.

BURBANK: Yes, I knew it was something like that.

ARENA: Who taught music.

BURBANK: Yes. He was a fine musician. I never questioned it. He directed his choir and he had his little baton with a tassle on the end of it--a good man of the old school. I remember him conducting combined choirs at the Yearly Meeting, which was here in Whittier. I don't know how long he had been director of the choir, but some felt it was time for some new blood

and a new setup, and it was decided upon to call this young fellow, Haslett, to be our choir director. But now, how to tell Mr. Milhous? Now, this was just by hearsay, but someone told me that Frank Nixon said, "Well, I'll tell him" And being a relative we supposed that he felt he had a particular in, and afterward I heard that he was very brusque and abrupt, and it was not a very smooth transition at all. We didn't see any more of Mr. Griffith Milhous at the church, which we were sorry about, but the young man did come and directed the choir then for some time. I don't remember how long. I guess he was still there when I left that choir to go and take work elsewhere. I took up with a choir in another church, the Huntington Park Friends Church as choir director. So, I just remember that particular detail, which called to my attention the fact that Frank Nixon was not noted for being tactful or diplomatic. Anyone who knows the family is aware of this, of course.

ARENA: Were you aware, or did it ever come out through your contact with any of the Nixons or Milhouses, that Griffith Milhous did do some music teaching and that Richard Nixon was one of his pupils?

BURBANK: I recall that he was a teacher. Now Richard, of course, went up north and studied under his aunt.

ARENA: Mrs. Jane Beeson of Lindsay [California].

BURBANK: Yes. And, of course, by the way, her son, Richard's first cousin, Sheldon [Chantry Beeson] in Long Beach, I'm pretty sure he was on that fishing trip that time. Most of us were East Whittier boys, but I think Sheldon and another boy came up from Long Beach; well, we went to Long Beach and they lived there. It seems to me that Sheldon was along on that fishing trip.

ARENA: Most likely. Richard, of course, did live with Sheldon for a while when he went to Lindsay.

BURBANK: Yes, so there would be a tie . . .

ARENA: And Sheldon has a brother, Alden [Joseph Alden Beeson]. He might have been the other fellow, but you're not certain.

BURBANK: No, I think it was not a brother. It was another fellow not of the family, because I remember the fellow, I just don't remember his name. I remember he lost his pole.

ARENA: Do you want to speak further to that--losing the pole--was that an emergency? No one jumped in the water after it?

BURBANK: No, it just was a mackerel pole and it went.

ARENA: I don't recall if I said this on tape or off tape, but hopefully students of religion, regardless of their background, will make use of these taped interviews, and you being certainly a student of religion and a practitioner, a missionary practitioner at that, what type of questions would you like to see put by an historian regarding the President's life that you think would be of interest from the standpoint of teaching and from the standpoint of scholarly work that buttresses the teacher? What sort of questions and hopefully answers, but what sort of questions would you like to see put to ministers, put to persons who had a direct or indirect influence because, as you know, they have that privilege. I would be most appreciative of whatever comments you would make here. YOU would be the person asking questions. And you, a thoroughly serious student of religion, what type of questions would you like to see put regarding the President's religious background and life and education?

BURBANK: Well, I think probably it would be questions regarding what were the basic beliefs of the church that influenced his life. What were the main emphases, the basic things that were taught as being basic to what is considered right. It seems to me that this is fundamental. And, of course, with my particular knowledge and prejudice, I notice attitudes and pronouncements of the President which, to me, show results of this background--his use of language, his talk about concern, the deeper dimension, his statements about character and ethics, and his deep concern for the character of our people. To me this in his formative years and as a teenager, I feel that he was taking it all in, that he was all for it. The questioning that he must have had, because everyone does, he didn't trot out his doubts as many did. He always presented himself, whether consciously or unconsciously, as a person who had convictions and thought them through. And, of course, these convictions were based on the basic beliefs of the church, which are basically what the Bible teaches and that most denominations believe.

But many denominations, and again it's not always the denomination but the local or temporary leadership that goes off into

one or another tack of special emphasis or interest. One church will be more involved with the social gospel and another church will be more evangelistic. Now our church, back in those days, was evangelistic, where some other churches were known more for their social working out. Not that we neglected the missionary aspect or caring for the needy and so forth, but the main basis of our religious faith is a personal relationship to God and relationships to each other, first on the spiritual basis and this, of course, influencing our actions. It is these questions of what the church really stands for and what the relationship is that makes a difference in one's life. This, to me, is the important thing in religion, more important than a thoroughgoing historical knowledge or interpretation of the Bible in original languages and so forth, but the application of Bible principles to contemporary life. And I think this has been the objective, even though back in those days it was not applied with as much technique as we find it now, because we have teachers that are better trained. We're very selective and we keep a teacher training program going, so that techniques are more up-and-coming than back in those days.

ARENA: Can you think of other relatives of the President besides--I don't know if you know the Marshburns or not--Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Marshburn . . .

BURBANK: Yes.

ARENA: . . . And you also might know that not too long ago they did missionary activity in Africa. Would you happen to know if there was something similar to that on the part of any of the other relatives that coincided with your and the President's youth?

BURBANK: I don't recall anyone of that family being actively . . .

ARENA: Of the religious community then, as a whole can you recall those who were from Whittier or East Whittier or Fullerton who had come back from Central America, who had come back from Africa? And then, in a way, I guess what I'm getting around to is, whence YOUR source of inspiration?

BURBANK: Well, the pastor who was there, Harley Moore, daddy Moore, I often called him. He was the pastor when I first started attending there and was pastor for many

years, and he was responsible for the building of the present edifice, the sanctuary, although there have been other buildings added on since. And I recall that, personally, I had never quite coincided in my views with my father on Biblical doctrine. When I went to college I found that they agreed with me in doctrine, and I felt at home there at Asbury College. It is an interdenominational college but it is largely Methodist in flavor, and the so-called Armenian doctrine. Well, I had become indoctrinated by my church without realizing it, and things seemed plausible to me in the way they were explained, our explanations of the scriptures, both in the Sunday School and by our pastor. And I think the minister was the main influence there. I remember vaguely some of the missionaries who went to Alaska and to Central America, but they were not local people that I knew personally. They were people from far away. They were from some other community, and they perhaps came and visited our church because they were our missionaries at the Yearly Meeting. But I don't recall anyone until more recent times that I knew personally, local individuals from our own church going into the mission field at that time.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you this question? Consciously or unconsciously were you aware of the youthfulness, in a way, of Whittier? Here, especially being born in 1913, the city was founded only in 1887, and given, as you grew up, a history of the United States, here we have Plymouth [Massachusetts] 1620; Jamestown [Rhode Island] 1607; and we have the idea of Western history, the Western movement, the expansion of the United States. What influence, if there was any, do you think this had on you and your religious or other views--the utter youthfulness, the newness of the community?

BURBANK: I don't think I was at all conscious of the newness of the community. As a young person this didn't occur to me until later when, oh, discussion with some people from Britain, for example, I mentioned the old church out there on the boulevard, and they said, "What do you mean old? It's only fifty years old, that's new." But back in those years, I just wasn't conscious of this as a new community. Whittier was just a small town. Fullerton was a small town. La Habra in those days was just a little bit of a country town, very one-horse you know. The fellow who was mayor of La Habra--that wasn't impressive at all, because it was a very small place. Our address was La Habra, and we lived about a mile on the west side, out there near what is now Beach Boulevard. But I thought of Whittier as a small town, just like

Fullerton where I went to high school. It was a nice little town, and all the business, of course, was uptown here. And out where there are so many business centers now, it was all citrus groves, countryside, country people. I really was not historically oriented in my thinking as a young person.

ARENA: If I could take a broad, rather than an historical, dip into your past, let me make a broad sweep here and ask you concerning the cultural diversity of the Whittier area as you grew up. I believe you mentioned earlier the attempts to do missionary work among those of Mexican ancestry. I was interested if there was any of that activity in which, directly or indirectly, Richard Nixon was involved? Were those of Mexican ancestry invited to the church? Did you, along with Richard or other members of his immediate family, visit Mexican communities? And from that go into the overall question, as much as you can, of the rich ethnic diversity of the Whittier area, as we noted either on or off the tape: those of Basque descent, those of Indian-- Chief [Wallace] Newman having been raised on a reservation. Not too far from Whittier there were those of pure Indian background. Those of possibly Italian descent, who, of course, were very influential in the East around this period. More and more Italians were coming into the country. I don't know to what extent they were coming into the West Coast. And, of course, the Japanese, and you might end up, if you care to, on the question of the transferring of Japanese during World War II and its influence or impact on the Whittier area community.

BURBANK: I'm afraid I can't be too helpful on this because back in those days when, as young people, we were in the church, I can recall going out with someone else when we were doing some canvassing and inviting by areas, inviting people to church. I remember inviting some Mexican people to come and feeling that there was no reason for avoiding them, we would welcome them. I just don't remember there being Mexican people actually come to our church back in those days, or Japanese. We had some in later years. In fact, back in those days, the impression now is that they were welcome and sometimes invited but then left alone because they did not respond to the invitation. There were Mexican laborers there on Leffingwell Ranch, and many of them were not fluent in English, and the language barrier could have been the reason why there was not more effort made. I don't remember there being any particular activity of that nature. I just don't recall.

ARENA: And with the Japanese?

BURBANK: Likewise. Now with World War II on, I was not around. I was in the East in school when Pearl Harbor took place. When I did come out, I did know that a lot of the Japanese had been removed to camps. I did not become too involved in feeling or discussion of that. I was busy establishing myself as a young minister in the church and, of course, had a health problem. I had more contact with the Mexican people when I was down in San Diego [California], which is clear out of this community. I was close to the border. Then is when I became more involved in missionary outreach to the Mexican Nationals who were over here illegally. During the war this was permitted more because they were needed. But I just don't have a recollection of that particular field in this area here in those years.

ARENA: Finally, let me end up on this note. Again, it will be an indirect reference to the President's Quaker beliefs, and we touched on it in part when we talked about the idea that the President did participate in the military aspects of World War II, pure and simple. He was not with the medical, but he was participating in the military side. What was the attitude of the community, as you recall, regarding that particular Quaker among you? Answer that as you will.

BURBANK: Well, I don't remember any particular attitude because, as I have said, our church has had an emphasis on the peace testimony, and yet one young man will be a conscientious objector and his brother will go in the Army and there isn't a noticeable attitude either way. And so, because of this, as a general setting I don't recall, and I would not expect to find, any particular attitude toward his going into the military. Of course, I was under the impression that he served in a legal capacity rather than in any real military participation. Of course, he obtained the rank, I think, of Lieutenant Commander in the Navy. But my understanding was that his work was paperwork and not actual fighting.

ARENA: The thing that I had in mind was that he did not join the medical corps. He did some legal work. His final obligation was to handle contracts that were being terminated as a result of the end of the war, but I believe in the South Pacific while not actually having a gun in hand, he had military assignments but did not see action, other than to protect

himself and others in that area from, maybe, Japanese bombings. But my basis for saying military duty is that he was in a military outfit.

BURBANK: Yes.

ARENA: But that outfit as far as I know, did not see direct combat other than--and that's pretty direct--protecting their skins from bombing.

BURBANK: Yes.

ARENA: Well, that answers the question. I know you would know if there was some, say, condemnation of the community for those who did--and I'm sure there were other Quakers--participate in a completely military way, whereas he might have been in the in between area. But I do know that there were those who joined other military forces, and I was wondering if you knew if there was any special castigation or condemnation . . .

BURBANK: I don't know of any and, of course, just as an opinion, I would doubt it very much because of our open-end attitude toward the thing, it being a matter of individual conscience, and this is my impression. Of course, during World War II there were Quakers who were rather militantly pacifistic. This was the first problem I ran into as a minister, a young minister there at Yorba Linda. We had young men going into the service. Some of the people thought we should have a service flag to honor them as other churches were having. Others felt, "No, not in a Quaker church." This became quite a heated argument in monthly meeting. I listened and listened as long as I could, and people began looking to me, "What does the pastor have to say about it?" And I was finding myself in the role of a diplomat rather than a prophet.

ARENA: I would imagine. [Laughter]

BURBANK: So rather than being the prophet and the oracle of God. . . . Well, the minister in the Friends Church has, perhaps, had less that position than in some other churches, less pontifical, because of our congregational belief and the responsibility on the individual. Of course, the Quakers have always held up this idea that every man is a priest, he's his own priest, we don't need a hierarchy and so forth. Well, in my own church out there in Yorba Linda the thing was resolved by a

plaque, "Pray for these men," and their names were put on the plaque in letters and so forth. This made some people unhappy, because we were calling MORE attention to the war effort than with just a flag.

And so there were a lot of feelings between the pacifists and the more liberal factors of the Quakers during that time when our young men were so actively involved, having to make choices, and some were concerned that there were too few young men taking the conscientious objector position, and they felt that we as a church should be more influential in molding their thinking. This was the situation in the church at that time, speaking for our church in Yorba Linda, and I'm sure that these feelings would have been aroused in all of the Friends churches, as they were in other churches. The Quakers certainly didn't have a corner on this. I guess there are more conscientious objectors among the Methodists, but then they're a larger denomination. Percentagewise, in more recent years, I think we've been having an increasing percentage of conscientious objectors.

ARENA: In all denominations.

BURBANK: Oh, yes.

ARENA: Thank you very much, Mr. Burbank.