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Alyce G. Koch (February 10, 1973, second interview)

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Second Oral History Interview

with

MRS. ALYCE G. KOCH

February 10, 1973
Glendale, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #2 with Mrs. Alyce G. Koch, in her residence, Glendale, California, on February 10, 1973, Arena interviewing.

Mrs. Koch, you will recall that in our last meeting we were discussing some unusual photographs that you have of the President and his wife, Mrs. [Patricia Ryan] Pat Nixon, and you were not sure where they were. And now we know. I have the pleasure of looking at them right now. I wonder if you wouldn't mind elaborating on these photographs that we mentioned but did not have in front of us, beginning with this very interesting one concerning the President's skiing ability. Would you describe the photograph, and as much as you can, the time, the place, the number of people--although he is now alone--but the incident and the circumstances, as much as you can recall?

KOCH: I'd be happy to.

ARENA: Thank you.

KOCH: This was one of the many weekends that a group of us from Whittier and Los Angeles--I discussed this group with you earlier, I think, at the previous taping--enjoyed many sports together. One of them was playing in the snow, ice skating. And we used to go to the elder Nixons' [Francis Anthony Nixon] home that they had in Forest Home, the name of the place, Forest Home. They had a large mountain sort of retreat there, which was comfortable but not elaborate. There were about ten of us, I believe, or twelve for the weekend. And my husband and I were the only married couple, so we were

the chaperones, pretty good chaperones for twenty-three-year-old kids. Now the picture we were talking about is one that the President is on the skis, or shall I say, on the snow.

ARENA: That would be more accurate. He's on both.

KOCH: It's an interesting picture. I'm not sure how he would react to it, but it's a fun picture and it reminds me of all the good times we had. He had obviously been trying very hard, so he got an A for effort, but at this shot he had taken a seat, and he's leaning over to his left side and is rather deep in snow, but he's laughing, and it was a happy time. He was not a particularly great athlete, but it never disturbed him. He was always fun to be with and willing to try anything; get in, get going. And it was fun.

ARENA: Just by way of further describing it, that is not in color and the size seems to be about two-and-a-half by four-and-a-half (inches). That would be a guess.

KOCH: It might not be quite four-and-a-half, around there. It's a small picture.

ARENA: Now the picture right next to it?

KOCH: That was taken probably, I think, the same weekend, and that is of four people with the President's wife, Pat, in the very middle of the picture. They're kneeling in the snow in front of a large tree. All the trees are heavily covered with snow. And on Pat's right is Virginia Hudson. Behind Pat is the man whom she married. I've forgotten his name, and I don't remember the name of the girl on Pat's left.

ARENA: The President is not in that particular picture.

KOCH: No.

ARENA: Shall we move on to some of the others?

KOCH: Yes. This is a picture of the same weekend, of a giant log. It's a picturesque picture, if we can call it that. It's interesting. This big old dead log was lying across a precipice across a waterway of some kind there, and we had inched our way along this log, so that we were literally sitting in the middle of the log with nothing but the log to support us, with about thirty feet below us. In this picture there were just eight of us. Reading from left to right as I look at the picture are the President . . .

ARENA: Excuse me. I want to be sure, for the record, he is fully exposed. He is not behind anyone. You see his full body there.

KOCH: Yes, we were all seated facing the camera. We were seated on the log which has a diameter. . . . Well, it's a very heavy log. It's easy to see the faces of the people. There's no doubt as to who's who. The President is on the very end, and then Pat is on his left, Pat next; and then [Francis Donald] Don Nixon, the President's brother; and the girl whom he was dating at that time; I've no idea who it was; and then my husband; and then the picture of myself; then Virginia Hudson and her date.

ARENA: Thank you. Again, this is not in color, and it's about the same size as the other photograph. I don't remember for sure, did you give an estimate of the date?

KOCH: Well, it was before Pat and Dick were married, and I would say it was in the winter of '39, because in the summer of '40 was their wedding; so I would guess it was the winter before.

ARENA: I don't believe we discussed this photograph, which is most interesting.

KOCH: No. Yes, I think these two pictures. . . . This one we did discuss. This is an interesting picture because these two were torn from the original scrapbook. Here's the original paper with my handwriting in white ink on black paper. And the writing says, "Pat Ryan's shower, June 9, 1940." And the people in the picture are Marian Wilson, who was principal of Whittier High School; Edith Holt, who was one of the teachers; Dorothy Brown, a counselor; Margaret O'Grady, a teacher and very close friend . . .

ARENA: Now Mrs. Theriault, I believe, but we have her name in our file so we can check to make sure.

KOCH: And then myself, Alyce Koch. There again, you can identify the people. Pat is standing. Mrs. Holt is on her left. Mrs. Wilson, the principal, is next to Pat; then Margaret O'Grady, Mrs. Theriault; here I am seated, and Mrs. Brown is seated, too.

ARENA: Do you recall the place, possibly?

KOCH: It was a restaurant that we rented. It was on. . . . What is the street that Whittier College is on?

ARENA: It's right on Painter [Avenue], the main street. And then there's also Philadelphia [Street].

KOCH: This was on Painter, south, beyond the college. It was a small restaurant which we rented. It was a tea-room sort of place, as I recall. It had a very lovely

grounds, and this picture was taken out in the garden of the restaurant. A number of teachers attended, friends of Pat's, and of course, she gave us a list of those she wished invited.

But I think this picture brings back great memories because following . . .

ARENA: This is another picture.

KOCH: Another picture.

ARENA: Most interesting.

KOCH: Yes, it is, because it's so specific and so clear. And it brings back definite memories to me, very happy memories. This was taken the afternoon of the shower, which was a luncheon. So this was taken about 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock. Now, for the centerpiece of the bridal shower I made an umbrella. I tore the silk off the rack of the umbrella and covered the metal pieces with flowers and made a shower of flowers, an umbrella of showers. It sounds very corny and it probably was, but it was fun for us at that level of our intelligence, I guess. Then there were daisies and flowers on the base. And this we placed on a wall, and Pat and Dick are standing under this little umbrella with just their heads showing. And Dick is on the left, and they're just beaming. They look very happy. So there they are, the engaged couple.

ARENA: Would you recall if you were the one that did take that snapshot?

KOCH: Oh, yes, I took that. I remember we had trouble getting Dick to come over. I remember how glad we were, because I said, "You'll want a picture of this, because after all, it's a big shower. That's a nice present."

ARENA: Do you recall any more about the circumstances of getting him over? Did someone call him at his office, and what his reaction was? Does that come to mind in any way?

KOCH: No, I don't.

ARENA: Do you recall what happened after the affair? Did the President and Mrs. Nixon go off . . .

KOCH: Oh, looking at the loot. I think that was the most exciting part, because we had invited as many people as we could for them, because in those days each little gift was a very meaningful thing.

ARENA: Do you have any recollection of what some of the gifts were, including your own, if that's not too personal?

KOCH: No. I remember there was some silver, because of course, there was no tax on silver in those days. We all loved Pat very much and we were fond of Dick, and I think those of us who could stretch the money probably did give silver, but I don't recall any of the specific gifts. I remember how thrilled they were at the number of guests, and I just remember that they were very joyous.

ARENA: I know you wouldn't remember all the persons that were there, but I was wondering about categories. It included her fellow-teachers, close friends such as yourself; how about relatives and possibly even students?

KOCH: I don't think there were any students involved. No, that would have been a difficult mixture, I think. I don't think the teachers could have been themselves or the students would have been comfortable. I think all of us might have felt ill at ease; and our purpose was to bring joy and happiness to Pat, and I don't think that would have been possible.

ARENA: Is there anything else concerning the episodes captured in all of these photographs we've mentioned, the skiing and outing experience and the shower? Anything else that comes to mind that I have not brought up myself?

KOCH: Photographwise?

ARENA: Photograph or episodewise, any other incidents concerning them that come to mind now? If not, of course, when you see this in the transcript form you can add to it. But I just wanted to be sure I didn't stop you from discussing it any further. How about your reading into the record, if you don't mind, and giving the background of your personal correspondence with Mrs. Pat Nixon, that you have right here in your album?

KOCH: It was not extensive, but I think that could be blamed on both our parts. She was busy and I was busy. I felt very disappointed in myself that I had not accepted some invitations which she extended to me.

ARENA: About when were these invitations extended, and what were the circumstances? Were they married at the time, for example?

KOCH: Yes. The ones I have here are written from Washington, and they are on her informal note paper in her own handwriting.

ARENA: Would you give, for example, if you remember, what the President's position was and what the date of the note was? Correct me if I'm wrong, the notes are completely in her handwriting, Pat Nixon's handwriting.

KOCH: Yes, they're all in her handwriting. She wrote them herself; she did not dictate anything. It is obviously her own handwriting. She didn't date this one at all.

ARENA: When do you recollect it may have been?

KOCH: Well, let me read the note to you. It may recall the time to me.

ARENA: Please do. Fine.

KOCH: Dear Alyce,
Just heard from Clara Jane.

Now, Clara Jane [Lemke Nixon] is Donald Nixon's wife.

ARENA: And by the way, she was not in any of those photographs where you mentioned a date, because you would know her.

KOCH: No, Don had not met her. Oh, I know Clara Jane very well. But Don had not met her yet, so he was free-lancing. So Clara Jane wasn't involved in these pictures. I'm amused; but you can see the freedom with which Pat brushed this note off to me. "Dear Alyce, Just heard . . ." There's nothing formal; she's just being herself. She doesn't bother with a subject and a verb; she just starts out communicating as she would with anyone that she wanted to be herself with. And this was typical of Pat.

Dear Alyce,
Just heard from Clara Jane that you are planning a trip here to Washington. As far as I know now, we will be in Washington during the week of June 11 to 19. (There's no year.) And of course, we are looking forward to seeing you. In fact, I'll enter June 12 in my book right now for lunch at the Senate dining room.

We can change this when you arrive if it is not convenient. The office phone number is National 8-3120, extension 1142. Miss Everts will be alerted to take your telephone number so that I can call you and we can make plans.

Hope to see you soon.

Pat

ARENA: And on one side, you might say the final side, is printed . . .

KOCH: No, that's the cover. That's a folded informal sheet.

ARENA: I see.

KOCH: You wouldn't know about ladies' stationery.

ARENA: But we do have the name, Mrs. Richard Milhous Nixon.

KOCH: Yes, here it is, a folded sheet, and then engraved informal note, the cover of which says, "Mrs. Richard Milhous Nixon", and then the note is written on the inside and on the back.

ARENA: Now that you have read it, does that give you a clue as to when that may have been sent to you?

KOCH: It was during the vice-presidency.

ARENA: And is that an invitation you could not accept? You did not have the opportunity?

KOCH: My daughter and I canceled the trip, and so we did not accept it, and I have regretted it greatly.

ARENA: Would you mind explaining the circumstances of the other note that I saw, and reading that into the record?

KOCH: There are two of them. Both of them are on the same stationery, on her informals.

Dear Alyce,
So sorry to learn that we are not going to have the pleasure of a visit. We had so looked forward to seeing both of you.
Perhaps it will work out later.
Hope to see you soon.
Affectionately,
Pat

So that was in reply to my regrets, which I had mailed. Now here's another one, written on the same informal stationery. When I say informal, I use it as a noun. It's called an informal. This is an informal. It's informal paper, but it's known as an informal, because of the shape, the white engraved paper here, and on the inside sheet she wrote what she wanted to. The other one is on the same type of paper.

Dear Alyce,
You were mighty sweet to send greetings by telegram. I only wish we could have had a chat, as of yore. I think of the "gang" often and of the good times we had together.

We hope to see you soon, and in the meantime we send our best to you and yours.

With affection,
Pat

ARENA: Mrs. Koch, is there any other item that comes to mind concerning this interview that we did not cover last time or this time, that you wanted to be sure is on the record?

KOCH: Well, there's another one that was typewritten on Mrs. Nixon's personal stationery. At the head it says, "Mrs. Richard Nixon," and the date "September 10, 1956."

Dear Alyce,

This is the first opportunity I've had since I returned from California to tell you how much we appreciated your telegram which reached us at the Mark Hopkins. You were more than sweet to think about us.

Dick starts out on the campaign trip next week, and I expect to go along with him. There never are many free moments on such trips, but if we get within shouting distance of each other I hope we'll have a chance to say hello, at least.

With every good wish to you and Gene, from both of us,

Affectionately,
Pat

ARENA: "Pat," it is signed.

KOCH: Yes, she signed her own name in her own handwriting. In all her notes she spells my name correctly.

ARENA: Well, I really appreciate your taking the trouble to allow me to have this on the record. Would you mind reading this item into the record as well, then?

KOCH: Yes. This is on the same stationery. "Mrs. Richard Nixon" is at the heading of the paper, and it's May 2, 1956.

Dear Alyce,

This is just a note to thank you and Gene for your thoughtfulness in sending me the telegram recently. It helps a lot to

know that our long-time friends are back of us, and both Dick and I appreciate your message ever so much.

We hope to have a chance to see you on one of our visits home.

Dick joins me in sending you our best wishes.

Affectionately,
(and it's hand-signed) Pat

ARENA: And for the record, would you state who Gene is?

KOCH: Gene is my husband.

ARENA: And the nickname Gene would be spelled how?

KOCH: Eugene R. Koch.

ARENA: Mrs. Koch, I can't thank you enough for allowing me the advantage of this interview. Is this telegram something we had not read in our last interview?

KOCH: Yes, it is. This I found when I moved to Glendale [California]. This was sent to my husband from Newport Beach [California]. President Nixon was going to visit the Boy Scout Jamboree being held in Corona del Mar [California] that year. That was 1953. The telegram is dated July 11, 1953, and was sent from Washington, D.C., to Eugene R. Koch, Newport Beach, California.

Greatly appreciate invitation to visit you when I come out for the Scout Jamboree.

We had a sailing boat, and we had invited Pat and Dick to go sailing with us. Don and Clara Jane had gone and we were inviting them to come and join us, and that's what the specific invitation was.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, did you have that opportunity to get together?

KOCH: Oh, yes. Dick and Pat never sailed with us, but Clara Jane and Don did, and on many occasions we used Don as ballast. [Laughter--Excuse me, Don.] He was a good sport about it. He was fun. He moved from side to side. It was a thirty-eight-foot boat, but he kidded about it. He said, "Now put me where you want me." And we'd tell him where we needed the ballast the most and he would move on. But Pat and Dick never were able to join us.

To continue the telegram, it says:

Regret it will be impossible due to heavy schedule here. I am flying out late

Saturday and returning immediately
following my speech on Sunday night.
Regards. Richard Nixon.

ARENA: Thank you again for not only reading these personal
documents into the record, but for giving the additional
personal comments about them. And I do thank you again
for allowing history to have the benefit of your recollections
for the Presidential library.

KOCH: Thank you. It's been fun. I've enjoyed every bit of
it. Thank you.