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## Richard H. Spaulding (December 17, 1971)

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

MR. RICHARD H. SPAULDING

December 17, 1971  
Buena Park, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mr. Richard H. [Harold] Spaulding, principal of Buena Park High School, where this interview is being conducted. Arena interviewing, December 17, 1971. Do you mind if I ask you, Mr. Spaulding, where and when you were born?

SPAULDING: In Eastern Kansas, March 8, 1910.

ARENA: And how did your paths and Buena Park meet? When did you move to California?

SPAULDING: My parents moved to California with the family in the middle of the 1925-26 school year, so that we actually became citizens of California about the first of January 1926.

ARENA: And would you mind giving a general resume of your formal educational background?

SPAULDING: Yes. When we came to California, I was a freshman in high school. I had started high school in a tiny town in Eastern Kansas, had dropped out of school for a year because of the needs at home, and started my freshman year again in the fall of 1925, came out here and went to Escondido High School for a few weeks, then went to El Monte High School through the ninth grade and finished about two-thirds of the tenth grade, and then, because of needs at home, went back to Escondido and continued high school and graduated in the spring of 1929. And again, with hard times, I stayed out of school a year, and then went to Whittier College in the fall of 1930 and graduated in the spring of 1934. I've done most of my graduate work at the University of Southern California over the years, have taught off and on in the graduate summer school at Whittier College since about 1965.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you your major area of concentration at Whittier College?

SPAULDING: My undergraduate major was physical education and elementary education, with minors in social science and biological science. And then my graduate work at the University of Southern California. I completed my Master of Science degree in physical education and my Master of Education degree in school administration.

ARENA: You recall, I'm sure, that the football coach at Whittier at that time was Chief [Wallace J.] Newman. Was he also the head of athletics? In other words, would a person in your area of interest be under him, as well, academically?

SPAULDING: He wasn't Director of Athletics at that time. He did teach various theory classes in physical education and related subjects, the life sciences, recreation, first aid, this sort of thing. He was also the head baseball coach, and my two college sports were football and baseball, so in my four years there I came to feel toward Wallace Newman about as I do toward the Rock, in the center of the campus there, that he literally, personifies all of the good that Whittier College stands for.

ARENA: That's very interesting. As you know, the President is on record for praising the high character of Wallace Newman, and I do intend to ask you about your relations with him because of that. Would you summarize your direct contact with the President? For example, obviously you were a member of his graduating class, and that was the same spring, 1934, but bear in mind the classes you might have had together, social, extracurricular organizations, possibly the Orthogonians, participation directly or indirectly in events where he debated, where he participated in plays, social events, such as dating, whatever comes to mind, in a general way first. And now, what we'll do is go back over these general areas, given the amount of time we have and explore them in detail. And if we don't finish today, and if you will permit, we'll come back another time.

SPAULDING: I first met the President in the fall of 1930, when I went to Whittier as a country boy, not knowing much about Whittier College, but having an opportunity to enroll there due to the help of my high school principal, and went out for freshman football shortly after I arrived, for a team that Richard Nixon was a member of. This started a relationship and a friendship that lasted rather closely through the four years. We played, both of us, on the freshman football team.

ARENA: As you know, the President spent quite a bit of time on the bench. If it isn't too personal, did you have a chance to put more time in on the varsity or in actual playing time yourself?

SPAULDING: No, I would say he and I spent about equal time on the benches. We certainly had MORE than our share of watching other people play, and wishing that we were capable and competent to play more ourselves. In this first year, our freshman year, one of the highlights of my experience with the President was probably in November. Our varsity football team was playing at San Diego State, an afternoon game on Saturday. I had a Model A Ford, and two other members of the football team, Louis Valla and [Edward] Ed Wunder, along with the President, the four of us, rode to my parents' home in Escondido [California], went on to the football game, watching the varsity play, of course, we were not members of the varsity.

We watched the varsity play that afternoon and came back to my parents' home outside of Escondido to spend the night, and came back to Whittier Sunday. This is one of the highlights of my experience with the President. It was the first opportunity for my parents to meet any of my new-found friends at Whittier College, and I'll never forget my mother's particular impressions of young Richard Nixon. While my father and the two other friends sat in the living room and talked, getting acquainted as my mother got dinner, Richard Nixon sat in the kitchen with my mother and got acquainted. She, I remember, had a high stool that she used to sit on at times, working in the kitchen, and the President sat on that stool while my mother prepared dinner. And she exclaimed to me afterwards that she had never met such a mature young man, such a mature outlook, such a cordial, friendly, interested person, but so mature for his years.

ARENA: Is your mother still living by any chance?

SPAULDING: Yes, she is, still at Escondido. This led to an incident that possibly doesn't fit in right here, but this led to an incident years later that my mother will NEVER forget. Among other things in that weekend there was a large grape vineyard across the road from our house, and a grape arbor around the back of our old country house there, and it was grape season; the grapes were ripe. And we picked some and ate them, and the boys all enjoyed them very much.

When Richard Nixon was running for Governor of California, which must have been probably in 1962, he visited Escondido on a campaign tour, spoke to a crowd of some 1500 or 2000 there. My father was dead by this time, but friends of my mother took her to the rally. They were interested and they went and listened, and he made his presentation, and my mother just commented to them, she said, "It's hard for me to realize that this boy spent the night at my home once when he was a college freshman." Immediately, her friends insisted that they take her up to the stand and introduce her to him again. She said, "No, he wouldn't remember me at all. That was thirty years ago and only one night. He wouldn't remember me." But they insisted, and they crowded up through the crowd and they got up to the platform, and the President leaned over, and she said, "You wouldn't remember me, but I'm Dick Spaulding's mother." He said, "I sure DO remember. I'll never forget that night we spent at your place and those good grapes that we ate." My mother never got over

that. She just marvels at his memory and his unique humanness, his warmth, his interest in people.

Well, back to our freshman year at Whittier. We completed the freshman year. In the sophomore year, the Orthogonian Society had been formed and started, and he was the president. This was started in the freshman year. I wasn't among the group that originated the Orthogonians, but in my sophomore year I was invited to become a member, which I was glad to do, because it was made up of my type of people. I became an Orthogonian and we, of course, then were in the same Orthogonian Society for the remaining three years we were in school.

And this was a close group. We met weekly. We were, without exception, I think, young men of very little financial means, so that we had much in common. Our pleasures and enjoyments and recreation were similar, anything that didn't cost very much, including our little local fraternity society of the Orthogonians. It didn't cost much to belong to the Orthogonians. And this was a rather small group of people that had opportunity to become quite close over these years, so this was certainly one of my closest relationships with him.

Sitting on the bench through three years of varsity football was another opportunity to become very close to him. Some of the classes we had together. I remember freshman English class under the present Dr. [Albert] Upton. We were in the same class. We were in the same orientation classes, freshman, under Dr. Louis Jones. Of course, our paths tended to separate as we went on, because our majors were so different, but I do remember a class in the theory of statistics under Dr. Marcus Skarstedt, which was a class we took in common. Whittier was a small school, of course. We attended many of the same social functions, particularly those that would be put on by the Orthogonians, but other social events that might be put on by some of the women's associations, we were apt to be at some of the same ones.

ARENA: Did you participate, possibly, in any of the debate events yourself, or . . .

SPAULDING: No. Dramatics, speech, debate, all areas where the President excelled, were just not in my line of interest or ability, and the only co-curricular area that I had extensive experience with him would be in athletics and in the societies. I remember an interesting experience when we were seniors. I was invited to a girl-date formal and didn't own a tuxedo. It happened that Richard Nixon owned a tuxedo, because he had to have one as a member of the Glee Club. They traveled and sang in tuxedos. I asked him if I could borrow his tuxedo for that affair. He had just bought a new tuxedo. He was invited to the same affair, and I knew that he had an old tuxedo, so I asked him if I could borrow his old tux, and he said that I certainly could. And I discovered almost by accident when I borrowed it that he was lending me his new one and he was going to wear the old one

himself. I corrected that, but certainly I wore his old tuxedo and was glad to have it. He would have had me wearing his new one and he would have been wearing his old one to the same affair, if I hadn't found what he was doing. This is typical of the Richard Nixon that I have known and that I still know.

ARENA: Was there any contact with him, again, still looking over the general areas, any contact with him doing some part-time or full-time work in the community while going through college?

SPAULDING: No. He stayed in and around Whittier until he went into politics. And I went first to El Monte, later to Newport Beach, and then came to Fullerton in 1940, so that I wasn't in and around the city of Whittier and, as a result, had no mutual service club or community organization experiences of any kind. I saw him at homecomings and Orthogonian lunches and so forth, at homecoming, but that was about the only time that I saw him after we got out of school.

ARENA: Did the invitation that your family had extended to him ever find a counterpart? Did he ever invite you to his home? Did you get to see the store and their residence?

SPAULDING: Yes. Of course, the store was right there on Whittier Boulevard, and you passed it every time that you went any distance south and east from Whittier. I've been in the store a good many times for various reasons, was in his home a few times for evenings or some short affair. It was right there in Whittier.

ARENA: While it's fresh in my mind, concerning the question of the President's sociable nature, his ability to mingle with others, what evidence would there be regarding these traits? In other words, you just mentioned attending one social affair; that one, or are there any others which would indicate whether he danced, whether he went out on dates, anything to that effect?

SPAULDING: Well, he was far from a social butterfly. Most of our friends weren't. I would class him as a country boy, as was I. He had relatively little sophistication, polish. He seemed quite normal, country boy, as I look back on the things that we did for enjoyment.

I remember another interesting case when I was a senior in college. Whittier College had discontinued baseball. Maybe this was when I was a junior, I don't remember exactly, it probably was. Anyway, Whittier College had discontinued baseball for a year or two because of the financial problems of those times. And I, being a baseball nut, was very much interested in baseball being reinstated



as a college sport. And I had a petition that I was circulating-- during my junior year that was--asking people to sign that were interested in baseball and, of course, I was primarily interested in those fellows who would play. He became aware that I was circulating a petition. He was not a ball player and I knew he wasn't, so I had never even taken it to him. But he hunted me up and said he wanted to be sure and sign that petition even though he was not a baseball player, because he felt that no American college should be without baseball. This is the typical kind of person he was, genuinely interested in what are YOU doing, what is the other person doing? Very typical of him.

ARENA: If this isn't too personal, what experience or contact, religion-wise, did you have with him? In other words, this might include your joint attendance at some of the chapel sessions at the college, and possibly he might have invited you to his church, and possibly you might have attended some organization such as the Christian Endeavor, of which he was a member at that time. But anything regarding your experience with him and religion would be of interest.

SPAULDING: I don't believe I can remember any common religious experiences.

ARENA: You don't recall his, I won't say proselytizing but enticing you along certain lines, religion-wise, or trying to start a religious discussion with you, or anything like that?

SPAULDING: No, I don't remember anything of that nature.

ARENA: Through interviews with some of the faculty members, including the man who went on to become president, such as Paul Smith, and other students such as Clinton Harris, would you say that actually you and the President were among the majority, in the sense that you came from a rural, farm, country-boy background, and that was the rule at Whittier at that time, or was it?

SPAULDING: Yes. I think that, basically, one of the things that has always attracted me to Whittier, as I came to know the institution, is its tremendous friendliness, and its relative unsophistication. Clinton Harris, for instance, was a real country boy, a wonderful person. Many of the fellows came from over in the San Gabriel Valley, Covina, Pomona, Montebello, Monrovia area. And, of course, these all were rather sleepy little country towns in those days, even if you lived IN one of these towns, you were a small town boy, which is not much different from a country boy. Many of these kinds of people were at Whittier College and relatively few sophisticates.

ARENA: Do you think that the fact that Los Angeles was close and could be reached even by, I understand, the Pacific Electric red cars, the fact that you were so close to such a large city--of course not as large as it is now--made any difference? You had access to what the city had, newspaper from the big city, therefore the fashions, clothing-wise and that you weren't, say, the typical country boy or the typical farm boy in the country at that time?

SPAULDING: I think maybe that's true. I remember, as maybe a sophomore, we had a sophomore class party, a theatre party in Los Angeles, and I remember Francis Lederer playing the lead in the play which we saw. I've forgotten what the play was, but it was possible to go into metropolitan Los Angeles in forty-five minutes or an hour. That certainly made our life, our environment, different from the environment that a country town would have had miles away from a metropolitan area.

I remember once, somewhere along in our career, of a newspaper article in one of the Los Angeles newspapers that was rather deprecatory of our football team, and I remember that a good many of us were incensed. The President led a protest group. We piled into four, five or six cars and drove into Los Angeles. I think we went to the Los Angeles Times, which was amusing as I look back on it--twenty or twenty-five or thirty young men in there, scrambling through a big metropolitan newspaper, trying to find somebody that they could protest to about a sports story that appeared in a sports section. We didn't get any satisfaction and then, as an afterthought, went to another one of the big metropolitan newspapers to protest and got a cordial welcome from them, because the story had not been their story that we were protesting. Dick Nixon was one of the two key leaders in that episode.

ARENA: Speaking of his leadership, did you have any contact, directly or indirectly, as he campaigned for different student offices in student government?

SPAULDING: Not particularly. I think I was treasurer of the sophomore class and vice president of the senior class, but I was relatively inactive in student politics, and I had no particular relationship with his extensive work in student politics.

ARENA: From your recollection of his participation in politics--as you know, he became president of the student government--what comments would you make from your recollection at that time then and, if you want, differentiate from commenting as you see him today? In other words, if you can recall what you thought of him as a political leader while you were a student and a contemporary; then, possibly, pass some observations with the advantage of hindsight of today and the opportunity, of course, to know him as a young political enthusiast and leader, as compared with present day leader of a major country.



SPAULDING: As I've followed his career closely from a distance as he has become state and nationally famous in the political work, he's just about followed the path that I would have expected him to follow. He, it seems to me, has been consistent. That boy developed into the man that I would have expected him to develop into, a warm, interested, very human person, that wasn't easy to get to know and was easy to misunderstand if you didn't know him fairly well.

ARENA: Would this judgment make sense, that was passed by a former teacher of his, that in his case a first impression was wrong, that you had to know him more than just on the surface level to really get to know and understand him; that it wouldn't be his surface personality and his surface actions were not indicative of the type of person he really was?

SPAULDING: I think that is definitely true. The stereotyped extrovert, hail-fellow-well-met, back-slapping, hand-shaking politician he was NOT. He was a quiet, reserved, almost reticent person, who had a flashing smile that suddenly seemed to show you a whole new personality. But he wasn't one that would initiate. . . . He just wasn't a back-slapper.

ARENA: How can you account, if I may interject, for his winning these elections, for his being a leader repeatedly, not only in this incident of a protest, but obviously in other areas, such as the presidency of the Orthogonians? How can you account for his getting the backing of majorities of people without these other qualities? What compensated for what usually seems to be the path to small or big political success? Excuse me; please continue.

SPAULDING: I know that we said, in the course of our progress, when he was a senior, as the senior will or prognostications were developed, he was generally selected by everyone as the person most apt to succeed. He was the one that was selected as the one most apt to become President of the United States. And there was a lot of humor in that. But I don't think that we who knew him had much doubt in our minds that he was capable and was undoubtedly the ONLY one in the group that was potentially and COULD have been a President of the United States. I'm sure that none of us were projecting that at that time. But I'm also sure that his success in the political world, to the ultimate position which he holds now, doesn't come as a great surprise to us.

Everyone knew him to be intelligent. Everyone knew his integrity to be above reproach. Everyone knew him to be thoroughly interested in his fellowman. Everyone knew him to be courageous, that he would stand for whatever he believed should be stood for, come what might, and that what he stood for would be reasonable and logical. These are the things that I think created his success in the

political life on the campus. And, somehow or other, much of this must have come through to the public without the warmth that apparently has not come through to the public, in order to convince them that he could lead the way we want to be led.

ARENA:            Would it be correct to say that among those who were with him, such as yourself--the same organization, warming the bench--the warmth came because of the close association, the close proximity, whereas the warmth that does not appear, seem to appear, is because it only does come on these intimate occasions? Of course, you're in a position to know him on an intimate level, whereas the great majority, of course, do not.

          I don't know if I've made that clear or not, that question, but trying to take into account this description that so many do make of him, that he is not warm, that he is a loner--you hear these adjectives. Would a person who would be in the same club or attend the same classes with him, could he say that he is a loner, after having been through these meetings with him?

SPAULDING:        Well, I suspect that the description of a loner is probably a good one. But with whomsoever he would have been thrown in close contact, I think that he would have created the relationship that he did with us there at school.