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## Ricarda B. Pyle (October 26, 1972)

C. Richard Arena  
*Whittier College*

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Oral History Interview

with

MRS. RICARDA B. PYLE

October 26, 1972  
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mrs. H. Randolph Pyle of Whittier, California. Mrs. Pyle, would you mind giving your full maiden name?

PYLE: I was named for my father, and my name is Ricarda Binford Pearson.

ARENA: We are now in Whittier, California. The date is October 26, 1972, Arena interviewing. Mrs. Pyle, by way of having the researcher have an idea of your own background and setting, and how this ties in with the life of President Nixon, would you mind giving the place and date of your birth?

PYLE: I was born in Whittier, California, where the bus station is today, December 24, 1902. That's the corner of North Comstock [Avenue]--well, it's South Comstock [Avenue] now, but it was North Comstock at that time--and Bailey Street.

ARENA: And would you mind giving a resume of your educational background, particularly the names of the schools that you attended and whether they're still standing or not, especially where Whittier is concerned?

PYLE: Yes. I started in the first grade at the old Penn Street School. And because of my December birthday I began school in the middle of the year. At the end of that year we moved to the Imperial Valley [California]. The next three years I attended public school in the town of Imperial [California] in Imperial County. When we came back to

Whittier, the school that is now called the Lincoln School was new, was not quite completed, in fact, and we attended Penn Street School until that was completed. At that time, the school on Broadway between Pickering [Avenue] and Newlin [Avenue] was called the Broadway School. From there I progressed to the old frame Bailey Street School, which was the whole block, surrounded by Bailey Street, Comstock [Avenue], Hadley [Street] and North Milton [Avenue]. When those years were through--that would be 1917--I went to Whittier High School for four years, and then attended Whittier College from 1921 to 1927. My husband says I crowded four years into six. I graduated in June of 1927. Since then I have taken courses off and on in other colleges, because my husband has been a professor all of our married life, student or professor. And that's just about the end of my formal education.

ARENA: From the standpoint of your husband's education and background, was there contact with the Whittier school system as well, Mrs. Pyle, including the college?

PYLE: Yes. The Pyle family moved to Whittier from Rochester, New York, in 1920, in order that their boys might have the advantage of Whittier College. So he did attend high school, I believe two years. Yes, because he graduated from Whittier College in 1926. As I say, they moved here because they were Quakers and they wanted him to have this Quaker education.

ARENA: Do you recall if Dr. Pyle's father had any specific relation to the college, maybe as a member of the board of trustees, or on the teaching level? Was there any personal connection with the college?

PYLE: No, none at all. Randolph's father and mother were active in the Friends church and his mother sang in the choir, but except for that they were not public citizens.

ARENA: I'm sure they were acquainted with the Milhouses. I was wondering to what extent you may know how well acquainted they were with them. Does your husband recall any direct contact, maybe as a youngster, in which he visited the Milhous home, that of President Nixon's mother [Hannah Milhous Nixon], and her father, Franklin Milhous? Did that ever come up in any way?

PYLE: I think not. I have no. . . . As I say, they were rather quiet, retiring people, and if there was such contact I've never heard of it.

ARENA: And the contact, if it did take place, most likely would have been with the First Friends Church of Whittier, the one which is now in the city proper, rather than the East Whittier Friends Church.

PYLE: That is correct.

ARENA: If I'm not mistaken, that was the one attended by the Milhouses when the President's grandfather lived in the city, unlike the President and HIS father, Mr. [Francis Anthony] Nixon, and mother, who were members of the East Whittier Friends Church, as HE was growing up, the President.

PYLE: That's right.

ARENA: But on his mother's side as a youngster, and on his grandfather's side, the Milhous side, it was the First Friends church. May I ask what your parents and the parents of your husband did in the way of earning a livelihood in the area?

PYLE: My husband's father was retired when he came to California from being a heating and furnace man, and gradually worked into full-time employment with the Farmer's Hardware [Store], where he worked for many, many years, and through that knew all the businessmen--not businessmen so much as ranchers and builders, and that was his function as long as he was able, and he lived to a ripe old age.

ARENA: Would that Farmer's Hardware be the ancestor and the direct ancestor of the present Farmer's Hardware on Greenleaf Avenue in Whittier?

PYLE: Yes, it was. And my father was a bookkeeper. He worked at one time in J. W. Gwin's Cash Grocery Store, which at that time was on West Philadelphia [Street]. This store fronted on Philadelphia Street, and on the corner was the old Whittier Implement Company, where they sold harnesses and carriages, including farm equipment. We used to always go past that on our way to the store where my father worked. In later years, my father was the City Treasurer of Whittier for quite a number of years.

ARENA: Do you recall what that period would have been, or about?

PYLE: Not exactly. I was a small girl, and I can remember standing just outside the polling place at the library, passing out cards for my father as he was trying to gain the office of City Treasurer. In those days it was elective; now, I believe it's appointed by the manager, but in those days it was an elective position. And as a result, I still abhor politics, because I felt so selfconscious standing there, and when ANYBODY is defeated I WEEP for the agony that the family must go through in anticipation. I mean, you can't be prepared for it, because you know your father is an outstanding

businessman. My father's term of office terminated, I believe, in about 1932.

ARENA: What was your father's full name, Mrs. Pyle?

PYLE: His name was Richard Wright Pearson. The name was Wright. He was born in England. He was very small when his father migrated and they came to California as a young man in 1887.

ARENA: Was he a member of the First Friends Church when he did settle in Whittier, too?

PYLE: Yes.

ARENA: And if this isn't too personal, and from the standpoint of understanding the times and environment, of course, in which the President grew up, may I ask if he had been a birthright Quaker?

PYLE: No. The family--I do not know their religious affiliation while they were in England--settled eventually in a little place called Prairie Center in Kansas, where my grandfather died, and the Quakers were so kind to my grandmother that one of his requests was that she stay by the Quakers. She later married a Quaker, and that was the family that migrated to El Modeno in Orange County [California], where there was a Quaker community. My father was the first postmaster of this little village of El Modeno.

ARENA: Do you recall, from your own personal knowledge--not necessarily from your own recollections, but from your own personal knowledge--taking into account this religious environment which surrounded the President, that the Quakers who came from Rochester [New York], your husband's father, and those who came from Kansas, on your side, were they of the same coloring? I'm thinking of those who believed in silent meetings, those who believed more along having pastoral leaders, as the First Friends, and I believe East Whittier Friends both do. I'm trying to get some idea of the make-up of the congregation of the First Friends Church. What happened if there WERE these two factions, if a person did come from the silent Quaker meeting, and merge or continue on in Whittier? Whatever comes to mind regarding that question would be of interest.

PYLE: The early Quakers that came were of both types. They did blend and fuse into a, shall we say, homogeneous group. I think difficulties that have arisen are pressures that have come on as times have changed. My husband's grandfather on his mother's side was a minister in New York Yearly Meeting. His father, however, came from the very conservative Friends, and was expelled from the meeting for marrying

the daughter of a pastoral Friend, and did not belong to the First Friends Church in Whittier, or any church.

ARENA: To be sure, by conservative in this instance, you're referring to the silent meeting type of Quaker.

PYLE: Yes. That title 'conservative' is used in their Yearly Meeting, Friends conservative.

ARENA: In other words, it was an official term.

PYLE: Yes. And so his father, after we were married, joined First Friends Church on confession of faith. Although he had attended regularly and been an usher, he was never a member after having been expelled back in 1897. So you can see, there was a blending of two types of Quakers at that time. The group from Kansas were more evangelical, as was my mother. My mother, also, was a recorded minister among Friends. She had graduated from Earlham College in the Bible Department, under a VERY fundamental Dugan Clark, who influenced Quakerism very strongly. He wrote many books and taught at Earlham College at that time, and was the type of Quaker that I would say Richard Nixon's background was.

ARENA: As you know, the parents of the President, on his mother's side, did come from Indiana.

PYLE: Yes.

ARENA: And Earlham College is in Richmond, Indiana.

PYLE: That is correct. And my mother grew up in Indiana near Richmond.

ARENA: Would you happen to know if there was any contact with the President's mother's side, Milhous, in North Vernon, or possibly in the Butlerville area?

PYLE: No, not in Indiana. Our families were acquainted in California, but to my knowledge there was no contact in Indiana.

ARENA: Would you happen to know if there was any contact with another related Quaker contact--indirectly, but I'd like to get it on the record--the wife of Herbert Hoover, who was also from Whittier, but buried in West Branch, Iowa, where there are some relatives of the President buried as well, the Hemingways; as a matter of fact, his grandmother's ancestors? I was wondering if there was any contact in Indiana from your side of the family and this West Branch settlement, which was founded by the Quakers, too, I understand. That happens to be the place where Herbert Hoover and Lou Henry Hoover are buried.

PYLE: Yes. The branch of Quakerism to which Randolph's [Pyle] father belonged is that same Iowa Friends conservative Yearly Meeting, and we have visited in that very conservative, unprogrammed Quaker meeting, still with the shuttered division between the women and the men.

ARENA: On that point, as a matter of fact, do you recall visiting that very Quaker meeting house, the Friends church in West Branch, which is now a part of the general historical site, not too far from the birthplace of Herbert Hoover, and it does have the shuttered partition? I'm just wondering if you recall that particular meeting house yourself.

PYLE: I can't be sure that that was the meeting house that we were in, but it was a few miles from it, if it wasn't.

ARENA: This was moved. It had been in another location, I understand, and moved to its present location close by his site.

PYLE: No, the meeting house that we attended was Whittier, Iowa.

ARENA: Oh, I see. There is a Whittier, Iowa.

PYLE: There is a Whittier, Iowa.

ARENA: In what part of the state?

PYLE: Near West Branch, the same Quaker group. We attended Yearly Meeting there in the 1930's, with the shutter down and the men on one side and the women on the other, which was. . . . I wish to this day I could have had a tape to record the sessions of that bit of living history.

ARENA: May I ask if you may have documents in your possession and where they may be, dealing with your ancestors and their possible marriage records?

PYLE: Yes. We have the handwritten marriage certificates of my husband's parents and the generation older than that, and our own, because we, too, chose to be married in the Quaker fashion, saying our own vows. And I have some records of the family, which is a minor hobby of mine, and they are entirely Quaker. Any records that I have are Quaker.

ARENA: May I ask you, again from the standpoint of historical research, how do you look into the existence of, and also the location of, genealogical records dealing with Quakers in particular? Of course, there are genealogical records, but would you know if there is THE center, a depository for such records, in the U.S., or anywhere in the world?

PYLE: Yes, it's at Swarthmore College [Swarthmore, Pennsylvania]. Our daughter's former mother-in-law was the curator, and if you were searching Quaker genealogy today from the records at Swarthmore College, you would write to her, and for a fee, although she is retired and is not functioning as an active member of the staff, she does do that sort of research.

ARENA: Would you give her name, please?

PYLE: Yes. She is Alice T. Allen. Trimble was her maiden name, Pennell was her first married name, and her second marriage was Allen. She lived in Moylan-- Box 102, Moylan, Pennsylvania.

ARENA: I'm sure that if a person would want to check on the Milhous side--and those Nixons who may have been Friends, although the President's father had been a Methodist when he first met the President's mother--there is the possibility that there were also Friends in his line, I understand. But, at any rate, that would be one of the key sources of research data on the whole question of the historical movement, as well as a description of Quakers in the history of our country. Would you think that these would tie in with Europe, England as well as other countries? These records may have references to the origins of the Quakers in the United States, and thereby get us into Europe.

PYLE: It might be. I'm not sure of whether the massive research that Hinshaw did, or do you know?

ARENA: I do not, no.

PYLE: A Friend, a Quaker named [Ezra B.] Hinshaw did a tremendous. . . . I think there are about five volumes of genealogical data, and it's based entirely on your Quaker records. The Whittier Public Library perhaps has the complete set. I have volumes number 2 and 3. One is New York state, and there is one on Ohio, one on Pennsylvania, one on Indiana, I understand. I haven't yet researched my ancestry enough to have explored these. They're not very expensive. They just give from the records of the Monthly Meetings, these Quaker meetings, who married who and where. But it is a start.

ARENA: From your own contact with the First Friends Church, and some contact with the East Whittier Friends Church, would you describe the historical usefulness, especially on a project such as this, tracking down the President's relatives and their actions, committees to which they belonged in the church, just what the records of the First Friends Church would entail? From your own experience, are they all there?



There haven't been any fires or other disasters which may have done away with some of the records which go back to the very beginning of the First Friends Church in Whittier?

PYLE: There should be complete records, and they would include the births and deaths and, as you say, various committees in their Monthly Meeting. The Friends have had a very careful recording of events. That has been one of the reasons the Quakers are easier to trace than most denominations, I believe. You see, to be married among Friends in the days before we had licensing, the names had to be presented to a Monthly Meeting. That Monthly Meeting would appoint a committee to investigate and that would involve the names of the people who were appointed to the committee. They would come back and report whether this was a suitable marriage, and appoint a day at which this would transpire. All of this would be in the Monthly Meeting records of a given church, so that you would be able to pick up a lot of loose ends if you could examine the records of a Monthly Meeting.

ARENA: This project, of course, is mainly concerned with preserving living records, but it is important to know where there are written records to follow through on these interviews, and that is the usefulness of your answers to these questions, and I'm very grateful. For example, the question of the President's parents' marriage. It would be interesting to know to what extent that procedure was used in their own case. We do know that they were married in the Friends church, but to what extent were they married in the traditional Friends church? One question that you may know about indirectly that remains unanswered is, what happened to the white bearskin rug on which the President's parents stood, which I understand was a custom among other Friends? And underneath the white bearskin rug were the signatures of those who married, including, theoretically, the President's parents themselves. So I would like to put that question directly to you. Have you ever heard of such a situation, and where such a rug might be now?

PYLE: Well, I have heard of that, of course. But I have no idea whether the moths carried it away or not.

ARENA: Do you recall ever seeing it?

PYLE: No, I don't.

ARENA: This would be something you have heard about, though, through the years.

PYLE: I have heard about it, but I have never seen it.

ARENA: Now, to get to your own direct contact with the President, or any of the members of his family. As I said off the tape before, we're interested in the

President's life before he entered politics, and this would be, of course, his parents, his brothers, aunts and uncles, many of whom still remain in this area. Would you summarize . . .

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: To complete that last question, would you mind summarizing--and I realize you're going by recollection and you have no notes in front of you now--but summarize your firsthand contact, not only with the President and his immediate family--Mrs. Richard Nixon, the children, his parents, his very close relatives, such as the Marshburns, his mother's sister, Mrs. Rose Olive Milhous Marshburn, and any of the other close relatives of the President--but such names as Mrs. Martha Gibbons, some of her children, Mrs. Russell Harrison who was, I believe, Elizabeth Milhous, any of these people. Please indicate to what extent you have had direct contact with them; and then, given time, we'll go into detail. First, I think it would be helpful to get a good summary picture of your direct contact with any of these persons, any any others that I have not mentioned.

PYLE: Of course, the Nixon family were all older, and most of my recollections would be hearsay from my aunt, who helped take care of Elizabeth Milhous Harrison before her death. Just things of that nature. And then I knew Martha Gibbons because she had a doll or two, and that's my hobby, and we used to meet at the doll shop and talk about repairing dolls.

ARENA: Where is that doll shop and does it still exist?

PYLE: No, it does not exist today. So that my personal contact with the family is largely through the Marshburn family, because Marshburns also settled in El Modeno.

ARENA: Now, just to be sure, since there are so many Marshburns, that particular family is that of Oscar O. Marshburn.

PYLE: And his father, the Dr. [William V.] Marshburn, who brought me my baby sister. Our families were very close, and through the years we have sort of grown up in Whittier together, moving from El Modeno to Whittier, approximately the same time, I presume. And my earliest memory of Oscar Marshburn, the President's uncle, was that I thought he was the most remarkable boy because he could eat ice cream by scooping it up and turning the spoon upside down and getting it in without spilling any, when we were small children having Sunday night supper at the Marshburns.

ARENA: May I ask if this was the home in which Mrs. Marshburn, Rose Olive, grew up? In other words, the home where the President's mother also grew up, the Franklin Milhous home?

PYLE: No, this was the Marshburn home on Bright [Avenue], south of Philadelphia [Street].

ARENA: And which Marshburn would that be?

PYLE: Oscar Marshburn's father [William Valentine Marshburn] had his office as a doctor at this very. . . . He was one of the leading doctors of this town. So that that was where I knew Oscar Marshburn.

ARENA: While that's on my mind, many of the longtime associates and friends of Mr. Marshburn will call him Doc. Do you have any idea of the origin of that nickname?

PYLE: Probably because his father was a doctor. I wouldn't know what else.

ARENA: Do you recall that that had always been his nickname, even as a youngster?

PYLE: No, I don't recall that. I just remember him as a boy that was across the table from me, and he was the youngest of the boys at that time. He was older than I. I thought he was most remarkable, probably because he was older and I was younger.

ARENA: May I ask you this, because there's a kind of interesting connection in this case? Do you recall Dr. Marshburn's wife, I believe it was Lutheria [Wyman Nixon Marshburn], whom he did marry, I believe, in Yorba Linda? And this may have been after the time you knew Dr. Marshburn, I don't know. But I do know that she was not the mother of Oscar Marshburn. I wonder if you ever met her?

PYLE: Well, I don't know what the time sequence was there, because I think I probably knew Oscar's own mother, because there were later, younger children, but I wouldn't want to swear to this in court, that I don't recall, but that I know there are now, a half-sister Esther Marshburn something-or-other, and I do not recall her in the family home.

ARENA: Let me say this: This would have been, as far as Lutheria, somewhere in the period between 1911 and 1922, because Mr. Marshburn himself mentioned that the marriage took place in Yorba Linda [California] while the Nixons were living there. And that's one reason why, one clue, if that's any help.

PYLE: My memories would have been prior to 1909.

ARENA: I see.

PYLE: We lived in the Imperial Valley [California] from 1909 to 1912, and I think they were in Yorba Linda when we came back in 1912.

ARENA: Don't let me stop you from continuing this resume of your contact with relatives of the President, the ones you haven't mentioned as of now.

PYLE: Yes. Well, I think I've been in both Dr. Marshburn's homes. That would be Oscar's parents' home on Bright [Avenue], as a child, and as an adult in the old Milhous farmhouse on the corner, before it was moved from its original location. And the time that I recall most recently was the time that the Marshburns were entertaining for a visiting Quaker who was connected with the American Friends Service Committee. Olive and Oscar Marshburn were giving a tea, and they asked Richard Nixon's wife [Patricia Ryan Nixon] to pour, because he had just been elected as a representative to Congress the day before.

ARENA: This would have been the year 1946, of course.

PYLE: I presume. As Pat was pouring--I can still remember--she wore a beautiful orchid on her shoulder and she was a sparkling blonde, and I was quite impressed. But Hannah Milhous [Nixon] was having a dreadful time with the baby that was fussing and crying, and she was pacing the floor.

ARENA: And the baby was?

PYLE: Tricia [Nixon]. But I have a way with babies, and so I took the baby so that Hannah Nixon could enjoy the tea, and I went out by the old barn. That was the original Milhous barn, and I jiggled Tricia till I got her to sleep. And quite some time later we wrote to the President about something, I think it was when he was Vice President, and reminded him of this occasion, and he said that she talked ALL THE TIME, now that she was able to talk. My impression of her, just from the news releases, is that she does speak very well, but I had thought until recently that she was rather shy, but her father did not imply that in his letter that we had.

ARENA: In view of what was said earlier about, in your own personal case, Quakers marrying, not necessarily outside the church, but outside the orthodox Quaker church, were there any problems, from your own knowledge, concerning the marriage of Patricia Ryan and Richard Nixon--correct me if I'm wrong--she was not a Quaker. Your knowing the Milhouses, and your knowing the Nixons, and your knowing the Marshburns, were there any problems as a result of that situation?

PYLE: I would think not. There is no legal protest against such things. Particularly in later years, there is much intermarrying of Quakers with Quakers and with other Protestants, Catholics, Jews. They are really, today, not the inbred group that they were, and I think that there would have been no problem at all.

ARENA: If not in that situation, let's say that, compared to those early years that you mentioned, that situation does not prevail hardly at all, if at all, today.

PYLE: I would think it does not.

ARENA: The other question that comes to mind regarding your firsthand contact with the President's parents and grandparents, the President has stated in his book, Six Crises, where from time to time he goes back to his own early period, he mentions the fact that his mother had hoped that when he grew up he would become a missionary in Central America. And my question is: Do you have any recollection of that question ever coming up between you and Mrs. Hannah Nixon, first Hannah Milhous, of course, or any of the relatives of the President? Did that question ever come up?

PYLE: No. But that does bring to mind a time when he was running for the Vice Presidency. Martha Gibbons and I were in the doll hospital, and she said, "Well, I'll tell you, he's just like his father. He's as stubborn as he can be, and if he wants something, he always gets it in the end." So, when he was elected President I thought of his Aunt Martha.

ARENA: That's very interesting. Were there any other relatives that we haven't mentioned--again, from the standpoint of the general summary recollection? For example, one gentleman who I believe taught music in the school for a while and then privately, was Griffith Milhous. I'm wondering if you have any recollection of this gentleman, who was very likely the one who got the President formally started in musical education.

PYLE: Yes, I knew Griffith Milhous, and was particularly acquainted with his daughter, Esther [Milhous Dodson], whom I believe you have already interviewed, and her brother. There was a son.

ARENA: I have, yes. Carl. The nickname was Carl. I believe it's W. Carlton Milhous.

PYLE: Carlton Milhous was a contemporary of my younger sister, and we were all in college. Esther was a senior, and I believe Carlton, perhaps, was a freshman

at the time I recall them. Carlton was married while he was in school. I remember, they [William Carlton Milhous and Cora Edna Green] were married and went to school the next day, and they kept yawning in the library and everybody laughed. It was quite a joke because these kids were married on a school day. But I would expect that it was Griffith Milhous who did start him in music, Carlton's father.

ARENA: I'm wondering if you have any firsthand recollections of him as a music teacher. For example, did any of your own relatives study under him? You certainly had no contact there.

PYLE: We were not musical. My younger sister may have known him in some capacity, but I did not.

ARENA: Speaking of the President's relatives who have been in education, there was a gentleman who I believe was connected with the Lowell School District, Mr. [Charles Wright] Milhous, and may have been the head of the school board there. I'm wondering if that name rings a bell.

PYLE: No, I can't recall. Of course, the other relative that I did know was Jessamyn West, who was in college when I was.

ARENA: Would you mind, at this point, taking as much time as you like to describe your contact, your associations with her; and in view of the fact that she lived in Yorba Linda where the President also lived, and attended the same college as he, it would be very interesting to know about her from someone who did know her intimately. Her full name is Jessamyn West McPherson.

PYLE: That's correct. Well, as a freshman I had a chum who was majoring--I'm not sure what her major was, but she and Jessamyn were taking Latin, which was not a real popular subject, and they used to do their homework together. And I remember how often this close friend of mine was off in a corner of the little sun parlor of the old redwood cottage which was the dormitory in which they lived, doing their Latin. My next recollection is primarily of the Palmer Literary Society of Whittier College. The group was named. . . . Well, I should say the name was proposed by Jessamyn West. She had just read the life of Alice Freeman Palmer, by her husband, George Stewart Palmer, and she was so impressed that when this women's literary society sprang up, she proposed this name, and it did become the name of this group, now a social group on the Whittier College campus, and to MY sorrow, the students today have NO idea of why it's called the Palmer Society, because we were a literary society.

ARENA: Was this just for females, by the way?

PYLE: Yes. The first social group of this sort was the Franklin Society, founded by some men students of Whittier College in the fall of 1921, I believe. And the women got around to organizing in May of 1922, so we are really fifty years old.

ARENA: And this was the first, not just literary society, but the first women's society of Whittier College.

PYLE: That is correct. Franklin was the first men's society. My husband was a Franklin and I was a Palmer, and we held various offices. I expect Jessamyn was at some time the president of the group. I know I was vice-critic, and we really were literary. We read our original works and we reviewed literature, and had lots of fun doing it; but it was a literary group.

ARENA: On the subject of self-criticism, each one criticizing the other's work--that was a part of your character, or part of your aims of the society. From what I have learned from interviewing, one of the objectives of the Orthogonian Society, which was the other society founded after the Franklins (and the President was one of the founding members), one of the objectives was self-criticism. In view of that fact, was there something basic to Quaker philosophy, to Whittier College itself, that promoted this idea of self-examination? Was this a scholarly outcome of Quaker religious or philosophical leanings, in your view, Mrs. Pyle?

PYLE: No. This was the era when everybody had literary groups, all across the country. The Eastern colleges, Friends colleges, had groups of this sort, and . . .

ARENA: But the self-criticism was just a natural part of all these groups?

PYLE: Well, I don't know that they all had self-criticism, but as students, we were trying to improve ourselves, of course, and so we did try to criticize. I can't remember that we ever were cruelly critical, but we did do some analysis of the literary efforts of members of the group.

ARENA: Along these same lines of being critical, as you know during this present year and I'm sure in years gone by, there are some very controversial speakers on the Whittier College campus. I'm wondering to what extent there were controversial speakers in your day, which was a little earlier but around the time of the President's era. To what extent has this been, would you say, a basic trait or characteristic of Whittier College, and the accompanying criticism by different members, whether they were on or off the campus? In this case, I mean alumni as well as citizens of the community. I'm thinking of the atmosphere in which students,

including and especially President Nixon, enjoyed or lived through when they were students. To what extent has this always been a part of life at Whittier College, the presence of controversial and well-known speakers on the Whittier College campus?

PYLE: I can recall Sherwood Eddy and Kirby Page as being speakers who were both LATER considered quite controversial at the time. Probably they were, but because we were rather eager young people, stretching out into a world that had JUST finished World War I, and that was the war to end all war, we took these idealistic speakers as the coming of Utopia that we hoped was ahead of us. Unfortunately, it hasn't come yet.

ARENA: While we're on the subject of controversy in college, to tie in President Nixon directly, you may recall-- and I'm anxious to know if you recall personally-- that he played a role in trying to change the policy of dancing, in the sense that dancing should be permitted on the campus as a regular feature. I understand that there had been exceptions even before he proposed that dancing be allowed on the campus, but I'm wondering to what extent you were aware, if at all, as a member of the community, that this young would-be president of student government in his junior year was campaigning on that platform. Whatever comes to mind concerning that, if it did reach the outside world.

PYLE: Well, of course, I did not live in Whittier from 1927 till 1940, so that those were his college years, but I will say that when we were in college we had to go clear out to the Hacienda Country Club to have a square dance, because it wouldn't be allowed on the campus. We couldn't even do THAT on campus. And the Franklin Society and the Palmer Society had a joint square dance out at the Hacienda Country Club in my college days. You see, that was the beginning of cracking the ice, but he was able to completely follow through, and dancing was then permitted. But at the time I think there was dancing, but I don't know to what extent. I'm sure it wasn't on campus.

ARENA: When you did come back in 1940.

PYLE: Yes.

ARENA: While the thought is fresh in my mind, I wonder if you did take note of the young lawyer, Richard Nixon, in any way, from the standpoint of, first, the fact that he was a lawyer and related to the members of the family, many of whom you knew, like Rose Olive Marshburn; and second, were you aware that he was engaging in choir practice with the Friends? Even though it may have been East Whittier Friends,



there may have been visiting choir sessions. Did you have occasion to meet him or to see him, even at a distance, in connection with choir work or with teaching a Sunday school class? I understand he had a young adult group. Participating in the Whittier Community Players group, I wonder if you had any contact with him in that respect, at all.

PYLE: No. The only thing that I do recall is when he was a partner with [Thomas W.] Tom Bewley in law, but I can't recall seeing him. I really had very little contact with him at all. The only time I ever talked to him he was very gracious. He was on his way up to the amphitheater to give the commencement address, I think it was. I was trying to take his picture and he turned around and posed, on that ramp between the gym and the amphitheater, and smiled and bowed very kindly for this one lone female trying to take his picture, which I have always thought was courteous.

ARENA: Do you recall about, or precisely, what year that may have been, Mrs. Pyle?

PYLE: No, I can't. I think it was prior to the time when he was here with Bob Hope [Leslie Townes Hope]. I don't think it was that time. I think it was a prior time.

ARENA: Would that have been while he was Vice President, or occupying another position, or not in office at all?

PYLE: I think he was Vice President at the time.

ARENA: This would have been the period between 1952 and 1960.

PYLE: He was on the board and was here, and I think he gave the commencement address. He was having some part in it.

ARENA: In view of your personal contacts with the members of the family before the name Richard Nixon became a household word around the world, to what extent would you say his fame has had an observable effect, from your first-hand observation, on his relatives, over the years. For example, you knew Rose Olive Marshburn, you knew Hannah Nixon before, and you've known them since. This would be your own evaluation, but that would be very interesting. To what extent did his fame have a direct influence on their relations with you, and in all facets? Did they become, oh, we'll say, swell-headed? Did they maintain their personality, their relations with you, in view of the fame of the Nixon name?

PYLE: I would say that the ENTIRE family have been just the same. It has not, in ANY way, changed their relationships, their attitudes, even down to the younger

generation of cousins. Still, they are themselves. They've been to The White House, but they make no pretense about it at all. They're just themselves.

ARENA: Again--and this is the sort of question that only a person like you could answer from this long-range firsthand association, and I would be derelict in my duty as an historian not to put it to you--knowing the Whittier Quaker community as you do, to what extent were the President's family typical, if you can use such a word? To what extent was he brought up as in any typical Whittier family? In view of the fact that he went on and achieved unusual distinction, unusual attention in the world, and is consigned to history for all time now, to what extent would you say that his education and his experiences were distinct, not only from the Quaker community, as you have noted, but from the families in general?

PYLE: Well, I would say that he had a very normal, average Quaker childhood and background. I know that many young people brought up in our church, when faced with World War II, said that nothing they had heard in Sunday school in the local Whittier Friends Church had ever helped them to make a decision about whether they were pacifists or not. That was a decision they had to make, for or against that position, as adults, because in Sunday school they hadn't had THAT MUCH of the traditional Quaker doctrine, shall we say.

ARENA: On that question of pacifism and the Quaker position, was Mr. Oscar Marshburn a pacifist in World War I? Do you recall anything about that situation, if there were any problems for him?

PYLE: I don't think he was a pacifist. I do not recall if there were any problems. I believe he went overseas with the Friends ambulance corps and worked in France rebuilding the devastation of the war. And I know that in World War II he again worked with the American Friends Service Committee and directed a Civilian Public Service camp for conscientious objectors here in Southern California, and he has never lost the respect of the community because of living his convictions.

ARENA: Thank you very much.