*"Those who have known him a long time praise his competitiveness, but they speak even more of a considerate nature and of the loyalty he shows his friends."*

# The Forces That Forged the Future: 'He Didn't Want to Stay in Yorba Linda'

*". . . Perhaps my major liability is—and this may sound incongruous—that I am essentially shyer than the usually extrovert politician ought to be. This seems to be an inborn trait which I cannot change or alter. I have a great liking for the plain people, but I feel ill at ease with the prominent."*

—Richard Nixon, 1968

*By Lou Cannon*

RICHARD MILHOUS NIXON has occupied a prominent place in our public life and in our consciousness longer than any other American politician, and yet his essential nature remains a mystery.

For middle-aged Americans he exists as a series of stereotypes extending back into our childhoods. Durable Dick and Tricky Dick. The relentless pursuer of Alger Hiss and the ruthless campaign scourge of the Democrats. The man who debated Khrushchev in a kitchen and who made peace with the Chinese Communists at a banquet table. The Nixon of Checkers, the Hughes loan and "I am not a crook." The Nixon who lost to John F. Kennedy in 1960 after a self-destructive television debate. The Nixon "You Won't Have to Kick Around Anymore." The resurrected Nixon of 1968 defeating the only Democrat who had lasted as long as he had. The Nixon of Watergate.

These and a hundred other Nixons torment our memories. Each is a separate portrait; none combines to form a composite picture of the man. After all these years Nixon remains, in the human sense, an enigma to his fellow Americans. But it is a different Nixon—or more properly, a whole Nixon—who is remembered by his friends of yesteryear and by a few close aides in the White House. These friends, like most Americans, are deeply troubled by Watergate and the Nixon taxes and all the rest, although perhaps more ready than most to blame the media for what they regard as magnification of the Nixon scandals. These friends retain a regard and even an affection for Nixon and a desire to explain him to others and to themselves. What follows is an attempt to understand Richard Nixon from the perspective of those who care about him.

Nixon is 61 years old now. Many who knew him as a young man are dead, and others are afflicted with failing memories. Some of those who are alive and robust have had their personal views of Nixon colored, for better or for worse, by the dramatic events of his long public career. Still, there is a common portrait of Nixon which emerges from the recollections of his friends and classmates. All speak of Nixon's shyness, of his quick intellect, of his capacity for hard work. Many also remember his poverty and his consciousness of it.

In American mythology, politicians in general and Presidents in particular tend to exalt the log-cabin aspects of their boyhood. It is commonplace for famous men, in a country that celebrates humbleness of origin, to glorify poverty they never knew. But Nixon's history defies the mythology, on this key point as on so many others.

UNLIKE MOST Presidents, Nixon was poorer than he seems. It is true that the Nixons were relatively well-off, in middle-class terms, when the biographers discovered them in the mid-50s. But the Nixons were dirt poor at the most critical times of Richard Nixon's boyhood. His father, Frank, was unemployed and trying to start a lemon-growing business when Richard was born in 1913. The business failed, and the first five years of Dick Nixon's life were hard scrabble times for the family. Nixon once recalled that in the five years preceding his older brother Harold's death of tuberculosis in 1933—a period embracing Dick Nixon's entire high school attendance—his mother never bought a new dress because of the medical bills. Nixon has never forgotten those years. People who came to know Nixon after he left Whittier rarely knew of his anxieties about material success, partly because they were hidden by his greater and growing concern for the acquisition of power and partly because he displayed a frequently generous spirit to his friends. Robert Finch recalls that Nixon was almost totally oblivious to the financial arrangements when he was trying to associate with a Southern California law firm after his 1960 defeat. Stephen Hess, a former White House aide in both the Eisenhower and Nixon administrations, learned never to set a fee for speechwriting or other services because Nixon always set a higher one when it was left to him.

But this real generosity of which Nixon often was capable obscured his preoccupation with money and the men who made it. "Get to know the big finance men, that's the key," Rep. John Rousselot of California remembers Nixon telling him in the late '50s at the time when Rousselot was a young conservative aspiring to Congress. And one of the early Nixon supporters, a man who helped draft him to run in 1946, recalls:

"Dick didn't have any money. He lived in a lousy cottage which Herman Perry (the Whittier Bank of America

manager) had got for him. On the one hand, Dick never gave a damn about money and was generous with what he had . . . On the other hand he was the child both of a poor family and the Depression, and he was drawn to people who made a lot of money. He's impressed by them. Money was important to him, not as something to have, but as security . . . That was important to Dick. This is what San Clemente is all about."

WHITTIER WAS KNOWN as "ye friendly town," but there was more tension than friendliness in the Nixon home. Nixon's least critical biographer, Bela Kornitzer, describes his father, Frank Nixon, as "tough, opinion ated, capricious, argumentative and unpredictable." To people who remember him, this seems an understatement Orphaned and uneducated at 9, Frank Nixon became a carpenter and a handyman and he was a rough disciplinarian with the Nixon boys. Richard learned to avoid the beatings that his brothers frequently received but at the cost of further repressing an already inward nature. "Dad was very strict and expected to be obeyed under all circumstances," Nixon told Kornitzer. "If he wanted something, he wanted it at once. He had a hot temper, and I learned early that the only way to deal with him was to abide by the rules he laid down. Otherwise, I would probably have felt the touch of a ruler or the strap as my brothers did." Frank, a Quaker by marriage to Nixon's mother Hannah and a sometime Sunday school teacher, also was gifted in profanity, and Nixon did not have to wait until his Navy service to learn the expletive-deleted language of the Watergate transcripts.

However, Nixon also was taught what was customary for his day, which was never to swear around women. And for a long time, there was scant danger of that. The young Richard Nixon was extraordinarily shy and stayed away from girls. Roy Day, the Republican campaign manager when Nixon first ran against Democrat Jerry Voorhis, recalled that at 33 Nixon was so shy that he had to be advised to look women in the eye when he spoke to them.

Nevertheless, Nixon was well regarded by his friends, most of whom thought he would make a career as a lawyer, not a politician. Those who have known him a long time praise his competitiveness, but they speak even more of a considerate nature and of the loyalty he shows his friends. "I never found anybody who knew him who didn't like him," says Hubert Perry, a classmate in high school and Whittier College and the son of the banker who recruited Nixon to run against Voorhis. Already, however, Nixon's remote manner and his tendency to compartmentalize repelled those who never came to know him well.

ON THE EVE of his inauguration Perry was quoted in his hometown newspaper as saying that Nixon would be admired as President but added, "I don't think he is ever going to be loved."

This was apparent from Nixon's earliest days. Nixon was the sort of young man who impressed relatives and various teachers by his ability to produce the "right" answers and by his bright, hard-working ways. Nixon's classmates also had high regard for his diligence and capability, but most of them were not drawn to him as a person, and his circle of friends was small even then. Within this circle, Nixon gave and received the kind of loyalty that would become a hallmark of his political existence. Outside his circle, however, his reserve appeared as arrogance, and his aloofness, coldness. He always commanded respect. Rarely did he inspire the human affection that Americans often associate with their Presidents.

This young Nixon, whatever else he may have been or would become, was something of a dreamer. His dreams led him to the world outside. The Santa Fe Railway symbolized Nixon's link between Whittier and the world, and the grownup Nixon would remember how the boyhood Nixon had dreamed of leaving on those trains.

"I see another child," Nixon said in his 1968 acceptance speech. "He hears the train go by at night and dreams of far away places he would like to go."

One of Nixon's former law partners, Earl C. Adams of Los Angeles, believes this speech to be among the most personally revealing speeches that Nixon ever made. "He wanted to follow that train," says Adams. "It's not a contrivance at all. He laid in bed and he heard that Santa Fe train go by and he wanted to get on it. He didn't want to stay in Yorba Linda. He wanted to go where he is."

Adams is the senior partner in one of Los Angeles' most prestigious law firms and one of the small group of San Marino and Whittier attorneys and businessmen who recruited Nixon to politics in 1945. He also is the executor of Hannah Nixon's estate and a longtime admirer of Richard Nixon's Quaker mother, whom he regards as the source of Nixon's drive. "A great high ambition is what makes Nixon go," says Adams. "It derives from his mother."

The early recollections make it clear that Richard Nixon, the second son in a family of five, must have been the

favorite of his mother, who liked to predict great things for him. "He was thoughtful and serious," she told Kornitzer. "He always carried such a weight. That's an expression we Quakers use for a person who doesn't take his responsibilities lightly."

DESPITE HIS brightness, Nixon was never regarded as an intellectual. He preferred games and athletic contests, where his competitiveness ran a constantly losing race with his poor physical coordination. "The sports stuff that Dick always spouts is for real," says one of his friends. "I think there were times he would have chucked everything else if he could have played football well." Instead of playing football, Nixon turned his mental talents to competition. He was not drawn to philosophy or even to its stepchild, ideology, but to the winning of argument and debate. Indeed, his Whittier football coach, an admirer of Nixon, believes he had no thought about whether he was Democrat or Republican until he was recruited for the Voorhis race. Nixon himself always has cited debate as the arena of his first achievements, and his autobiography compresses the mistakes of the 1960 campaign into an agony of second-guessing about his "lost" debate with John F. Kennedy.

"I'd always liked to debate," said Nixon in a 1968 interview with Kenneth Harris of the London Observer. "Even when I was a very small boy, I liked to talk to people, discuss things, make points, cross swords in language, and I came to regard the lawyer as the social functionary who most deployed the art of debate." Debate provided Dick Nixon with the outlet for his competitive spirit and for the verbal display of independence denied him in his home. It pleased his mother who wanted him to make something of himself, and it also pleased his difficult father, who regarded rhetorical skill as a demonstration of superior education. Frank Nixon was uneducated and his grammar was poor. "But he always admired educated people," Dick Nixon told Harris. "He was more interested in my education than my career."

Debate developed both Dick Nixon's education and his career, but it broadened him rather than deepening him. He developed a quickness, a facility, an ability to argue all sides of every question. He also developed the dozen little debater's tricks that still mar his speeches, especially the ability to plausibly refute an argument his opponent has never made. "I have met a dozen Dick Nixons on debate teams," says one of his debate opponents of those years. "I didn't do well with a proposition I didn't really believe in . Somehow that never seemed to bother Dick."

Later on, events would reinforce Nixon's early view of the importance of debate. He has always believed, and with some justification, that his debates with Jerry Voorhis helped him to win the congressional seat in 1946. Nixon remained the essential debater when he returned to California to practice law after his loss to Kennedy. Says Earl Adams, his senior partner, of Nixon's California practice:

"He practiced law the way he's best suited to practice law. By temperament, he's not the guy to paw through a file and ferret out all the facts. He likes to have that done by someone else, giving him the opportunity to make the sweeping case."

Debate was not Nixon's only achievement. In school he excelled in geography, history and English. Frequently he has told the children of close White House aides that "geography was my best subject," and his report cards support his recollection. "He wanted to go to faraway, exotic places," says a friend. "He was interested in the world and thought about it when no one else did." Perhaps geography, like the Santa Fe Railway, seemed a way out of Whittier. In any case, Nixon loved the subject and he would spend hours reading books about foreign countries and rolling the names of strange-sounding capitals off his tongue.

THE COUNTRY of Nixon's mind, like the minds of other boys, was inhabited by the heroes and villains of his parents. He revered Woodrow Wilson, another dreamer, and the President his mother most admired. He hated newspapermen, as did his father, who once during a serious illness suggested to his Vice President son that they be thrown out of the house. Let those who trace Nixon's suspicion of the press to the Hiss case or to the Checkers speech consider these words from "Our Privileges Under the Constitution," a prize-winning speech Nixon gave as a high school junior:

"How much ground do these privileges cover? There are some who use them as a cloak for covering libelous, indecent and injurious statements against their fellow men. Should the morals of this nation be offended and polluted in the name of freedom of speech or freedom of the press? In the words of Lincoln, the individual can have no rights against the best interests of society."

Robert M. Williams, a classmate of Nixon's at Whitter High School, recalls that Nixon "delivered the speech in much the same way he delivers speeches now—not very well." But Williams was impressed by Nixon in other ways. Both were candidates for student offices on what was known as the "senior ticket" with Williams running for editor of the school newspaper and Nixon for student body president. All of the senior ticket candidates except Nixon won, and afterward Williams named him "feature writer" for the school paper.

WILLIAMS SAID he selected him because of his good marks in English and his reliability. "I knew I could count on him to meet deadlines," adds Williams. "He always did, too."

Nixon's school newspaper stories, like his speech on the Constitution, were models of organization. In fact, it probably is not too much to say that organization and hard work always have been the twin keys to Nixon's personal success. In his California days he loved to tell the story of how he had pushed his way through Duke Law School, in part by mimeographing the pages of his law professor's thesis in a hot, airless room. Nixon also valued the statement of a Duke upperclassman in the Earl Mazo biography of Nixon. The upperclassman predicted that Nixon, who was then worried sick about the possibility of failure, would make it because "you've got an iron butt and that's the secret of becoming a lawyer."

When he entered politics, Nixon's organizational abilities served him even better than his debating experience. He also developed a fascination with strategy and a habit of explaining his strategies to people as a demonstration of his analytical powers. It was legal strategy at first, then poker strategy in the Navy, then political strategy.

This habit suggests that it was the strategy itself that was paramount rather than any particular objective. When David S. Broder and Stephen Hess wrote "The Republican Establishment" in 1965 they would conclude about Nixon, "He is one of the few politicians . . . whose motives are always questioned."

It is this central suspicion that he is a hypocrite that has plagued Nixon throughout his political life. Its roots go deep into the childhood of a home divided between the Quaker instruction in a higher morality and the teachings of a profane, intolerant, opinionated father who did not lightly accept dissent from equals, much less from his sons. "Dick never liked to admit he made a mistake," recalls a high school classmate who says with understatement that the flaw now seems much larger than it did at the time.

Sometimes this dualist morality of his childhood would lead Nixon to make claims that seemed transparently hypocritical as when, during his third 1960 debate with Kennedy, he criticized Harry Truman's use of language and praised President Eisenhower for restoring "dignity and decency and, frankly, good language to the conduct of the presidency .

"What made it silly," said a former Nixon aide, "is not only that Dick swore but that he knew full well that Ike swore like the trooper he was."

THE CONTRADICTION between what Nixon had been taught and perhaps wanted to be and that he was was nowhere more evident than in his spiritual life. He invited both a Quaker speaker and the Rev. Billy Graham to preside at his mother's funeral, and their presence seemed to symbolize the contradiction between Nixon's early reliance on a personal, inner God and his later celebration of the Lord as a political ally of the United States.

The contradiction has been there for a long time. Loverne Morris, a contemporary of Nixon's in Whitter and a retired staff member of the Whitter Daily News, wrote in 1969: "Those who attended Sunday school, church services and young people's meetings with him said he took his normal part but never seemed particularly devout and certainly not spiritual. They said he observed conventional moralities." Others disagreed, both then and now.

One of those who is convinced of Nixon's basic spirituality is Charles Colson, the former White House aide and convert to Christianity who pleaded guilty to obstructing justice in the Ellsberg case. Late in 1973, before the publicization of his conversion, Colson gave Nixon a book by the Quaker writer Elton Trueblood, "Abraham Lincoln: Theologian of American Anguish," and Nixon read it in those distraught days of a 1973 San Clemente trip when he was so depressed and diverted by Watergate that he walked about alone at night and canceled some of his most important appointments. Writing of Lincoln in words that Nixon has come to claim as his own, Trueblood said: "His only certainty lay in the conviction that God will never cease to call America to her true service, not only for her own sake but for the sake of the world."

The God whom Nixon was taught about in childhood was a more personal one. There are many evidences that Nixon believed deeply in Him, none more compelling than an awkwardly moving eulogy he wrote at 17 to his youngest brother Arthur, who had died at 7 of meningitis. Arthur