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A number of years ago Examiner reporter William Flynn, then a correspondent for the Boston Globe, researched the early life of Richard Nixon. Rechecking his files and notes recently, he decided the intervening years have made them more timely, not less. We agreed.

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The Young Dick Nixon

SF Examiner

By William Flynn

RICHARD MILHOUS NIXON, the 37th President of the United States whose ultimate involvement in the Affair Watergate is the subject of serious concern, is said to be a "private man."

None, it seems "at this point in time," knows nor understands him.

But Richard Milhous Nixon is not an unknown man.

The influence and the details of his early life, his formative years, are known.

When put into perspective, they make up the facets of a portrait of a man which could help explain his attitude toward the work of the Watergate autopsy surgeons.

Like Southern California, where he was born, reared, and matured into manhood, Richard Nixon is a composite of contradictions.

The land of his heritage is rich, it is poor. It possesses beauty and ugliness. It is rich in sunshine. But smog pinches tears from the eye with sharp, piercing pain. The home lawns are rich green. Playgrounds for school children are surfaced with a black asphalt that bubbles in the heat.

One man says Richard Nixon is a paragon of virtue. Another describes him as "the personification of opportunism."

A one-time law partner says he is serious. A teacher remembers him as a "smart alec."

One political peer says he is a loyalist. Another says he is a double crosser.

And one who knows him well, in triumph and defeat, summed up the man and the character with these nine words:

"Richard Nixon never made a joke in his life."

On January 9, 1913, Richard Nixon was born into the uncomplicated world of Francis (Frank) Anthony Nixon, a native of Ohio; and Hannah Milhous Nixon, whose life began in a towering, rigidly square frame farm house near Butlerville, Indiana. He grew to manhood in another world, more complicated and more sophisticated.

The Nixons were part of the westward migration of Americans who sought wealth, health, "a change," as they found the cultures of their native communities inadequate for their needs or desires.



The families related to the 37th president of the nation were steeped in the faith of the Quakers. They were hardworking, God-fearing, almost inflexible in their judgment of what was right and what was wrong. They were determined. They were kind.

These individuals brought their culture and environment with them. The land was pastoral, the life relatively simple. The virtues of truth and honesty were the standards of community life. These precepts were the first rules of living that were instilled in the man child known as Dick Nixon.

But a new way of life was developing, exerting its influence on the emerging young man. Oil was pumped from the sun-parched land that nurtured fruit orchards. Acres and acres of undistinguished terrain became brooding aircraft and electronics factories, identified by acres of land stripped for parking lots.

Thus Richard Nixon, born into the world of the stolid, hard-working Quakers, was caught up in a world of social and economic changes that twisted the culture, moulded it, shaped it, into something new in which, it appeared, pragmatic achievements had more meaning than the old virtues.

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THE BIRTHPLACE of President Nixon, in Yorba Linda, California, above. At left, Nixon as a sophomore in high school in 1928.

Richard Nixon began this life in the southwest, first-floor corner bedroom of a two-story frame house in Yorba Linda, 25 miles south of Metropolitan Los Angeles. And here he lived for the first years of his life.

In that community the first documents reflecting the character of the man to be are available for inspection.

The first record of his academic activity concerns his work in the second grade, enrolled at the age of six years and nine months, one student in a class of 35.

His attendance during the year was perfect. He did not miss a single day. And his progress was rapid. On February 11 of 1920 he was listed on the roster of the second

grade. On February 14 he was moved into the third grade. And on June 10 of that year, he was officially placed in the fourth grade.

His teacher was Ellen Anderson. She was to remember him for two reasons:

"He knew school was his business and seemed to be quick in all of his studies. He was a good student. When it came time to play, he was full of life.

"I am sure I would remember more about him if he had been anything but serious. He never gave me any trouble and you just don't remember children like that too well . . . you do remember the others."

Another elementary school teacher, Miss Esther Williams, remembered him as "a good quiet, serious student."

"I don't remember any problem of discipline with him," she recalled. "But if he had done anything out of the way, I would remember it."

Brother Donald Nixon remembers this era in the life of the President:

"None of us had too much time to play."

And it was at this time that Richard made his first effort as a debater, an exercise in

'If he had done anything out of the way, I would remember . . . ?

which he was to fancy himself in the years to come. In the seventh grade, he and another boy debated a girls team with the subject:

"Resolved, that insects are more beneficial than harmful."

To prepare for the verbal encounter, he consulted an uncle who was a professional entomologist and acquired a store of arguments that held bugs and insects were, indeed, helpful. These he presented in a solemn intense manner, somewhat mature for a youth of his years.

His team won.

And there came the time when his mother, who could be stern, added another chore. She assigned him to do the dinner dishes. He considered the task "girl's work." But he did them.

"Richard always pulled the blinds down tight so people wouldn't see him with his hands in a dishpan," his mother was to recall years later.



This is a street scene in Whittier as it looks today

His academic record at high school was one of high grades. He scored 59 in an intelligence test that had a norm of 35. The best he could do in a journalism class was B although he had an A record in Latin. And he made his first move as a vote seeking politician. He won election as general manager of student body affairs.

This office imposed the responsibility, for example, of making sure all water buckets were filled when the football game started. He could fill them or assign the task to one of the team managers. His peers recall — the manager usually carried the water.

As his high school career ended, Principal

O.C. Albertson identified him as a serious student.

"Dick Nixon was a very alert, serious-minded student who never needed any help from the principal," the educator was to recall. "He knew what he wanted and went out and got it."

During this era he publicly disclosed his early awareness of the United States Constitution, saying during an oratorical presentation:

"Fellow citizens, we have seen that without question the Constitution has been the underlying force in America's progress.

"We know that our forefathers have championed this document to the extent of giving their lives — that we might enjoy its benefits.

"Yet in view of these facts, at the present time, a great wave of indifference to the Constitution's authority, disrespect of its law, and opposition to its basic principles threatens its very foundation.

"Shall we of the present generation allow this instrument to be cast into disrepute?

"Shall we be responsible for its downfall?

"If this nation wishes its progress to continue, this wave of indifference to the laws of the Constitution must cease.

"For as long as the Constitution is respected, its laws obeyed and its principles enforced, America will continue to progress.

"But if the time should ever come when America will consider this document too obsolete to cope with changed ideals of government, then the time will have arrived when the American people as an undivided nation must come back to normal and change their ideals to conform with those mighty principles set forth in our incomparable Constitution."

This was the Constitutional philosophy of the 17 year old Whittier youth who was twice to be elected defender and guardian of the Constitution he so revered.

Graduated from high school, Richard Nixon decided to go to college in his home town, matriculating at Whittier College, founded by a Quaker, the inheritor of the Friends' ideals but non-sectarian in organization and official philosophy.

Poet John Greenleaf Whittier penned the words that summed up the objective of the educational institution:

*"Early hath Life's mighty question
"Thrilled within the heart of youth
"With a deep and strong beseeching
"What and where is truth."*

Despite the legends born of what might have been, Richard Nixon was not a Whittier football star—nor was he a student of such excellence that he graduated with honors.

As for his prowess on the gridiron:

"He had two left feet," recalled Team Water Boy Harold Litten. "He couldn't coordinate. He just didn't have it."

A check of the scholastic records brought this comment from the honors statistician:

"That young man's grade point average was not high enough for honors."

It is worth noting that his lowest grades were in journalism—a straight C. He did receive an A in "Fundamentals of Football."

Acting was one of his extra-curricular activities. His portrayal of a role in Drinkwater's "Bird in Hand," inspired a reviewer to comment:

"Richard Nixon, playing the heavy role of the English Inn Keeper, acted with a surety that has been seen far too seldom in Whittier productions."

And when the undergraduate years concluded, the yearbook had this to say:

"After one of the most successful years the college has witnessed, we stop to reminisce (sic), and come to the realization that much of the success was due to the efforts of this very gentleman (Richard Nixon.)

"Always progressive and with a liberal attitude, he has led us through the year with flying colors."

From Whittier, he went to Duke University to study law. He was admitted to practice in California by examination on November 9, 1937, almost a year before he bothered to register as a voter although he had turned 21 several years earlier.

He finally registered—as a Republican—on June 15, 1938.

As a young lawyer in a hometown law office, he was serious, dignified, legalistic rather than dramatic. He had a part time job as deputy city attorney, handling "a few drunks, some parking problems."

This then was the life of the man who went on to serve as a Navy lieutenant, congressman, senator, and President and now in the eye of the Watergate controversy.

And the advice from the Los Angeles Times offered long ago is still valid. It was:

"Nixon—A Man to Watch."