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## A search for recollections of Nixon's younger days

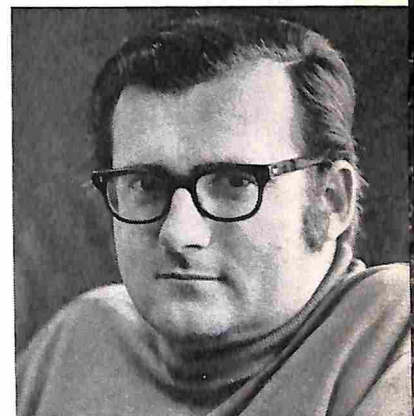
When Staff Writer Donald Jackson set out to write about the early years of Richard Nixon he discovered that talking to folks about a man they knew long before he became famous is not quite as easy as it sounds. First, there was the problem of merely locating the President's old acquaintances. Many of his boyhood friends still live near the family's original home in Whittier, Calif., but others had moved, some more than once, leaving few clues as to their present whereabouts. An old Navy buddy of Nixon's, Jackson learned, had lived in Chicago as late as 1960. After two frustrating and fruitless days on the telephone from New York, Jackson finally flew to Chicago and went through old telephone books until he found the man's former address. Then Jackson canvassed the neighborhood until he found someone who'd received a recent Christmas card from the man. The return address—in Adrian, Mich.—was on the envelope.

But finding the sources was not the most difficult part. In weeks of interviews across the country, Jackson found that people's memories of the young Nixon were bent and shaped by recent politics.

"Almost everyone in the country has an opinion about Nixon," says Jackson. "Nobody was neutral—even those who knew him 40 years ago. But everyone's memory was edited by the passage of time, and by his own current ideology. I would ask a college classmate about Nixon's personality as a freshman football player. The classmate would talk about how determined Nixon was, and pretty soon he wasn't really talking about the kid he knew 35 years ago but about the man he voted for two years ago. One woman I talked with had disliked Nixon when they were students together. She told me about a time she recalled seeing Nixon cheat during a college debate—he had been citing facts and figures from a piece of paper that was actually blank. After she told me the story she paused a few seconds and said, 'Gee, I think I remember that.' That was what I had to watch out for.

"Most of those who knew Nixon as a boy or young man were unabashed fans, and most would make that clear immediately with a phrase such as, 'Well, I'm a partisan, you know,' or 'I never believed any of that Tricky Dicky stuff.' It took a lot of sifting and delicately phrased questions to get what I thought was an honest portrait.

"In the end, the writing process, I had to try to suppress my own political reflexes too, so that what finally came out was not a picture of Nixon viewed through any single ideological screen but—I hope—a picture free of any screen at all. People already have strong feelings about him, feelings that will survive almost any input of information, including this story. I just wanted to present the facts of his life as a boy and young man, to say: here is where he came from, here is what he did, here is what he was like."



DONALD JACKSON

*Ralph Graves*

RALPH GRAVES  
Managing Editor



# TIME

## THE YOUNG NIXON

- His career as an actor
- The steady girl he didn't marry
- Breaking into the dean's office
- Poker champ of Green Island atoll



At 14, Nixon played second violin in his high school orchestra

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