

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Brian Kilroy

(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)

GMOH# 170

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Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. The date is November 19, 2009, and we're at the MEA building—Maine Education Association building—in Augusta, Maine, with Brian Kilroy and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Brian, could you start just by giving me your full name?

Brian Kilroy : Brian Joseph Kilroy.

AL: And where and when were you born?

BK: I was born November 22, 1955, in Lewiston, Maine.

AL: Did you grow up in the Lewiston area?

BK: No, my father was a teacher at the time, my parents were from the Portland area and they had moved to Lewiston-Auburn. And I was the second born in their family, and at the time they were, my father was teaching in the Auburn school system and coaching baseball.

AL: And what were your parents' names?

BK: My father was Robert Joseph Kilroy, he was born in 1926. He was the youngest son of Jane and Francis Kilroy. My mother was Constance [Ann] Greaney [Kilroy]. She was the third of four, of Robert Greaney and Simone Greaney, from the Portland area. Both my mother and father grew up in the Portland area, in the Sherman, Grant Street, Sacred Heart area.

AL: And so where did you ultimately end up, growing up?

BK: My parents moved to Delaware to be near my Aunt Margaret, who was my grandfather's older sister, Margaret Kilroy. And my father took a teaching job down there and taught for many years, retired from the state of Delaware as an educator, and my parents moved back to Maine in 1989. I moved back to Maine in 1981, after going on to graduate school, receiving a degree at the University of Delaware, and I got a master's degree from the University of Maine, 1985, but my wife and I, Barbara and I came back to Maine in 1981 and we've been in Maine ever since.

AL: So, when you were growing up, did you know the Mitchell family at all, or is this something, you got to know them in later years?

BK: Yes, my father was, Robert and his two older brothers, William and Richard, were first cousins to the Mitchells. And we used to come back to Maine all the time, four or five times a year. I used to spend my summers up in Maine; I used to spend them at Old Orchard Beach. My grandparents, Francis and Jane Kilroy had a place at Old Orchard Beach when my grandmother was in the legislature, and we used to come up and visit with the Kilroys, and also knew the Mitchells well. And later actually, in 1982 and '88, I actually worked on the Mitchell campaigns, senate campaigns. And so, yes, my father was very close to his first cousins, and my Uncle Bill, for example, was a very good friend and hung out a lot with, Bill Kilroy hung out with Robbie Mitchell, one of the brothers. And Richard, my father's oldest brother, he was involved in politics as well, and was very active in Democratic politics and was an early supporter of George in the first run, in the governor's run back there in the early '70s. I was actually, I remember, at the Mitchell Compound up in Waterville when that race was under way.

AL: Can you talk about that?

BK: I don't have, I was only sixteen or seventeen at the time so I was interested in other things, but I just remember that everyone expected George to win, and of course Longley came out of nowhere to win that governor's race, which was a big surprise.

AL: Now, let's go backwards and talk some about your family background.

BK: My grandparents. Francis Kilroy was the second of five children of Michael Kilroy and Bridget Hunt Kilroy. And the children in that family, it's an interesting story, not a story unlike many families that had immigrated to the United States at that time; they came over from Ireland and settled in Boston. My great-grandfather, his name is actually Michael Kilroy, it's been reported to be other things but his name was Michael Kilroy, he had five children: Mary Kilroy, who was born in 1892; Francis, my grandfather, who was born in 1896; James Henry, later known as John, who was born in 1897; Isabella, who was later known as Betty, born in 1898; and then the youngest, Michael Kilroy, who was born in 1900, who was George Mitchell's father. And my great-grandparents' parish, we don't really know the circumstances of that, but the five children got placed in various Catholic orphanages in New England, and this was a common story because these folks were very poor and worked in, my great-grandfather worked as a longshoreman on the docks in South Boston, and when my great-grandmother died he couldn't really take care of the family, so the kids were put in orphanages.

And my grandfather, being the second oldest, Francis Kilroy, was very interested in his later years, as he got older in the orphanage, to reconnecting with his siblings. And he, with the assistance of the nuns and the orphanages, sought out and maintained, established and maintained contact with his siblings in the orphanages and came to know better, as he grew up, his connection to his siblings, who eventually found their way to various parts of northern New England.

My grandfather Francis got shipped up to an orphanage in Portland and was semi-adopted into

Irish Catholic families in Portland, one family was the Carroll family, I believe they are the same Carroll family that the Carroll Mansion in Portland is named after, they're an Irish family, and he was also brought into a household named Collins, and for a time, much like his little brother, George Mitchell's father, actually went by a different name. My grandfather went by the name of Collins for awhile in his youth, because he lived with the Collins's family, but he, as he grew older in his teenage years took back his name Francis Kilroy and there's -

AL: I wondered how he got the name Kilroy, if that was the family name, but the other names had changed over time.

BK: Actually, all the names of the children, they all kept their name Kilroy, except George Mitchell's father, who was adopted into a family in Waterville. And the story has been reported by George and other Mitchells that George Mitchell's father, who at the time was Kilroy, was actually brought up to an orphans' Mass in St. John's Church, Catholic Church in Bangor, and was adopted off the altar, as they often had, they used to have orphans' Masses back then. They used to empty the orphanages periodically and take the orphans to so-called orphans' Masses, and couples would go to those Masses and pick essentially the children that they wanted, and that's how George Mitchell's father got adopted out of the orphanage.

My grandfather was older, these were kids, the five children were ages probably [from] single digits up to the early teens. My grandfather was a young teenager when he got placed in the Portland area, so he was old enough to maintain himself pretty much, as was his older sister Mary, who became known as Margaret, who was the aunt that my father later moved to be close to in Delaware.

So they all eventually got placed in homes, the five children, and my grandfather actually was a very interesting character in that, in his teens he ran an Irish gang, a gang of Irish kids in the Saint Dominic's Church area in Portland, he was the head of the gang, there were gangs of kids back then, ethnic gangs. His gang had I guess a dozen or so kids in it, and he was the leader of the gang. And actually one of the runts of the gang, they used to call them the runts of the gang, was someone by the name of Giant Conroy, who later of course became the famous football coach for Portland High School. His name is Jack Conroy, John Conroy, Giant Conroy, he passed away just a few years ago.

So eventually my grandfather Francis sought out his siblings and established contact with his, for example, his younger brother in Waterville, and used to visit up there. And as he married, he married my grandmother, Jane Callan, from another Irish family in the Saint Dom's/Sacred Heart area. Jane Callan was the daughter of Joe Callan, Joseph Callan, and Mary Doyle. Francis married Jane, they had three children, the youngest is my father, Robert, but as Francis and Jane had their family in Portland, my grandfather kept contact with all his siblings. At that point, they were all of course older, and used to frequently visit with the Mitchells up in the Waterville area.

And it was kind of interesting, as my father and his brothers, William and Richard, grew up, they all went to Chevrus, and my father was a very good athlete, basketball, baseball and football for

Chevrus, developed a family rivalry of sorts with the Mitchell cousins, who were extraordinary athletes in the Waterville area, and used to go up and visit and share stories in their adolescence and so on. George Mitchell's mother, Mary, anglicized name Mary, was a wonderful person and took it upon herself to coordinate some of the family activities and was very, very helpful.

In fact, a very funny story that my father told me a few years ago, and I actually observed firsthand back in the '90s. When John Baldacci was in the Congress he was in a parade in Hampden, and my father had his convertible entered in the parade, and John was walking in the parade and during a lull in the parade we approached John, who was walking, politicking along, walking along the sides of the cars in the parade, and we asked John if he wanted a ride. And he got in the car and we gave him a ride for a bit. And my father turned to John and told a funny story while we were riding in the car, I was driving, and my father said, "You know John, I dated your mother when I was in high school." And John said, "That's interesting, how could that be?"

And it was a really funny story. My father said that his aunt, who was George Mitchell's mother, did a kind of a blind date thing with my father and John Baldacci's mother [Rosemary Baldacci], who happened to be George Mitchell's [mother's] sister's daughter. So I guess they dated a few times and it was a long-distance date, but Mary Mitchell set my father up with John's mother for a few dates, which was kind of funny. Because John is related to the Mitchells in exactly the same way that I am, except I'm through my father's side and he's through his mother's side. So, that was a funny story, and I think John Baldacci got a kick out of that. But, do you want to hear more about my grandmother?

AL: Yes, and I want to say, just to make sure that I have it clear, George's mother was a sister to John Baldacci's grandmother.

BK: Yes, John's grandmother and George Mitchell's mother were sisters.

AL: Were sisters.

BK: Yes. And, yeah, that's the connection there.

AL: Yes, so more about your grandmother Jane.

BK: My grandmother Jane was a very interesting person. She was the oldest in her family. She had a younger sister, Frances, as well, Frances with an E, who was a long-time educator in Portland, taught for over forty years in the city of Portland, and she had another sister who died at age seven. But Jane Callan grew up in the Irish section of Portland and became involved in politics at a relatively early age, back when women were not involved in politics. She worked for the telephone company for a time; she was a supervisor for the telephone company. She also worked in the Customs House down by Commercial Street, on Exchange Street, for several years, but eventually met my grandfather Francis, who had gone in the war, World War I, and had come out and settled back in Portland. And he started a career in the post office, eventually

became number two in the post office there, and they married and had three children.

Jane was very interested in politics, and got involved early on in Democratic politics and was first elected back in 1935 as a representative to the Maine House, in the Maine House of Representatives, and at that point in time House members from Portland were elected at large, so she represented the city of Portland, and she served off and on over five decades in the '30s, in the '50s, the '60s and into the '70s. And she was a member of the Democratic National Committee for many years; she was an early supporter of John Kennedy, which helped her a lot in the '60s, as she got invited to numerous things once Kennedy was elected. She was also, as I think I said, she was member of the Democratic National Committee, and at the time, in the '60s as I recall, James Farley was the chair of the Democratic National Committee. And of course James Farley was known as the king maker in Democratic politics, he was FDR's right-hand man for many, many years and one of the famous politicians, and my grandmother got to know him very well, and he later became chairman of the Coca Cola Corporation.

And so, as a member of the Democratic National Committee at an interesting time, when the Democrats took the presidency in 1960, my grandmother was really involved in the national political scene as a member of that committee. And when John Kennedy came to Portland, campaigning I remember, my father tells me this story that I was right there, right in the thick of things when Kennedy came. And one of the funny stories my father tells me anyway is, I was so close to Kennedy, I was on my father's shoulders, that I grabbed John Kennedy by the tie and wouldn't let him go, which caused a minor ruckus. But as many people know, Kennedy also came to Maine shortly before he was assassinated, and I have pictures of that interaction between Kennedy and the various political figures in Maine at the time, including my grandmother, Jane Callan Kilroy.

She was also president of the Order of Women Legislators, which was a national organization for women legislators in the U.S., and she was very proud of that. Her interests were primarily youth and education when she served in the Maine House. She was a friend and supporter, obviously, of Ed Muskie. And one of the things I guess she was most famous for, she was the ranking Democrat for a time in the '60s, having first been elected in 1935, but one of the things she was very well known for, and there's a lot of funny stories about that, is she used to sing the National Anthem at a lot of the state events.

AL: Yes, tell me about that. How did she get to start doing that?

BK: Well, she was a singer in church, and my grandmother was a very strong personality and was very proud of her singing and I think, much like many singers, sang for many years, was very proud of it, and I think as she got up in years, her voice was not as good as her perceived ability, but she still continued to sing at some of these state events. But she was, she traveled frequently with my grandfather back to Ireland, visiting my family relatives in Ireland, and had a really wonderful political career, and was bipartisan in many respects. One of the pictures I have on my wall in my office was a picture of me as a youth with a Republican governor, Governor Reed. She was an interesting character.

AL: Now you mentioned she had a strong personality. Talk to me about her relationship with Senator Muskie, because they were both very prominent at the same, they overlapped in that prominence.

BK: Well there were a quite a few stories, interesting stories, I guess. One of the interesting ones that I remember in my family was, Ed Muskie got in a very serious car accident when he was in politics in Maine and my grandmother was in the House, and the accident actually occurred in Wilmington, Delaware, where my father and my mother were living at the time, and my father *and* my grandmother told me this story, that my grandmother called my father and said, “You’ve got to go into the Wilmington General Hospital, Ed Muskie’s in there, he was involved in a serious car accident, you need to go and visit him on my behalf.”

So my father went in to see Ed Muskie, and Ed Muskie and my grandmother, although they were in the same political party and he was the governor, they used to fight occasionally on political things. So my father went in to see Ed Muskie, and Ed Muskie greeted my father and they started talking, and he was obviously very glad to see someone from Maine in to see him, but then he also started telling some stories about my grandmother and started using some salty language to describe their relationship. And [he was] actually was very happy that my father was there and that my grandmother sent my father as a visitor, an emissary, but it was kind of a funny story.

And I heard others. I remember hearing one story where I guess Senator Mitchell, at that time an aide to Senator Muskie, was in a car with him one time and Ed Muskie was complaining about my grandmother and using some interesting language, I guess, to describe some of the things that were occurring. And I think at one point, at least I was told, George said, “That’s my aunt you’re talking about.” And I don’t know if that was one of the early interactions, and I wasn’t sure if Muskie knew that at the time or George was just, Senator Mitchell was just reminding him of that fact, of that relationship, but it was kind of funny.

AL: Do you have a sense of what her campaign style was when she was running in those early years as a woman? I’m assuming it must’ve had some strong grassroots support.

BK: Portland was, parts of Portland were much like Boston at the time, and this was in the early, in the ‘30s, and later in the ‘60s and ‘70s. I know my grandmother never spent more than twenty-nine dollars in her, one of her campaigns, and that was for a, I think she said it was twenty-nine dollars or nineteen dollars for a picture of her in the *Portland Press Herald*. She never campaigned, she was prominent in the community there, and basically just got elected and got elected and got elected, and was in and out of the political scene as she raised a family.

And my father and my two uncles went off to war, in World War II, they were all, my father was on an aircraft carrier, my Uncle Bill, William, was on a B-24 Liberator and, in Europe actually, the most dangerous assignment in the entire war, fifty percent mortality rate, the 8th Air Force, the B-24s, half of them got shot down. And my other uncle was a naval officer, Richard, and was

at Normandy. So all three were lucky to get back, and I have some very interesting letters and correspondence back to my, from my uncles and my father back to my grandparents, when they were in the war. So she was obviously very interested in Democratic politics and had quite an interesting career.

AL: Yeah.

BK: My oldest child is named after her, Callan Kilroy, and my cousin Rob Kilroy, Robert Kilroy, has twin sons and one of those sons is also named after her. So we have two Callan Kilroys in the family now, named after my grandmother.

AL: Oh, that's nice. Now, she was also active at the same time Margaret Chase Smith was. Did, they were two different parties, but both being women and strong personalities, do you have any recollections or stories about their interactions?

BK: I really don't, I don't know how much they interacted. Obviously, Margaret Chase Smith was more on the national scene and was a prominent U.S. senator. My grandmother was primarily in state politics, although because of her DNC membership was involved in the national political scene, particularly in the '60s. So I don't really recall any major interactions, any stories from that relationship, but I'm sure they knew each other. And women in politics were a rarity, so I'm sure that they had some sort of understanding or relationship. And there weren't a lot of women back then who chose to run or actually got elected. It was interesting, it's not like it is now, and I'm sure my grandmother was very proud of the fact that she was a woman and served for so long a time.

AL: Yet, did you have a sense that your grandmother felt like she was breaking new ground? I mean -

BK: Well it's, when I was growing up, my grandmother was always immersed in politics. I mean she always had people over to the house, and she was always talking on the phone with people, and always going to one event, to another. I don't ever really remember that she, it was all part of a natural thing, and I don't recall her ever thinking that this was remarkable, though it kind of was I think, because of the length of involvement, and the fact that she was a woman and elected at such an early age actually, in a time, I mean clearly, she was an FDR Democrat. Portland at the time was, although it was primarily an immigrant city, was still a very much of a Republican stronghold, because they just weren't electing Democrats. If you look at the composition of the House in 1935-'36, there's just a few women in there, and I don't know if there were any other Irish Catholic women, for sure, and there, it was, Maine was very Republican back then.

AL: Can you talk to me about your recollections of the Mitchells, maybe stories and family gatherings, if you have more than you've already mentioned?

BK: I was out of Maine for much of my youth, obviously, and came back in '81. My uncles,

Richard and William, Richard's family grew up in Cape Elizabeth, William in South Portland, and as I mentioned earlier, they were very close with the Mitchells over the years because they were still in Maine. My father was down in Delaware, and we'd come back and we'd connect somehow on, during vacations and so on and so forth, and my father always maintained contact with Paul Mitchell in particular, and Johnny and Robbie. George much less so, since he was younger and was always very, very busy.

And my father's favorite cousin, I'd probably have to say, at least in his youth, was Barbara Mitchell, who was the youngest of the Mitchell clan. And she was my father's pen pal when my father was in the war, my father was eighteen, actually he went in the navy at seventeen and served on the Pacific Fleet in '44 and '45. Barbara Mitchell was a wonderful cousin and wrote to all the Kilroy boys who were in the service, the three cousins, while they were in the service, and she was just nine, ten, eleven years old when she was writing these letters. I actually have a letter if you want to -

AL: Oh, do you?

BK: I read this letter last May when my father passed away, and Barbara Mitchell was in the church alone with Johnny and Paul, and I read this letter from the altar, because it was kind of funny, because it kind of brought into perspective what was going on during the war, and also what was going on in the Mitchell family during the war. So I'll read this, it was written December 7th, 1944, the third anniversary, actually, of Pearl Harbor. And it was from Barbara Mitchell who was, I think, age nine at the time. It's kind of funny because afterwards, after the Mass, the funeral Mass, I said to Barbara, I hope you didn't mind if I read that letter, and I said, "You must have been what, twelve or thirteen when you wrote this letter?" She said, "No, I was nine." She quickly corrected me that she was nine, so it was kind of funny.

But the letter says, "Dear Bobby, During the coldest season of the year, I bring you the warmest wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We received your letter and we all thank you for the gift. Pauly is on the varsity team for Bates College and Johnny is still playing for Waterville High. Robert and Georgie go to the Waterville Boys' Club every night and practice for basketball because they want to try and be as good in sports as their brothers. Dad and Mom are working all the time. Now, dear cousin, I hope you will understand why I", underlined I, "answered your letter. It seems that everybody in this house is busy either with sports or making money, except poor me" – this is pretty funny – "so I took it onto myself to answer your dear letter. I hope you don't laugh at my letter because I'm trying to do my best. In your letter you said you were going on an aircraft carrier, so I shall pray every day that God may bring you, Dickie, Billie, and all the other boys home safe and sound to their loved ones. God bless you and be with you. Your loving cousin, Barbara".

AL: Wow, that's nice. And your dad kept that all those years.

BK: Yeah, and it goes to show you what was going on in the Mitchell household, because clearly, Pauly, who was Paul, is Paul, and Johnny, of course, were incredible athletes for

Waterville High School and went on to play in college. Robbie, Robert, was a phenomenal basketball player also for Waterville High School. And George was the youngest, George was younger than the Kilroy cousins and his older brothers, and my father used to say that when he used to go to Waterville to visit his aunt and uncle, George's parents, that George's mother, Mary, would give my father a nickel to buy George an ice cream, because he would not be allowed in some of the basketball games with his brothers and the Kilroy cousins, because he was younger. So George's mother, Mary, asked my father to occasionally look after George so that he wouldn't be left out. Of course George was a good athlete in his own right, he was just younger, and of course was also an incredible student, and all the Mitchells and all the Kilroys, and my grandmother in particular, valued education.

Going back 120 years, even from now, all my relatives were extremely poor in Ireland, and I still have family over there and they are all farmers. But when my great-grandparents emigrated from Ireland, my great-grandfather, who was a longshoreman in Boston, they had nothing obviously, and those kids that grew up, were growing up in Boston and had nothing, and my grandfather never forgot that, as did George Mitchell's father, the younger brother. They really emphasized education, and all the Kilroy boys and all the Mitchells very much valued education, because they came essentially from nothing. And my grandmother when she got involved in politics, that was her primary interest, was education and programs for the youth, because they were part of that immigrant population that understood that you couldn't go anywhere or do anything in society without a proper education.

Now, my grandfather didn't graduate from college, nor did George Mitchell's father. The other siblings in that family also went on and were successful. I mentioned some of the others, Betty, her family went to, she went to Connecticut and had kids in her family and they were all successful as well. John as well, and my, the oldest there, Margaret, who my father had moved near in Delaware, she did not have any kids of her own, but, so education was always emphasized. And Barbara's letter to my father back in 1944 emphasized the fact that, in that household, sports, hard work and going to school were the things that were important. And they certainly were in my family as well.

AL: Did you have a chance to get to know George, George and Robbie and John and Paul and Barbara's father?

BK: No, no, I did not. I met the mother many times in her later years and, no, I did not. And Paul used to get a kick out of seeing me when I would visit with them in the, as a young man, in the '80s and all up through now, because Paul and Johnny always say that I look just like their father, that I resemble their father. And they used to joke, they still joke about it, that I look like their father. And I've got all kinds of pictures of the Mitchells and my grandfather and George Mitchell's father and my aunt, Margaret and so on, and I'm not sure, I suppose there's a family resemblance, but I, yeah, it's interesting.

AL: Did your father have memories of George's father?

BK: Oh yeah.

AL: (*Unintelligible*) a sense of, did your, I mean have a sense of what he was like?

BK: George Mitchell's father was an incredibly interesting person, my father said, because he was, he worked essentially as a laborer, but he also was very well read, and he spoke French and he spoke Arabic, and was a very interesting guy in and by himself. He had no formal education, but understood the value of education. My father just remembers that the Mitchell household in Waterville was a very loving and supportive household. My father used to love to go up to visit the Mitchells, because the house was such a nice, warm friendly house, and they were working all the time, the mother and the father, but they had a very connected community there in the Lebanese community in Waterville and they just were very supportive and wonderful people. And my father had great memories of the father and the mother, George Mitchell's mother, as just very nice people, very kind and generous people.

AL: Can you talk about your present relationships with the Mitchells, and you said you have cousins, some of the cousins you're close to?

BK: Yeah, of course. I worked on the '82 and '88 campaigns as a volunteer, Mitchell for Senate campaigns, so in those years I reconnected back with everybody. And I was going to graduate school at the time, in 1982, at the University of Maine, and I got very much involved in Democratic politics as just as a helper. And so I reestablished a lot of connections with the Mitchells when I came back in '81, and I've continued to be friendly, particularly with Paul and Johnny. Robbie, Robert came up to my house a few times and actually was up at my house just two weeks before he passed away in the '90s, for my parent's seventy-fifth, my mother's, must have been my mother's, my father's seventy-fifth birthday. I invited them up, and Robert and Janet Mitchell came up and he was quite ill at the time and passed away just a few weeks later. So I just saw Paul just a month or so ago, he came through the Portland area and we all went out to dinner.

My daughters, one of my daughters is a recent graduate of the University of Delaware and one is going to Boston College and they both worked, actually, it was this late summer, so it was in August, right before school started. We all went out to dinner at the Falmouth Sea Grill, because Paul gave me a call and said, "I'm passing through, let's meet for dinner," and he had just picked up one of his grandchildren from the airport. And of course, I know some of their, all the children, Sue Mitchell, who's director of external affairs for Maine Maritime Academy and is Johnny's daughter, and Jim Mitchell whose Robert and Janet's, one of the big lobbyist in Maine, and his brother Peter, I know those second generation folks. They're all very nice, and it's interesting, they all are very well-schooled and the education piece has followed through that generation as well. They all value a higher education; they've all done very well. They're all very successful, all the Mitchells are very, very bright and all very successful.

AL: Can you talk about that '82 campaign a little bit, because this is, you know, George Mitchell had been appointed to the Senate seat, and then within two years had to run in his own

right and the early numbers weren't in his favor against David Emery .

BK: They certainly weren't. I went to the swearing-in ceremony down in Washington when George got appointed by Brennan, and I went to that ceremony in 1980, with the other family members, and it was pretty remarkable to be in a room with Mondale and Kennedy and all those folks. And I think a lot of people perceived that George Mitchell was a place-holder for that Senate seat and that he wouldn't have much of a chance of being reelected. So when the initial polls were run, where he was down sixty, sixty-nine/thirty-one or whatever it was against Emery, was quite a formidable task.

One of my good friends, John Diamond, who was helping run the campaign in '82, that's how I kind of got involved, we both were the same age, so I signed on there and just helped out in minor fashion. But it was pretty remarkable to see George in his campaign mode, because he had been cast as the underdog, and just chipping away at the lead over the campaign, and obviously as people got to hear him and know him and hear him speak and came to know the George Mitchell that everyone eventually came to know, a person of integrity and intelligence, the votes started swinging and the numbers started swinging. And the more he got out and campaigned and people heard him speak, the more support he picked up.

It was interesting; I have a lot of the old clippings from the '82 campaign. George was a good politician, and when he ran in the Portland area he actually spoke about his Kilroy background and his Irish, his half-Irish background, because he wanted the Irish vote as well. And some of the clippings from the paper then played up his connection to Brennan and others, and [p/o] his aunt, Jane Callan Kilroy, and the fact that he was half Irish and so on and so forth. So George was not only a very good politician but a very smart politician, and eventually the lead evaporated and people in Maine returned him back to the Senate, which was, as we all know, a wonderful choice.

And the '88 campaign was much easier, because he was so much more established and had established his reputation with Maine voters. I think anybody that gets appointed to a vacant seat, I think the assumption is always that the person is kind of a place-holder, and I think he really had to work hard to reverse that notion, and it was a remarkable campaign and he just ran a wonderful campaign in '82.

End of Side A
Side B

AL: We are now on Side B. I guess I've asked you, you've observed George Mitchell over many years, and he's done many things. Can you sort of describe [him] in terms of your relationship with him up close, as opposed to how most of us see him nationally?

BK: It's hard for me to generalize beyond all the Mitchells, because I think they share all the same characteristics. And whether it's Paul or Johnny or George or Barbara or Robert, they were all very, very hard working people. Paul Mitchell continues to be on the board of trustees for the

University of Maine, for example, and they just all have a sense of direction and integrity, they're very friendly, warm people, and it's really hard not to like them.

I mean it's pretty remarkable when you think, when Senator Mitchell was in the Senate, he was perceived as a very partisan Senate majority leader, but he was also perceived as a very fair advocate and was bipartisan when things needed to be accomplished. That has been kind of lost these days, I think, in national politics. But I think it's because of where they all came from, that they all had to get along, and grew up in a poor family where people had to get along and people obviously had to assert themselves, but they also had to accommodate each other's interests. And I think that's how he was a politician, whether it's the partisan Senate majority leader or later as a mediator/peacemaker facilitator, when he went over to Ireland. I followed that situation closely, because I am Irish, and he was cast in a very difficult role there and trying to resolve a historical dispute that went on for centuries.

I know the dispute well, because I've researched it, and it's interesting that when he went over there that some of the folks actually knew his half-Irish background and didn't want him going over there because they thought he'd be partial to the Irish Catholic view, as opposed to a true neutral. And in fact, I think the British had questions about that, but his character came through and persevered, obviously. And it's interesting that he's evolved from a leader of the Democratic Party and a Senate majority leader, very partisan, running a very partisan agenda, and despite that he and Dole got along very well, from what I understand, but now in later years is now a peace maker, a mediator.

But it's not out of character with any of the Mitchells, I think, and they all have, to me at least, from a distance, all have the same characteristics of just being very smart and adaptable, and very connected to where they came from and the notion of constant improvement and how to work towards an improved society. They all seem to be interested in that and that's kind of where my grandmother always was as well. It seems like things these days have gotten a lot more partisan. But that's my overall assessment of the Mitchells; they're just a very remarkable family.

AL: Over the years, do you have any personal anecdotes of you and George Mitchell that you recall?

BK: I just remember some of the chats when he was running, particularly in '82. He's always very appreciative of whatever help the Kilroys gave him. My uncles were supporters of his, and he always appreciated his aunt, Jane Callan Kilroy, because she was kind of a trailblazer in many respects, and he always just had funny stories. When I think he first was running, people thought he was kind of dry and didn't have a sense of humor, and I think as he campaigned in '82, he would be able to tell funny little stories. So that's kind of what I remember as, that really kind of captivated people. He really was a superb campaigner, and personally, he would tell funny little stories, family stories or little things that were of interest in relevance to people, which really allowed him to connect to people. I mean politics is all about interpersonal relationships, and he worked very hard at that I think, and became very successful because he had a great wit as well.

AL: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think is important to add, that I missed?

BK: No, I think you've covered it all. I think, I don't have anything further to add.

AL: Great, thank you so much.

BK: Thank you, I appreciate it.

End of Interview