

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Barry Lee Valentine
(Interviewer: *Andrea L'Hommedieu*)

GMOH# 027
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Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project. The date is August 11, 2008, and we are at 22 Elting Road in South Harpswell, Maine, and today I'm interviewing Barry Valentine and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Barry, could you start just by giving me your full name?

Barry Valentine: Yep. My full name is Barry Lee Valentine.

AL: And where and when were you born?

BV: I was born in Emporia, Kansas on September 12th, 1943.

AL: During WWII.

BV: During the middle of WWII, I was born in Kansas purely by accident.

AL: And how did that come about?

BV: Well, I was supposed to have been born in Maine; my mother is from the southern part of Maine. During WWII my dad, whom she had met when he was stationed in Maine, he was originally from Florida and was stationed in Maine in WWII, and he had been assigned to duty in California and that's where they were when she was about to have me, and she got on a train in California to come back to Maine, to come back to York, Maine, where I was supposed to have been born, and either I was restless so the dates were off or whatever, but she went into labor in the middle of the night in the middle of Kansas. And the next train stop was Emporia, Kansas, and I was born twenty minutes later, after they took her off the train.

AL: Oh wow.

BV: And so that's how it started, and then she, when she was able she traveled back here to Maine for a little while and then a few months later we went back to California.

AL: And so did you mostly grow up in Maine, though?

BV: Yeah, yeah, from the age of a couple of weeks on I was a, you know, a resident of York Harbor, Maine, at least legally, right up until my late forties, I was a legal resident of Maine

anyway until my late forties.

AL: And what was it like growing up in York Harbor?

BV: A little bit Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn style, growing up in the, you know, basically mid- to late '40s through the '50s and into the early '60s before I went off to college, York was, at that time, a community that had not changed much in several hundred years. I think the population in 1850 was around thirty-five hundred, and in 1950 it was only around forty-five hundred, so it had only grown a thousand people in a century. And I mean it was typical sort of small town Maine – coastal community with, I'd say, two characteristics, one was its proximity to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and in my mind for some reason I recall that there were four hundred people in the town who worked at the shipyard in Kittery, so kind of the year-round economic base was in part predicated on proximity to the shipyard in Kittery and the number of people employed there. And in the summertime of course, it was your typical Maine coastal summer community. York Beach particularly was fairly touristy, because of the driving distance from Boston, from Massachusetts and whatnot, you had people who came down for the day, for the weekend or for the summer, as the case may be.

York Harbor, which was a village corporation within the town, and Maine had these little anomalies that were created at the turn of the last century called village corporations, and they were sort of towns within a town that were established because of some characteristic within that part of the community that set it off from the rest of the community. And York Harbor was about one square mile, but it had its own board of selectmen and three or four other, quote, 'municipal officials.' In fact my dad, who worked at the shipyard, also was the building inspector for the town, for which I think he was paid twenty-five dollars a year or something, and then he was also one of the selectmen on the board of selectmen, and I think that paid fifty dollars a year, as I recall. So York Harbor was this sort of community within a community, and it was a residential portion of the town, and along the shoreline were – were and still are – very lovely estates so that the summer residents of York Harbor, you know, tended to be fairly affluent people from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, that sort of thing. So that was the complexion of that part.

I grew up within walking distance of the ocean and the beach and the harbor, and that was my world growing up and it was a pretty delightful world.

AL: And your mother, did she work in the home or outside of the home?

BV: She worked in the home until I was probably ten or eleven years old, and I have a sister who's two years younger, and when we finally reached the point where we were a little older – we also had right at that very same time my grandmother. My father's parents were deceased before I was born, and I had a grandfather who passed away when I was around eleven or so, and at that point my grandmother, my mother's mother moved in with us so, and although she worked outside the home, that sort of added an additional dimension in terms of being able to look after me and look after my sister. So at that point my mom went to work outside the home,

and she went to work as a telephone operator for New England Telephone right there in the town of York.

And those were in the days when the phone system was a manual system, if you will, we picked up the phone and the operator said, "Number please." And that lasted, incidentally, until 1964.

(Telephone interruption)

BV: Excuse me. The town of York did not get dial phones until 1964, so - . And one of the few stories I like to tell was, when I went to college my freshman year I was filling out the paperwork you fill out when you start school, and they at that time had started using IBM cards, the punch cards which were a fairly new technology, and it had a space for seven digits for one's phone number. And my phone number was 3-7, okay, my grandparents got one of the first fifty phones installed in town and then phones were numbered one through fifty, and they got number thirty-seven. So all the time I was growing up my phone number was 3-7, so when I was filling out the paperwork I asked one of the school officials, you know, "Where do I put the 3-7, at the beginning of the seven blocks or at the end of the seven blocks?" They had no idea, I mean nobody, they didn't realize that there were still phone systems with numbers like that still in existence. So, but anyway, so my mom worked for New England Telephone for about twenty-five years.

AL: Wow, and so she saw a lot of technological changes.

BV: She did, very much so, yeah. The town eventually went dial, she ended up in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and she was basically a customer service representative, she worked with companies, corporations in southern New Hampshire and southern Maine that were setting up phone systems, and so she ended up becoming a customer advisor to people setting up phone networks and systems.

AL: And what was your educational experiences like growing up?

BV: York High School was a fairly small school, probably, I say small, I'm not sure where it would fit in the spectrum of schools in Maine, but there were about 250 students in the high school, to give you a sense of the size, and my high school graduating class there were sixty-seven students and that was the largest class in history by a significant margin. The class before that had forty-some-odd, as you go back. And so again, that sort of small community experience. I mean you literally knew who everyone was growing up, in elementary school and in high school you knew who all the kids were.

York actually had two elementary schools, because York Beach had a separate system from the other part of town, but then we all came together in high school. So our elementary schools were even smaller than that, so it was growing up in a community where you knew pretty much everyone in the community, and you knew certainly all the kids in school, that you went to school with. May not know them real well personally, but you knew who they were or what

their names were –

AL: Right.

BV: - and so forth, so it was that kind of an environment. I lived on a street called Woodbridge Road in York Harbor, and at that time the area beyond my house, from there down to Route 1A was very sparsely populated, a distance of maybe a half-, three-quarters of a mile, but it wasn't densely populated, so we had quite a few woods around the area. And I mean my recollection of childhood is basically playing in the woods and along the beach and along the ocean, and that was sort of our kingdom as kids to grow up and play in.

My wife and I have a similar experience because there was a large wooded area near where she was in New Auburn, and as a little kid they all played out in the woods too, so we talk about the fact that we, we didn't have formalized entertainment of any sort growing up, but we had this vast panoply of ocean and beach and rocks and forest and ponds and everything else to play with. And as was typical of that age, and we sort of joke about it now with the advent of cell phones and tracking devices and everything else, is that as a kid on the weekend, you would leave the house in the morning and your parents would say, "Be home for dinner, be home in time for dinner." And that was it. They had no idea of where you were, no idea of what you were doing, and no way of reaching you or contacting you. But that was childhood in America really, for the whole country, for that matter, but very typical of ours. So we, we'd, you'd get on your bicycle and go off and visit a friend, and you go off in the woods and have an adventuresome day and come home.

AL: And where did you go to college?

BV: I went to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, RPI, or Rensselaer, they use both terms, which is in Troy, New York.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

BV: And it's a technological university, primarily engineering and science and math, and my interest was in engineering. In school I was reasonably good at math and science and those were my interests, and so that logically I chose engineering and ended up – there was a fellow who had graduated from RPI a couple of years, graduated from York High School a couple years ahead of me and went to RPI and so I was familiar with the school, and he was a really smart kid and so that was one of the reasons I looked at that school, and it had a good engineering program so that's where I ended up going.

AL: And did you have a love of flying at that point, or did that come later?

BV: I've had a love of flying from my earliest recollection. Four or five years ago, a fellow who writes for the, one of the editors of the *Atlantic Monthly*, wrote a book called *Free Flight*, and he was one of those persons who got into aviation fairly late in life and got totally enamored

with it and decided to write a book about certain things going on today in aviation, so today and into the future, and he was interviewing people with various aviation backgrounds. And one of the questions he asked was the question you just asked, which was, “When did you get interested in flying?” And what he found as a common answer and a common theme during those interviews was that significant number of the people said, “I have been in love with flying from my earliest recollection.” And that’s, I would say the same thing, I mean it was just, it’s always been there, as a little kid, as, I think as I was able to walk, every time an airplane went over I’d run outside and look at it and be fascinated by it, and then eventually managed to acquire books so I could figure out what an airplane, which airplane it was when it flew over, what I was looking at and so forth. Been crazy about aviation and airplanes all my life, and I have no idea where that comes from or how that happens to people. And I suppose that could be true of other interests people have, it just is there, so.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

BV: And when I was, I used to talk my parents into letting me go for airplane rides. In those days, the nearest, or one of the nearest airports from southern Maine that you could do that was Hampton, New Hampshire, so we used to go down to Hampton, New Hampshire, and I’d take a ride in an airplane down there. When I was fourteen years and fifty weeks old my parents said, “What would you like for your birthday, your fifteenth birthday?” And I said, “I’d like a flying lesson.” So, and that’s what I got, so on my fifteenth birthday, it turns out the instructor down at Hampton was on vacation but there was another one up in Rochester, New Hampshire, so we went over to Rochester and I took my first flying lesson over there at Rochester. And needless to say, I loved it, and over the next year – you have to be a minimum of about sixteen years of age to solo an airplane – so over the next year, whenever I could scrounge up enough funds, I’d go up, take a flying lesson, and as soon as I turned sixteen I soloed and got my student pilot’s license, and I’ve been flying ever since. That was in 1959, so next year will mark the fiftieth anniversary of having a pilot’s license in my pocket.

AL: And so did you join the Air Force?

BV: I did, I was in ROTC in college, and I am a person of a generation in which most males assumed at some point, you know, they would be in the military. Either you graduated from high school and went in the service and went on with life, or you graduated from high school and went to college and went in the service and went on with life, or, or maybe you made it a career in some cases. So there was never any, it never occurred to me, growing up, that I would not serve in the military. My dad served in WWII, three of his four brothers served in WWII, all my family, it was just, it didn’t occur to me that it would ever be otherwise.

Also, I don’t know if, most people don’t remember this, but certainly in the ‘50s, I think pretty much during the post-WWII period for a while, and that may have been the case before WWII, if you were a young male and you were filling out a job application, one of the questions on the application was, “Have you fulfilled your military obligation?” *Obligation*, that was the word, “Have you fulfilled your military obligation?” If you had not, it meant you were likely to get

drafted, or at least subject to the draft, and employers wanted to know about that because they were sometimes reluctant to hire someone and train them or whatever in some occupation and then turn around and have them get drafted, so that was a question on job applications, at least for males anyway, in those days. And the draft was very much an alive thing and once you were out of high school, about by the time you were nineteen or twenty or so you could probably expect to get a letter in the mail.

But I had decided that I would serve, and I wanted to fly, understandably, and to do that you have to have a college degree and become an officer. So I joined the ROTC program at Rensselaer, so on the day I graduated, in addition to getting my diploma, I also got my commission as a second lieutenant in the Air Force. And I had qualified physically for the flight training program which was, you have to take both the physical and the mental exam but the, in most cases it's the physical exam that's the disqualifier for most people. Eyesight, for example, unless you have, unless, at that time and it's still pretty much the case initially, unless you had perfect eyesight, you were disqualified, so. But I passed all physical qualifications and all the exams and so when I, after I graduated from college I went into Air Force pilot training and I spent five years flying for the Air Force.

AL: So were you, you were before Vietnam?

BV: No, right during.

AL: You *were* during Vietnam.

BV: Well, it's interesting. I joined ROTC when I started my freshman year of college in 1961, and nobody had ever heard of Vietnam at that point. And this was the Cold War period; there was no expectation, at least on my part or that of anyone else my age, that we would necessarily be involved in any military conflict. There wasn't any. The Korean War had ended in the mid-'50s and, as I say, this was the Cold War period.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

BV: And there wasn't any expectation that anything would happen. And as I got toward my senior year you started hearing about Vietnam and the U.S. involvement. Even then it wasn't necessarily the case that I or my contemporaries would be involved, because our involvement in Vietnam at that was still fairly limited, you know, we'd had about fifty thousand Marines sent in and had been, we were, quote, 'advising,' you know, the Vietnamese military and the Vietnamese air force. But things just kind of converged all at the same time. I graduated, I was in pilot training in 1967, and at that time things were being built up rather rapidly in Vietnam.

AL: Hmmm.

BV: So it was very evident to those of us in pilot training that that's where we'd end up. Two-thirds of my class, myself included, went straight to Vietnam out of pilot training, and the other

third eventually went, they may have gone into the Strategic Air Command, B-52s, tankers, and they had additional training and went through all the bases. But eventually all of us, every one of us ended up serving in Southeast Asia in some fashion. So it was just how events converge.

AL: Right.

BV: Yep. So I saw a lot of pilot training, I went through combat crew training and transitioned into the airplane I was going to be flying, and then two months later I was in Vietnam, spent a year in-country in Vietnam, and then when I came back – I was flying C-141s when I returned, which are the big four-engine transport jet the Air Force had – and so I flew back and forth to Southeast Asia for about three years after that, when I came back. So I had about a four year period in my life when I was either in or going back and forth to that part of the world.

AL: Hmm-hmm. And then did you come back to Maine?

BV: And then I came back to Maine, ostensibly for a summer. Actually when I left the Air Force, it was in February of '72, and I had promised myself a couple of things, the first of which was that I would go to Europe and travel around and see Europe. Flying for the Air Force I got to travel all over the world and I got to see a lot of neat places, but for a very short period of time. And I did not have the opportunity when I was younger or in college to travel to Europe or do that sort of traveling on my own, and so I literally packed a backpack and headed off to Europe for several months and just traveled around Europe. So I came back in the spring to Maine.

The other thing I promised myself was that I'd spend a summer in Maine. It had been several years since I'd done that, and – you're from Maine, I'm from Maine – we all know there's no nicer place to be, despite what's been happening with the weather the past two weeks I guess, but there's generally no better place to be in the summer than Maine, so I promised myself I would come back for a summer and then figure out where to head after that. And summer became fall, and fall became winter, and winter became spring, and I ended up staying in Maine from '72 'til '92, so pretty much twenty years. And that's kind of where the politics came into the picture.

AL: Yes, was it '74 or earlier?

BV: No, right in '72. That summer – back up just for a second. During my college years, my summer job was that as, of a lifeguard, I was the lifeguard on York Harbor Beach for four years, the beach I grew up on and then I spent four years as the lifeguard on the beach. And there was a fellow who was originally from Massachusetts who spent summers there and, he and his wife and children, in fact I watched each year the children come along, and had gotten to know them a bit just because they would come down to the beach. He was a writer and he, sometime during the period I guess when I was in the service, he and his family settled in York, moved there, and got involved in politics.

And one day he came and knocked on the door of the cottage I was renting for that summer that I had come back to Maine. And he was running for the state legislature, and we had a nice chat, and I had had, I've always had a bit of an interest in politics, had read a number of books. The whole Vietnam era tended to politicize people to some degree in one form or another anyway. And I listened to him, liked what he had to say, and offered to help on his campaign and whatnot, and ended up actually getting fairly actively involved in his campaign. And he was elected, he had run two or three other times, he was running as a Democrat in a district that was overwhelmingly Republican, and each time the margin narrowed and it narrowed pretty close to, he ended up winning. The fellow's name is Neil Rolde.

AL: Oh yes, I know.

BV: Yeah, and somewhere along the line you have or will be interviewing Neil?

AL: Yes.

BV: Have you interviewed him already?

AL: He was interviewed for the Muskie Project.

BV: Okay, that's what I figured, yup, and so it was Neil that got me involved in politics, basically. And I worked in his campaign, and he was elected. I was at that time involved in aviation at the airport in Biddeford, two young fellows and I had started up a flight operation there and we were doing flight instruction, air taxi and charter aircraft rental, that sort of thing and, which in Maine is a good way to starve to death but that was great fun, and I, sort of on the side, got involved in politics.

And then in, oh, is it '73? I guess the following summer there was a referendum issue involving the proposal to establish a public power authority in the state of Maine, because of a concern at that time about the cost of energy and electricity in the state, that kind of generated some political activity toward creating a power authority. And there was, were, there, the committee that was put together to promote this proposal, which was going to referendum in November of '73, was looking for someone to be a coordinator in York County, and I think it was Neil that called me and said, "Is this something you would be interested in?"

I actually, at that point was actually considering, I had lived for a while in the Philadelphia area and was considering moving back to that area, you know, primarily for job opportunities and whatnot. But Neil called and said they were looking for a coordinator for York County for that effort, "Would I be interested?" So I said, "Well, that sounds like it would be kind of fun" – it was only a couple of months. And I was still involved, I had still been involved with the airport and still had been engaged in that activity to some extent, but... Aviation in Maine is busy in the summer and pretty quiet in the winter, and so I thought I could make that fit. So that's how I sort of got more actively involved in politics, and that's what led to my meeting George Mitchell.

AL: And when did that happen the first time?

BV: That happened that fall. I knew of George, you know, the following year, '74, was going to be an election year for governor, and various people in the state were already starting to position themselves with that regard. Because the primary would, the primaries in Maine then usually started about January, and you campaigned through until the June primary, and there were a number of people already hinting or indicating that they were interested in running for governor. The fellow who, in fact one of them was the fellow who was heading up this committee, it was Peter Kelley from Aroostook County –

AL: Hmmm.

BV: - and he had gubernatorial ambitions and this provided a pretty good platform for him. Another was Joe Brennan, and Joe was indicating that he, let's see, Joe was what? Joe was attorney general then – no, I'm sorry, he was state senator, Joe was a state senator then, and later became attorney general. Joe was a state senator; he was indicating some interest and whatnot.

And I guess right around late October or, I guess it was November after the referendum (which did not succeed, incidentally), Neil and I and the folks who were part of the Democratic town committee in York, a group that at one time could have met in a phone booth but was a little larger by the time we were involved, had a bean supper, your classic sort of Maine Democratic bean supper fund-raiser sort of thing in York, and all of the candidates were invited and interestingly I think five or six of them showed up. That's again one of the great things about Maine, is that direct contact with the people who, who end up being governors and members of congress and senators and whatnot.

There was a family that had moved to York from Connecticut, he'd been an executive with, I think, New England Telephone, AT&T or somebody, decided he wanted to raise his kids in a nice environment and his family moved to York. They actually opened a retail gift shop small business, and they were actually amazed at this dinner that, they said, "In Connecticut you'd have about a third tier surrogate show up for a bean supper in a small town, and here were all of the assumed candidates for governor in the room," and so forth.

But one of them was George Mitchell. And I had not planned to be involved in anybody's campaign for governor but was very interested in following the events and whatnot, and at the end of the supper that night, George asked me if I would go across the street, there was a little restaurant, coffee shop, and, for a chat afterwards, and I said, "Sure." And there was, a fellow who was basically kind of the, oh, I don't know what his title would have been, but sort of executive director or manager of the public power campaign was Tony Buxton, who I'm sure you've –

AL: Oh yes.

BV: - probably had some, spent some time with, and so I'd gotten to know Tony pretty well.

And Tony had kind of hooked up with George, and so Tony, I think, had suggested to George that he have a chat with me, so we went across the street.

And it's the first time I'd really spent any time with George, and he sat there and in a period of about ten or fifteen minutes explained why he was running for governor, why he thought he would be the best choice, what he had hoped to accomplish as governor and – you know George – I mean it was very succinct, lined up perfectly. And I was most impressed with his presentation, and after some subsequent conversations with him and with Tony and some others decided to become involved in his gubernatorial campaign. So that's how it started, so that's my contact. I was very impressed with his presentation, and if you know George he, he's very good at that. And so that's how it started.

So in January of 1974, I started with the campaign. It was headquartered in Portland; it was in the Eastland, right there in Congress Square, and in fact I had a room in the hotel. Bob Dunfey, who was very close to George and involved in the campaign, owned the hotel and so we had offices in there and we had a couple of rooms in the old part of the old wing of the hotel. And so that's where I lived for almost six months, at least most of the time. I still had a, I had a cottage that I was renting in York Harbor still, but was spending my time there.

And you have probably interviewed Jay McCloskey also, I imagine, and Jay was my roommate, as it was, although we never saw each other because we worked different, running around with the campaign. And the short version is that I spent the next five-and-a-half months with George from very early in the morning until midnight, six days a week, and he and I traveled twenty-five thousand miles inside the state of Maine in five-and-a-half months.

AL: Wow.

BV: And I think we pretty much went to every town in the state.

AL: Now, was your role as driver?

BV: It was scheduler, scheduler-driver. Originally it was supposed to be, start off with scheduler, but they needed somebody to travel with him and keep him on schedule so it evolved into a sort of scheduler-driver-coordinator-Jack-of-all-trades sort of thing. But he and I lived in an automobile for five-and-a-half months essentially, driving around Maine, doing the traditional, you know, first of all you had to do the factory gate early in the morning and then you did the factory gate late afternoon, and then you did factory gate at the midnight shift. So I mean, so you sort of started at a factory gate and ended at a factory gate, and they were very long days. And when we did come back to Portland, which was most evenings, we'd end up somehow back in Portland, we wouldn't get back 'til midnight, one a.m., and then I'd be over picking him up at five thirty, six in the morning at his house in South Portland and we'd hit the trail again. Any time we were further north we did, we more often than not stayed with friends, occasionally stayed in a hotel or motel somewhere but most of the time with friends.

And it was, for me anyway, one of the most valuable five-and-a-half months of my life. It was like a, you know, a graduate course in sociology, demographics, history, geography, politics obviously, human nature, philosophy, you know, name it, all packed into one. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience.

AL: You, I mean you must have on some level really gotten to know George Mitchell, being that close for that many hours.

BV: I will quote George, what he said to me once, he said, “Only my wife knows me better than you.” Because I knew, yeah.

Judy Valentine: Than who?

BV: Me. I mean he and I –

JV: That’s the myth anyway.

BV: - shared many rooms together so I got to know all of George’s, you know, some of his personal habits and idiosyncrasies –

AL: Right.

BV: - and so forth.

AL: Now were there any, all those months out on the road, you must have had stories of on the campaign trail, funny, or were there incidents that just, very memorable?

BV: One that sticks in my mind, and I think this was in Rumford, at the paper mill in Rumford, and it was, I don’t know, it was either early morning or late, it was dark so it was either early in the morning or late at night, I remember that. We were standing outside and George is shaking hands of people coming out of the mill. I remember this guy comes out and (*unintelligible*), but he was kind of short, a short guy, and he kind of walks up and he shakes George’s hand and he says, “Mr. Mitchell,” he says, “what are you gonna do about them women?” And George says, it was like, “Beg your pardon?” You know? And he said, “Them women, they’re taking our jobs.” And George said, “What do you mean?” And he said, “Well the mill, they’re hiring women, they’re bringing women in, you know, these jobs is for men, women shouldn’t have these jobs,” and on and on. But the way he started out, you know, just, he’s talking about, going, “What are you going to do about them women?” And this guy was quite irate that the mill was hiring women to work on the jobs on the factory floor, on the mill floor, that he thought were, that those jobs were for men, that women shouldn’t be, that his view was that they were taking jobs away from men that should have gone to men and so forth, so. I mean and George went on to, to politely explain that anybody who has the skills and ability ought to have the opportunity to be employed however they wished. The guy didn’t like the answer, but I, but that was an issue for that time, in history apparently, in the mills.

I have not thought about these or any of the travels in a long time, so as we're talking probably some things will come to mind. The schedule itself, to the credit of the staff and to Tony Buxton, the crew, was a really tight schedule. George had set a goal in January of by the June primary; he said his goal was to – what's the quote he said? – to shake hands with, I think he said a hundred thousand people or something like that; he wanted to shake a hundred thousand hands. And so that required, or a thousand, I'm sorry, it was like a thousand a day, he wanted to shake a thousand hands a day, something like that. We didn't achieve that, but I think we figured out we did about five hundred a day for five-and-a-half months, so he shook a lot of hands. But that was his goal, was to meet face-to-face as many people as possible.

And George is at his best when he's one-on-one face-to-face, he really is, because there are parts of his personality and his style and his presentation that don't necessarily show up on television or on stage or at a distance, but up close very much so. And so that was his goal, so that's why we did, so we established a schedule that would provide him with an opportunity to meet the maximum number of people he could possibly meet in one day.

And part of the challenge, as is always the challenge on campaigns, is being someplace on time. When you're starting in the morning, you've got ten events on your schedule and you don't always get to control what happens at the events, and when your host decides that it's time for you to leave, not when you want to necessarily. So one of the great challenges we had, and that was my job, my job was to be the bad guy, the guy that went, "Time, time," you know, and so forth and to cut people off, so my great challenge was keeping him on schedule the entire time. And we did, you know, a pretty good job of it all the way around, and he did get to meet the number of people.

I do remember another one, and this really captures, I think, George's intellect and ability to explain sometimes difficult and controversial issues. That year at the Democratic State Convention, which was I guess around May, maybe April, I think it was in May, it was in Bangor, and there were two very controversial -

End of Side A
Side B

AL: We are now on Side B, and you were just beginning to tell a story.

BV: About the Democratic State Convention in the spring of 1974, and there were two controversial planks in the Democratic Party platform. One had to do with gay rights, and the other had to do with amnesty for young Americans who had gone to Canada to avoid the draft. One of the planks supported gay rights, and the other plank supported amnesty for those who had gone to Canada.

Well Maine's a, certainly was then and can be sort of a fairly conservative, traditional state, and those were very sticky issues at the time and there was certainly not unanimity of agreement in

any way on either one of those issues. And what was interesting, as I recall it, was the a number of the candidates running for governor were very quick to denounce those two planks of the platform; they maybe supported the platform in general, but they made it known right up front they didn't support those two planks. And it's still my recollection and you can check the records, I may be wrong on this, but as best as I recall, George was the only one who did not denounce those two planks in the platform.

So at the end of the convention there was a, basically a headline of the *Bangor Daily News*, sort of the wrap-up of what happened at the convention, and the candidates positions on various issues that came forth from the convention, and in essence the paper said that George Mitchell supports gay rights and amnesty or whatever. The Monday morning, I guess it was, after the convention, we're on the road – I think we were in Dysart's in Bangor – we were at a truck stop and it was probably Dysart's but I'm not, I wouldn't swear to that but it was somewhere in the Bangor area, or maybe Old Town area, we stopped in the morning at a truck stop and a diner, and George is going through, shaking hands, and he comes up to this booth and there's four truck drivers there with their John Deere hats on and sitting in the booth. And one of them says, "Mr. Mitchell, is it true that, you know, you" – I think the way it was presented was, "Is it true you support cowards and queers?" or something like that. I mean it was a little bit more rustic, but something like that, and, you know, it was kind of accusatory, the guy was pointing in his face, "Is it really true? Because I read it in the *Bangor Daily News*."

And George sat down in the booth with them, and within about fifteen minutes, I mean the answer was, "Yes," and he explained why in about fifteen minutes on the – I still remember this, these three guys in the booth are going, sitting there, nodding their heads up and down in the affirmative. I mean he explained the whole thing to them in a way only George can, and they understood. I mean they were these really tough truck driver guys sitting there, nodding their heads up and down, when he explained his position and why. I mean I wish I could have had that on film, to have watched that transition from these guys scowling with the accusatory finger, and then, you know, they're just mild and they're nodding up and down and following everything he says. And that was a particular event that I always remember from that campaign, because it really captured, again, George's ability to explain why he would take a position, and why that was the position you ought to take. I think that singularly is one of his very great skills.

AL: So it's part explanatory skills and parts persuasion?

BV: Persuasion, yeah. He had the, sort of the ability in the way he presented something to make people understand and accept, and maybe even agree. Or if they didn't agree, at least they understood and accepted and so forth. So and I, you know. I always told people that, "If you, no matter how smart you think you are, spend about fifteen minutes with George Mitchell and you won't feel quite so smart." Because he is, he's one of the most brilliant persons I've ever known. But along with that brilliance is the ability to be able to translate that in, through language in a way that conveys ideas and gets people to follow, so.

AL: And so what was the culmination of the '74 campaign in terms of your role in it as -?

BV: I was with George through the primary. At that time the person who was the state senator from the southernmost district in Maine, which included my home town of York, it was a fellow who'd been there I think for three terms at that point, and I won't go into detail on his background or circumstances, but he was fairly solid enough both in terms of having been reelected several times and in terms of being a Republican in a heavily Republican district, that he was considered to be unbeatable. And so there was no Democratic candidate to run against him; he was going to get a free ride. So several people, both at the state level and at the county level, approached me right at the end of the primary campaign and asked me if I would consider running for state Senate. And I said, "Well, you know, what for? I mean this guy is -," And they said, "Yeah, but we don't want him to have a free ride, that sends he wrong message, to say that he's so formidable that nobody will walk in."

So anyway, they talked me into getting the signatures and getting my name on the ballot – that was before the primary actually – and so I became the Democratic candidate for state Senate from that district, even though I've never run for office or got involved in, other than George's campaign, been involved in politics. So I left George's campaign at that time to run for the state Senate, so I did not stay with the campaign during the general election. And in some ways I wish I had. I don't know whether I would have or not, whether if I had been able to be on the road at that time I would have seen what was happening, what was coming in November of that year, vis-à-vis Jim Longley and so forth so, maybe I would, maybe I wouldn't. So I've always wondered about that, whether we might have been able to, just from being on the road and seeing what was happening around you, have determined early enough the direction things were headed and maybe have developed new strategy to counter it, because the difference between what Longley won by and what George got was only two or three points.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

BV: It was sort of close. But you know, never know that.

But anyway, I ran for state Senate. I think I got forty percent of the vote out of, in a district that was three-to-one Republican, so it wasn't too bad. And it also gave me the opportunity to have a forum to present to the public their state senator and some of his votes and what he had done, which, as it turns out, a lot of people weren't aware of. And I think that paid off in the sense that he was – a couple of terms later – he was defeated and so we managed to narrow the margin.

AL: Yeah.

BV: Yeah. And then sort of kicking back and sort of related in a parallel way was going back to Neil Rolde, Neil had been elected in '72, he was reelected in '74, and in 1974 for the first time since the one brief aberration in 1964 the Democrats took control of the Maine legis-, the Maine House, not the Senate, took control of the Maine House, and Neil became house majority leader. And he asked me at that time if I would be interested in coming to Augusta to be his – well, the way it was structured in those days, I don't know if it still is or not, there's not much for staffing

in the Maine legislature, there were three staffers in the house, one who worked for the speaker, one who worked for the majority leader, and one who worked for the minority leader, same over on the Senate side. So I ended up being the staff person for the majority party of the Maine House in 1974 and 1975. And, which was great fun and there's lots of stories there as well.

But, and then –

[*End of disc one*]

BV: - sort of jumping forward, in 1976 Neil decided to run for Congress, as did six other people, it was a cast-of-thousands primary in 1976, there were, I believe, seven Democrats in the primary for 1st District congressional seat. Neil was one of them, I ended up becoming manager of his primary campaign, but the issue was, "What happens to his seat?" So I also became the candidate for his seat to the House. Neil did not succeed in the primary, the vote was split seven ways and Rick Barton won the primary but lost the general, and everybody but the, the Republican running for reelection was Dave Emery and Dave had been elected in [1974], beating Peter Kyros [Sr.], and everybody considered that to be a just complete aberration that certainly wouldn't repeat itself, and so that's why so many Democrats jumped into the primary, to try to be the one to run against Dave Emery because they figured that that previous one was an aberration, it was more of a vote, everybody wanted to believe it was a vote *against* Peter, not a vote *for* David, and so everybody jumped in.

But David did succeed in the general election in the fall and was reelected to Congress, and I ended up succeeding and was elected to the Maine House that year. And I worked fairly hard at it, particularly the last couple of months, because I knew that the only way to succeed was to get out and knock on doors, and I actually spent two months doing nothing, literally six days a week, six-and-a-half days a week, but knock on doors. And it paid off.

AL: Hmmm.

BV: And I ended up winning sixty-four in a three-to-one Republican district, so a lot of people forgave me for being a Democrat, that knew me in my own town and whatnot –

AL: Hmm-hmm.

BV: - but in those areas. And in the meantime of course, you know, George Mitchell was still in Maine and, you know, as U.S. attorney and then as federal judge.

AL: Right.

BV: And whatnot. Other events converge in time in 198-, actually late '79, all of the, the country was gearing up for the 1980 decennial census, and as you may know, the way positions, or senior positions are filled in census organizations around the country is through the use of the political system, through the party system wherein the, normally it's the senior senator in the

state of the party in the White House is the one who gets to sort of decide the top of the organizational structure, and if that person's not a member of the party, it works its way down, or the member of Congress or the governor of whomever.

But anyway, Muskie was still in office then, in '79, it was just before he became secretary of state, in office, and so it was his office basically that got to decide how the census organization in Maine, in the southern half of Maine it was, Maine was divided into two parts, would be structured. And I got a call from Muskie's office asking if I'd be interested in being district manager for the 1980 decennial census in Maine, and I ended up deciding that would be an interesting thing to do and did so. But there was a, George had a connection to that as well, I mean, because he and Muskie and others were talking about how to set it up, so I have some sense that he had his hands in that process as well.

AL: Right.

BV: So I ended up doing that, so that's a point at which we converged.

Then you have to kind of, I guess probably, well I, and then that process ran through until about September of 1980, that's when the census operation was complete. At that time David Emery was still in Congress, was again running for reelection to Congress, but it was also pretty well known – oh and I should back up. In 1980 of course Muskie became secretary of state.

AL: Right.

BV: And under the Maine Constitution the governor gets to fill the vacancy and Joe Brennan filled the vacancy with George Mitchell so George Mitchell became U.S. senator, you know, with the clear goal of running for, you know, the full term election in '82. It was also known that David Emery planned to do the same thing. And, but David was running for reelection, and here we come around, sort of that same story again, there were no D[emocrat]s out there who wanted to, you know, instead of the seven you had in 1974 who wanted to run against David Emery, in 1980 nobody wanted to run against David Emery, because they knew they'd most likely be defeated, he was fairly popular and continued to do well in his reelections, and so they didn't have a candidate so they went to Harold Pachios and asked Harold to be the candidate, and Harold I think somewhat reluctantly agreed to do so, so there would at least be somebody up there.

And also when you, you know, if you have a candidate and have a candidacy, then you have a platform with which to at least address the other person running from the other party. I mean if you don't have a candidate then you really don't have a platform. So even if you know going in that the odds are pretty long, at least you give an opportunity, and obviously with the prospect of the '82 election coming up, you know, didn't want to give David Emery a free ride. So Harold ran, and, I think, in September when things were being wrapped up, or about the time finishing off the Census Bureau, I was asked if I would get involved in that campaign to make sure there was at least some energy and activity out in the field. Because there hadn't really been any field

organizing done, it was a pretty limited campaign because, I think the view was, “Why would you necessarily put a huge amount of energy and resources into something when the outcome was, you know, was likely to be in a particular direction?”

So anyway, I got involved in that campaign that fall very briefly, for the couple of months of that campaign as well, and that was due in part to knowing that George wanted there to be as much activity in that campaign as possible, you know, in preparation for the ‘82 race. So that was a, so during that period, with the census and with that campaign there was that peripheral connection, if you will.

And then fast forward to fall of, November or so of ‘91, I was running the Portland Jetport and had been there about four years, and I got a phone call one morning from Larry Benoit, calling on behalf of George, and telling me that they were forming a special committee in the U.S. Senate to address, try to address once and for all the issue of whether or not there are Americans still being held captive in Southeast Asia all these many years later. And the Senate had formed the Senate P.O.W.-M.I.A. Committee –

AL: Hmm-hmm.

BV: - and, which was going to run for a year, and there were several, I think about a dozen senators who were on the committee. And the way the committee was structured was that the Senate majority leader, who was George, and the Senate minority leader was Bob Dole, each got to have a staff representative on the committee as well, kind of to be the connection to leadership. And I guess they were going round and round trying to figure out who and how, and I guess my name came up periodically. They wanted somebody, obviously they knew and were comfortable with, but also ideally somebody who was a Vietnam veteran, and even more so a pilot, since most of the people who were missing had been aviators, the great bulk of them and so forth.

And I guess my name got tossed around, and the way it was told later was that they tossed it around but they figured, “He’s got a great job at the Jetport, he loves doing what he’s doing, you know, why bother?” And then finally somebody said, “What the hell, give a call,” And so Larry called and told me about it, and I said, “Gee”, and that morning my wife and I were getting ready to go on vacation, we were, I think we were headed down to Key West or somewhere for vacation, and were trying to get ready and get out of town and get on an airplane that noon to go. And, but Larry presented it and I said, “Gee, that sounds kind of nice but I’m fairly happy where I am here,” and whatnot. And he said, “Well don’t,” he said at the time, “I know you’re in a hurry,” he said, “go on vacation and when you get back from vacation think about it, don’t give me answer now, when you come back give me an answer.”

So we got on, Judy and I got on the airplane and we’re sitting there and I said, “Geez, I’ve just got this interesting phone call from Larry.” I told her, and she said, “What was it?” and I told her, and she said, “What’d you say?” And I said, “Well I don’t think so, but-” “What do you mean ‘you don’t think so’?” and so forth. And I had been at the Jetport for a few years, and

before that I was director of aeronautics for the State of Maine for a number of years and had been involved in some national aviation policy issues.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

BV: There were a couple of avenues. I was regional vice president for the National Association of State Aviation Officials, which was the organization of all the fifty state aviation directors, and so I used to go to Washington periodically for meetings with them.

AL: Hmmm.

BV: And I was chairman of the Airports Committee and whatnot, and the (*unintelligible*) as well, and then I was also a member of triple-AE [AAAE], the American Association of Airport Executives and was on the national policy review committee of AAAE. At that time the vice president of AAAE was Linda Daschle, and so I, and she and Tom were good friends with George and so I sort of connected with Linda and had been asked to serve in that capacity. And so I'd been going to Washington on that.

And I kind of liked getting involved in national aviation policy and whatnot, and my wife very kindly reminded me that I liked getting involved in that. And we'd been talking about, you know, "What's next?" "How long do you stay at the Jetport?" "Where do you go from there?" I'd had the good fortune as an aviator of having the two best aviation jobs in the state of Maine, in government, both running the Jetport and as director of aeronautics. So it's sort of like, "Where do you go from there?" Had the two best jobs. But somewhere down the road, not immediately. And so she said, "You know, we ought to think about it, it's just for a year, we can go down there and see if we like Washington, see what the opportunities are and see what's going on."

So about halfway through the vacation I called Larry back and said, "Tell me more about this," and so he went through some more detail. And I said, "Okay, we'll do it." So on January 1, '92, she and I packed up and drove to Washington. We kept our home in Maine, left one car there, rented a furnished apartment in D.C., and went down to Washington ostensibly for the year, and, kind of like a sabbatical, and that was sixteen years ago and we're still there. So, but again, that's another, you know, so I worked with the Mitchell staff all that year.

AL: Yeah. Now who did you work closely with on that staff?

BV: Bob Carolla, Steve Hart in particular, and I always stayed in contact with Mary McAleney, you know, Mary and I were involved way back in the '74 campaign, and she had stayed with George in various capacities throughout a good portion of her career, so stayed in contact. But it was Bob Carolla and Steve Hart were the two people that I communicated with between the Mitchell staff and the committee staff; I mean that was kind of the connection.

AL: Right.

BV: Yep.

AL: And what were the major things that you worked on, the issues?

BV: The job of the staff members was to look at phenomenal amount of information from a variety of sources, all of which claimed to in some way indicate or try to confirm that American servicemen were still being held as prisoners in Southeast Asia. And a lot of it was, a lot of research, tracking information back, looking at the sources, comparing it to other sources for its validity, and it involved a very lengthy CODEL to Southeast Asia as well, five senators and several staff, and one of the old Air Force One airplanes that we took out of Andrews for about three weeks to, it was a Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Hong Kong, so forth, as part of that trip, to go right directly to the sources of information and certain sites as well. So it was an interesting exercise and -

AL: I was going to ask, did you meet with much success, were people -?

BV: It met with success in the sense that we were able to debunk a lot of the information coming. One of the very sad things that was happening, Andrea, is that, that there were a lot of pretty shifty people, opportunists, who were -

(brief interruption)

BV: - preying on the heartache of the families.

AL: Hmmm.

BV: There were people who would go to the, you know, the wives, the children of missing servicemen and say, "We have information on your husband, your father, your brother, whomever, and we can get to him, or get close to him, or get more information on him, but we need fifty thousand dollars to put together an organization, because we need to go into Cambodia, we need to go into Laos, we need to go into Vietnam, we need to go here or there" - at that time, folks weren't going into Vietnam but - "We need to go to these places and do that." I mean it was a scam.

AL: Hmmm.

BV: It was an absolute scam, and there were several organizations in the country that were scamming these people, I mean it was really shameful. And we were able to debunk a lot of that, I mean they really, they really were scam artists, it was pretty pathetic.

We spent a lot of time meeting with the families, we spent a lot of time taking depositions from people who were privy to what maybe at the time had been classified information, some of it still was. I was, within the staff, my duty, I was the security officer within the staff and, although it's

not a secret if you're looking at the Capitol building, way up in the Capitol dome, there's actually a room up there that I don't know many people, anybody in Congress probably knows about it, I don't know about the public in general, but it is a secure room, and that is where meetings are held that have to be done. It's one of those rooms, it's impenetrable electronically, and sealed off and guarded and so forth, and that room was used to do a lot of, to review a lot of classified material that was provided by CIA, DIA, NSA, various agencies of government, whatnot.

And we went on the road and interviewed people who had some involvement in some way with this issue that might have been able to contribute information of value. Another fellow and I flew to Mexico City and interviewed the then-ambassador to Mexico, who was John Negroponte, but Negroponte had been in Saigon back in the early days and had some sense of what was going on and information as well. So it was an interesting year, interesting.

AL: Yeah.

BV: I'll tell you what else that I learned is that our – how do I say this? – there are people in positions of influence and power who, let's just say, 'don't have it all together.'

AL: Yeah.

BV: You know? I could be less kind and say some other things, but one of the things you have to watch out for – and I've seen it happen in Maine as well – is that once in a while people, by virtue of intellect or personality or assertive style or whatever end up in positions –

AL: Hmm-hmm.

BV: - and they are people who probably ought not to be in those positions. So that was one of the, sort of my eye openers there a bit –

AL: Right.

BV: - in working with that committee and working with congressional staff members. There are some people who are, follow into the 'true believer category' and are very zealous about what it is they believe in, and I guess tend to be blinded to the point where facts don't get in the way.

AL: Yeah.

BV: So that was another interesting sort of learning and educational experience along the way.

AL: Right. Does that really end your time professionally having connections with Senator Mitchell or -?

BV: One more event, and that is when Judy and I went to Washington in '92. George Bush, Sr. was president, running for reelection against Bill Clinton. And I think, certainly in the early part of the year when we were there, there was certainly no expectation on our part that George Bush wouldn't be reelected, I mean at least in fact all the numbers showed that at the beginning of the year, he was in a comfortable position. So we were not, my expectation was that if we decided to stay in Washington that I would get involved in one of the aviation associations in town, and in fact I was offered a position with AAAE.

But while I was busy working in the Senate, Judy had left her position. She was director of sales and marketing for F.S. Plummer Company in Portland, and left that position, obviously, to go to Washington with me, so she had to go find a job. And within two weeks of arriving in Washington, she found a great job one-and-a-half blocks from our apartment, so she had a very short commute, and the job was with Hart Research Associates, Peter Hart, who was and is considered *the* preeminent Democratic pollster in America, and Peter hired her as director of operations for Hart Research.

Judy Valentine: Lucky for me, he went to Colby College.

BV: You know, it was one of those things, yeah, I think he was looking through a stack of, I mean he probably had a stack of applications aside and he found one and he saw that she'd lived in Waterville, Maine, and he went to Colby, and I think he had a kind of an affinity for Mainers, for good reason, I think.

AL: Yeah.

BV: So I mean I think hers got pulled off the pile there and called in for an interview and hired her.

So, and what's important about that then, Andrea, was then she became privy to all the polling information, to which she was sworn to absolute secrecy but, you know, but I got the benefit of the pillow talk. So she'd come home at night and say, "Guess what's going on in this campaign or that race or whichever?" But what was really showing up, and along I'd say about summertime, it was showing that, the polls weren't showing that people were going to vote for Bill Clinton, but the polls were showing that only about forty percent of the public was willing to vote for Bush. And no matter who, you could put them, it could be George Bush versus Bill Clinton, George Bush versus you-name-it, anybody, any person, Mother Teresa, whatever, it could have been anybody, he had a ceiling, he couldn't bust the forty percent ceiling.

AL: Hmmm.

BV: And that meant that he was going to lose. I mean you got to get at least fifty-point-somewhat percent of the vote to win.

AL: Right.

BV: And he was going to lose. And I should rephrase that, given the, the 2000 election, but anyway, but statistically, normally speaking, and he wasn't going to do that so it became apparent that he was not going to win. Incidentally, George Baker later has acknowledged that they, by September of that year, they knew they weren't going to win and George Bush, Sr. had to go through the rest of that campaign, through November, knowing absolutely that he was going to lose, short of somebody else getting run over by a truck or something, that he was going to lose the election. And Baker said it was really tough trying to put a smiley face on something when you knew what the outcome was going to be, and at that point Clinton was the, the only other obvious person on the ballot who would win, so they knew.

Well that also meant that there was going to be a change of administration and that there would be some opportunities in aviation policy at the executive level of government as well. And so that's when people in the Mitchell office started to suggest to me that I consider, kind of staying loose and taking a look at the FAA. And given my background and credentials, that was certainly not illogical at all. So that's what we ended up doing. So I mean George basically was my sort of sponsor, if you will –

AL: Hmm-hmm.

BV: - with the White House for that position with the FAA, so that carried all the way up right into '93, and I went to the FAA in late '93. And even once or twice while I was there, there were some peripheral matters, I think, involving Bangor and the Bangor Airport and whatever that, you know –

AL: Hmm-hmm.

BV: - George had some connection to in behalf of –

AL: Right.

BV: - the state and whatnot so, so it probably led right up until that period of time. And then he left.

AL: Right.

BV: Right. And went on to other things.

AL: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about your times, your connections to Senator Mitchell, who he was as a person, any little stories that you want to add?

BV: Yeah, this is something that only I can know, and so you have to take my word for it that it was the case. But I think what impressed me the most, or one of the many things, I mean I was impressed by, about everything, what impressed me the most was the extent to which he

genuinely thought about and sometimes agonized over sort of political/policy decisions with regard to Maine.

When we were driving, he would sit in the car and chat and he, what he would not do is just say, what he wouldn't do, and this Tony Buxton can confirm this because there used to be some heated discussions, George would decide that on a particular issue, this is how he felt and the position he would take. And people would tell him, "George, you're going to get killed if you take that position, I mean that's, that's not going to fly, it's going to be very unpopular politically." I mean sort of like the issue of amnesty and gay rights, that it would be, and you know, and all the people around him and friends and people in politics would say, "George, you know, you're doing, don't take that position, don't do that, that's going to be very unpopular." And George would say, "I'm sorry, that's what I believe and that's the position I have."

And he would sort of process a lot while we were driving along some of that stuff, and that's what I admired most about him was that even though it was, that he knew it would be politically harmful, and George was certainly a very ambitious person politically, even though he knew it would be politically harmful, if it is what he generally believed, he would not switch; I mean he would stay with it. And that's what I admired most about him, was the fact that he stuck with his beliefs regardless of the political consequences.

AL: Impressive.

BV: And I don't think most people appreciate that, because as Senate majority leader he was known to be a pretty tough cookie, and a real partisan and so forth. I mean some of my Republican friends working in the Senate have passed it on, so that was kind of the view he had. But what you probably didn't get to see was that he, when he felt very strongly about something he – and believed it was the right thing – that he'd stick with that.

And I got to see that on a very close personal level that maybe others didn't see him going through that process. And that's one of the things that I have always admired about George, is the fact that at a time when, on a number of issues other people were jumping ship, he wouldn't jump ship, so - .

AL: Great, thank you so much.

BV: Oh, you're very welcome, it's a pleasure.

End of Interview