

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Al and Ruth Joseph
(Interviewer: *Andrea L'Hommedieu*)

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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 October 6, 2008, and I'm at the home of Al and Ruth Joseph in Waterville, Maine, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Al, could I have you start by giving me your date and place of birth?

Al Joseph: Oh boy. I was born on March 23, 1933, in Waterville.

AL: Did you grow up in Waterville?

AJ: Yes, I spent all of my life in Waterville except for eight years. We lived in Lowell, Mass., for a couple of years, and in Calais, Maine, for six years, where I started up a factory for the Hathaway Shirt Company.

AL: Oh, wow. And you parents, what were their names and what did they do?

AJ: My parents, my father was Maroon Joseph, and he worked on the railroad for fifty years, and my mother was Annie and she lived at home and took care of the kids, ten kids.

[p/o]

AL: Where did you fall within those ten children?

AJ: I was the baby, the youngest in the family, and my brothers treated me as such, believe me.

Ruth Joseph: They still do.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: There were eight boys and two girls – I don't want to interrupt.

AL: That's okay.

AJ: That's all right.

RJ: And they were both immigrants from Lebanon.

AJ: My parents were, yes.

RJ: His parents raised these ten children on Middle Street in Waterville, and wonderful people.

AL: Did you grow up bilingual?

AJ: I could understand but not necessarily speak the language, the Lebanese language [Arabic]. We spoke English at home, actually.

AL: You did, so –

AJ: My parents did, broken English, but they spoke to us in English.

AL: Was that normal in the immigrant households, or did they make a, did you have a sense they made a concerted effort to speak English?

AJ: Well, I think when my brothers were growing up, my older brothers, there was more Lebanese spoken at home, but by the time I came along, I mean with all my brothers, it basically was English.

AL: Right.

RJ: But I think it's interesting, there were eight boys and two girls, and all eight of the boys were in the military, [six in World War II and two in the Korean conflict]. Six of them were in the military at the same time. And Al and his brother Paul were not, but then as soon as they graduated from college they went into the military, because it was required at the time, as a draft, so Mrs. Joseph, Fahme was her name, was very proud of the service of her children. And I lived at that house during the military service time, with our oldest son.

AJ: My military service time.

RJ: That's correct. Oh, not all the boys. I was just a baby then.

AL: And you said your dad worked on the railroad. What did he do?

AJ: He was a laborer, you know, he was, he shoveled coal into the steam engines, did a lot of different things up there. And I can remember walking up there, bringing his lunch every once in a while, and that was a long walk, I mean it's all the way up on upper College Avenue. He was a great old man; I mean he was very gentle, well liked.

And we went to school. George [Mitchell] and I were the same age, we went to grammar school

together, which was actually a parochial school, which was on the main, the first floor of the church, that is, we have one down on Appleton Street, and there were eight grades in the school, three classrooms, so there were three grades in two classrooms, and two grades in the upper classes, seventh and eighth grade. So you can imagine a small classroom with three different grades, and the teacher was teaching, these were Ursuline nuns that we had, and they were teaching three grades at one time. You know, you were studying, and if your class wasn't being taught at the time, and then she'd jump from one to the other. And George went to the school with us, and I think in our class we probably had ten kids, in our grade.

AL: Right

AJ: In the classroom there were probably twenty-five or thirty.

AL: And what did, how did, did you become friends with George?

AJ: Oh yeah, George and I were very good friends, we played sports all the time. I mean, when we weren't in school we were playing either baseball, football, basketball or, and we spent a lot of time at the Boys' Club, where he worked – you probably heard this story, everybody's heard it, but his older brother Rob -

RJ: Robbie.

AJ: Had a job as a janitor at the Boys' Club, and George worked for Robbie, and Robbie would get, I don't know, two dollars an hour and he'd give George a nickel an hour or something like that. And George, even to today, I'm sure, he still tells the story because every time I see him he's, I hear the story, so I'll never forget it. But we played basketball, we were on teams. I've got pictures around here some place; I don't know where they are.

RJ: If you want pictures, we'll get them together and we can mail them to you, and either we'll copy them or you can copy them, because I'm thinking now of the different basketball teams and so many of those men, now men, have, are now deceased, Sonny and (*name*) and da-da-da. And they weren't wealthy, and their shoelaces weren't really sneaker shoelaces, they would only tie the top, the top few eyelets, because they didn't have the long sneaker laces. But it's great to look at those pictures.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: I'm sorry I didn't get them out, I just didn't think about that.

AL: That's okay.

AJ: Oh, they go way back. I mean –

RJ: And you have a scrapbook too, Al, somewhere.

AJ: Of course back to when we were maybe ten or twelve years old, and then all the way up to high school, we were both on the high school basketball team.

AL: Have you –

AJ: And he went to Bowdoin and I ended up at Colby, and he became a very successful man, and he's, you know.

AL: Yeah.

AJ: We're all proud of him really; he's quite a guy.

AL: How did you manage to go to college, given there were ten children in your family?

AJ: Well, I'll tell you. Back then I didn't want to go to college, so I got out of high school with the idea of mine that I wasn't going to go to college because I'd been in school for twelve years and I decided I didn't want any more education, really. So everybody, all of my friends started, George one of them, started going off to college in September and I was going down to the pool room watching these guys play pool, and I said to myself, "You know, this isn't right." And I hadn't taken any college entrance exams or anything because I wasn't going to go to college.

So I came home one evening and we're having dinner, and my oldest brother –

RJ: Joe.

AJ: Joe asked me if I would like to go to school, so I said, "Yes." So he gets up off the table and he goes to the telephone and he calls Bill Millet who was, had something to do with admissions at Colby, and Bill said, "Have him come and see me tomorrow." So I went up, I had an interview with him, and he said, "Well, when do you want to start school?" And I says, "Tomorrow," and so that's how I got into Colby. And ended up graduating in 1954, the same year as George graduated from Bowdoin.

Back then, well the tuition was \$500 a year, so you could work your way through school. And what I did, I taught swimming at the Boys' Club, in the, during the school year, and I taught swimming at the municipal pool in the summertime and I was able to earn enough money to go to school.

RJ: But didn't Joe help you with the first -?

AJ: Yeah, he, my brother gave me the \$500 for the first year, you know. And, you know, we were fortunate back then, I mean because you could work your way through school. But today, with tuition at Colby being \$48,000, tuition, board and room, the cost to go to college, you know,

\$48,000, I mean they can't work their way through school. But there's a lot of help available now, but, it's... So it's –

AL: Did any of your other brothers or sisters go to college?

AJ: I had, the brother just above me graduated from Colby a year before I did, I had a brother who graduated from Rensselaer Polytech, he was an architect.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

AJ: And I had a brother Peter who graduated from USM, no –

RJ: U Orono.

AJ: Orono, and I think that was it.

RJ: Oh, I think they all did something. Like John went to a trade school in Dexter, Maine, I don't know what that's, Tool and Dye or something, and they all did something beyond their high school. Of course, they were all veterans, too, which was helpful, and they could get some G.I. Bill help, which is, I don't think it's available right now for veterans. It should be, but.

AL: Yeah, that was a great thing for veterans back then.

RJ: It was wonderful because we got a generation that, you know, they were in the service for four years.

AJ: So after I got out of school I went in, had to go into the service for two years, and we were married, and when I got out of the service I went to work for Hathaway Shirt and stayed there for thirty-seven years. And George used to call me to fix him up with shirts.

AL: Oh.

AJ: He wanted to buy some shirts wholesale, you know. So I always, I took care of him. He got my internal rate for the shirts. And then after this happened, three or four years, he sent Bill Cohen in to see me at Hathaway. One day I get paged and the operator said, "Bill Cohen is here to see you." So I went down and he said, "George told me that you would take me into the factory, the employee store to get shirts." And I said, "Oh sure, come on." So I took him into the store, and he bought like a dozen shirts. Then he asked me to pick out ties for him to go with the shirts. So that got to be a regular thing, every two or three months he'd, on his way back from Washington he'd stop into the store, the factory.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

AJ: And get shirts from me.

RJ: Was this Bill or George?

AJ: No-no, Bill. George usually wanted them mailed out to him; he didn't come into the store.

AL: So –

AJ: But Bill Cohen got to be, we got to be friends. As a matter of fact, he sent me an autographed copy of his book, because – I don't know if I want to get into it.

RJ: This is edited, so you can get into it – it's not that bad.

AL: Okay.

AJ: One time he came into the store and he bought a lot of stuff, and he got the bill, I don't know, maybe it was a \$110 or so and something and he's reaching into this pocket and he had a hundred dollar bill but he was lacking a dollar. So I reached into my pocket and I gave him a dollar and he says, "I'll make sure that you get it back." And I says, "Oh, okay, don't worry about it." So in the mail, I get the dollar plus an autographed copy of his book, so-

AL: Oh. Well, that was nice. So what is he like, Bill Cohen, what's he like to interact with?

AJ: Bill Cohen's a great guy; I mean he was very nice. I know that we all were on different sides of the political spectrum, but I think he did a good job on his side, and I think he was – nice guy.

AL: Yeah.

AJ: He's just a regular guy, like George is. And they were good friends, I mean, they were very good friends.

RJ: Well I think because of that we trusted to be a good friend, George, there wasn't a lot of infighting like there seems to be currently.

AL: Hmm-hmm, yeah.

RJ: But I wish you'd tell her the raincoat story. Of course this is about Bill and not George, but Bill and George had a close, warm relationship.

AL: It's important to talk about that if you have a story.

RJ: I think he's a Bowdoin graduate, too, isn't he?

AL: Yes, he is.

RJ: I had –

AJ: We had these raincoats special come in from Canada, Croyden raincoats. And we had them in the store for twenty-five dollars. Now, these retailed for over \$200. And Bill Cohen happened to be in on one of his shirt-buying expeditions, and he saw these raincoats and he says, “Can I buy one of those?” I said, “Sure, go ahead.” Took one, tried it on, and he bought it, went to Washington, called me the next day, wanted to know if he could get another one. I said, “Geez, I don’t know, I may not be able to get that size.” He says, “I don’t care what size it is.” So I did, I mailed him a raincoat, but I mean it was just one of these deals, you know, it was a good deal and he jumped at it and –

RJ: I’m still wearing mine. You too.

AJ: Yeah, we got, we still have it, yeah.

AL: Wow. Huh, that’s funny. Can you talk about your date and place of birth?

RJ: Oh, heavens. Well, in my political brochures I say that I was raised in Waterville, Maine, however, I never talk about where I was born, so I was born in Melrose, Massachusetts. But because I wanted to be a Maine native, and my mother was a Maine native, all my political brochures say, “Ruth Joseph, raised in Waterville, Maine.” Because I, you know, I certainly wanted to be truthful. But nobody ever questioned that in the twenty years that I was involved.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: So, and actually, the date, October 9, 1933.

AL: And so –

RJ: So I’m having a birthday this week.

AL: Yeah. And so you grew up in Waterville.

RJ: That’s correct.

AL: What part of Waterville?

RJ: Actually I grew up, it’s called the North End, but I wasn’t really north North End, like Trigger Hill, because Waterville, like many cities, is divided into, you know, different sections. But it was called the North End, and I lived on Oak Street. And the only significance about Oak Street is that we lived on the second floor, and my uncle, who was Wally Donovan, who was the coach of all these Mitchells and Jabars and Josephs and Canavans and all these people who

played basketball.

In those days, they would go over to visit the coach – don't know if they do that today, but – so I was kind of raised at the knees of many of these men who visited my uncle, and I used to sit down there in the living room listening to their discussions, about whichever sport, whether it was baseball or basketball or football. And so, you know, I felt quite at home with all these men, boys at the time. And they were all a little bit older than I was, and it was, I felt it was a great honor.

AL: Oh yeah.

RJ: And my Uncle Wally was a jokester, and he always had a nickname for people. I don't know what he called you -

AJ: I don't want to know.

RJ: But he called me Ruthansky, because my middle name's Ann. And oh, you know, he just, you know, we were very poor, so to speak, and I think one of the significant things of being brought up in that house was that we lived on the second floor, but we did not have a telephone but Wally did, so when people would call me – I don't know how they put up with this through the years but they did – they would knock on the radiator and I would come downstairs and answer the phone. And I mean, at the time I thought that was fine, but I think about it today, that it would be such an intrusion in people's lives, and they had three children but at the time they had two, one perhaps, and then later on they had two others, so they had a young family and all these other people coming and going. And also other kinds of sports people, like hunting and fishing and, yeah, it was a very busy household, and our household wasn't, it was just me there, I was an only child.

AL: Oh.

RJ: So I was just watching all this stuff go on.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: So I think one of the things that, as I grew up, I could say it was a lonely life, so to speak, because you're the focus and that's it. So I always said that I would marry somebody that had a large family, because I really wanted to be part of a large family. And so -

AL: You got your wish.

RJ: I got my wish. And Al having eight brothers, every now and then throughout the fifty-some years that we've been married -

AJ: Fifty-six.

RJ: Fifty-six years that we've been married, I'll say, "Well you know, I would have married any one of your brothers because they were all great people." But we've had a good time. And you know, because I knew so many of these boys at the time, I wasn't intimidated by their sports prowess and I just thought I was one of the boys, I guess.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: And hung out everywhere that they were. We had another friend who was an automobile dealer, his name was Herb Joseph, and he always, he was the only person who ever had a car, and one other person that we did know had a car, I also went in that car too, well, maybe two, there was a Sherman too, but Sherman grew up with George, in his class, so Sherman had a car too. Sherman's family was a lumber dealer. So Herbie would drive us all around town, everywhere we wanted to go, and often George would be in the car, and all these 'cool guys,' so to speak, in today's language. And it was just fun, we had a good time.

My uncle was the director of the Kiwanis pool, which is now the Alfond pool, and I worked there, and Al worked there, and that's where we really met. I mean we'd known each other throughout the years.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: And I don't ever remember George, oh, George was working at Colby on the grounds, I believe, at the time, the grounds crew. So, you know, Al and I would work there and we got to know each other very well of course.

But, so I remember George at the Boys' Club. The girls weren't allowed at the Boys' Club, but we went to go out and we watched them play basketball. And I can remember they used to have carnivals on Charles Street, and all the boys from the Boys' Club used to go down to these carnivals – not that any of us had any money, but we all did things like picking beans and babysitting and things.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: So we went down there, and I used to see George there too, with, but he was a very pleasant, quiet, good person. You know. And of course he has that wonderful Mitchell smile.

AL: Yeah, yes.

RJ: That they all have. So, you know, it makes you feel that he's pleasant to be near.

So that was about it. I was supposed to go to the University of Maine and graduate in '55, but then Al and I got married, so I took courses at Colby, and interestingly enough, this nice Catholic girl had a child the week of graduation, and unfortunately this wonderful brother Joe, the oldest

in Al's family, passed away suddenly of a coronary heart attack – just before graduation, Al?

AJ: During final exams.

RJ: Oh, during final exams, and so, you know, here's number one son and number ten son, and Joe was so responsible for Al going to Colby, it was a sad time for all of us. So we just continued to push. I don't think my mother-in-law ever got over that one, she, I used to tell her how fortunate she was to have these other nine people, but I don't think she ever really believed me. So, we've had a good life.

AL: Yeah. Later in the years as Senator Mitchell became a senator –

RJ: Hmm-hmm.

AL: - and then went on to all these other things, did you continue to have contact with him, did your friendship continue?

AJ: The friendship will always be there, you know.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

AJ: Didn't have much contact with him, though. I didn't. She was a politician, so.

RJ: Well, being political, I was where George was often. And I spent a great deal of time in Washington for the Arab-American Institute and other groups that I was involved with, so I always went over to the Senate office, and I've been trying to think who that wonderful – Gayle.

AL: Gayle Cory.

RJ: Gayle Cory. She has since passed.

AL: She has. She was the sister of Buzzy Fitzgerald.

RJ: Yeah, yeah. And also, she had a daughter, a special [needs] daughter, I believe.

AL: I don't know.

RJ: But I'm not sure the child, you know, it was, you know, that's what I remember. But any time I went to Washington, that was probably my first stop was going to the office, and sometimes George would be nearby. And of course when he was the majority leader he was always proud to take me through the – I don't know if Al was ever there, but – to the majority office and I knew a lot of people in Congress just because of the association of other boards and commissions and groups that I belonged to.

And so I would see him, but I always felt so secure being in Washington, whether I was at the office or not, because if I needed anything I could pick up the phone and said, "This is Ruth Joseph," and somebody would do whatever I needed, change a flight or a plane, nothing serious.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: Just get in and out of town easily. So, you know, I did see him. And then of course I saw him in Maine because he would come to functions at the State House and – he doesn't spend a great deal of time in Waterville. Maybe he does with his brother Paul, and Barbara, and of course sees John too, but mostly he's at his home in Maine or at Paul's.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: And so we see him, and like Al said, we'll always be friends. We've always, we, and I would make him part of our family, like when we all get together as a family, if that's what he wanted. But at that stage, this stage in his life, with his children, but in between, you just value your private time. And at this stage, Al traveled worldwide for his position, I did a great deal of national and international traveling, and we're just happy to be home. So we do travel, but it's –

AL: Yeah.

RJ: - we don't really, we feel that we, I feel, I can't speak for Al, but I feel, I don't know if there's anything in the world that I want to see that I haven't seen.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: And Al has been everywhere, everywhere. The only place that I'd like to go where Al's been is Mauritius, and he used to do business in Mauritius and I always wanted to go there. So you, and then we have children and grandchildren and family and all those ups and downs.

AL: Yeah. I have a couple questions.

RJ: Okay.

AL: You mentioned your Uncle Wally.

RJ: Yes.

AL: Was he your mother's or your father's brother?

RJ: My father's brother.

AL: And so Donovan you said was the last name?

RJ: That's correct.

AL: Irish?

RJ: Yes, very Irish, oh yes.

AL: And was your mother Irish as well?

RJ: Well my mother was named Sheive and that's a mixture of, from what I know, there are Sheives here, but my mother's family was separated at a very young age so they weren't close.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: And my mother's now deceased, but I think most of her brothers and sisters may be too, and we were close maybe to two of her siblings. But that's about it, but you know, nice people.

AL: Yeah. And can you talk about, we didn't really talk about how you got politically involved and what you've done in terms of your positions.

RJ: Oh, politically involved. I don't really know, it just sort of happened. I did some projects – oh, I know, one of the things, I did some projects for a couple of groups and they suggested that I run for the Maine legislature.

AJ: Well, you were head of the Maine Commission for Women, that's -

RJ: That's correct, Joe Brennan, the governor, named me the chair of the Maine Commission for Women so I, you know, I was doing some work down in Augusta. But even before that, when Roger Maller would have a couple of projects for me to do on nuclear energy and so forth, I was getting to know all these people on the state level. So, and before that I was teaching nutrition and weight control, seeing about five hundred people a week in the classes. But that, so I did get to know a lot of people – those people were not politically involved – but I really enjoyed it. Apparently, people felt that I'd do a good job in the legislature.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: So I ran and won, seven times, and I enjoyed every minute of it, every minute of it. I think it was a mistake that Maine passed a term limit bill. On the other hand, I think that I probably was about ready to do something different. And then I was convinced, persuaded, to run as mayor of the city of Waterville, which I did and was elected two times. But that's a really difficult job on the local level, it's –

AL: Yeah.

RJ: It's almost not fun. On the other hand, we did some great work, and I had some great

plans and we actually got an awful lot of those started in the process. And George was very good, coming through to support me at the end of those terms. But we, so that's what I did. And I loved it.

AL: What was it like being the husband of the mayor of Waterville?

AJ: Oh, I think it was very interesting. It's not a good job, really, it's probably a lousy job.

RJ: Almost like the mayor of Wasilla, Alaska.

AJ: You've got more experience than Obama.

RJ: Effort.

AJ: Well, I mean according to what they're saying, you know, the mayor is, you know.

RJ: No, I, you can never take any of these things personally, because any opposition to you is general, not personal. I mean, I see the campaigns today, it kind of rolls off your back. I think maybe you think about it, but you move on.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: And you've got a goal and you're thinking of the issues and things that you know that you could accomplish for the people of Waterville or the people of the state of Maine or the people that I was associated with in Washington, which was basically Middle Eastern political stuff. But it was, you know, you become focused and that's what you're thinking, so.

And I feel badly, you know, that I always had this desperate feeling during campaigns, because often I was unopposed but not everybody would vote for me. And I couldn't understand why all those people didn't vote for me, and I'd get out there in the street and work hard, even if I was unopposed, but it gives you a wonderful opportunity to meet people, groups, that are interested in what you're going to be doing. And so I really panicked, and when I would look at those numbers, I'd think, "Hmmm, yeah, how come they did not vote for me?" But you really have to separate it from your personal life and your political life, and if you don't you could really drive yourself crazy.

AL: Yeah.

AJ: That's why I would never be a politician.

RJ: Well, you were.

AJ: Because I take it personally. I mean, if they could criticize her, I mean I, she let it roll off her back, but I wouldn't.

AL: No.

AJ: And as far as I'm concerned, they shouldn't be doing this, they had no reason to, but -

RJ: Well, you were. Al, when we lived in Calais, Maine, was the chair of the school board, and then he came to Waterville and somebody had heard about that so he became the school board chairman here, and I think that's when he decided that he would do more traveling for Hathaway Shirt and not be political. But, you know, we've had a good time. It's not easy sometimes, but - I know you want to say something, I can tell.

AJ: No. I mean this is supposed to be about George, isn't it? I mean I don't -

AL: It's about both of you and George, because a nice perspective on you lets us understand the Senator better.

AJ: Well I, when I got out of the service I didn't know exactly what I was going to do, I mean I was married, and a salesman for Hathaway wanted to go visit George in Washington, when he was living there. This is before he became politically involved.

RJ: I think he was in law school, wasn't he? Selling insurance and going to law school at night.

AJ: And he was living with my brother Paul, the next one up from me, who graduated from Colby, was working for the government -

RJ: Paul was. Oh, it was George?

AJ: Paul, he was living with Paul.

RJ: But Paul -

AJ: They shared an apartment.

RJ: But Paul was working for the government.

AJ: Yeah.

RJ: And George was selling insurance.

AJ: Yeah, yeah, George was going to law school and selling, I think he might have been an adjustor or something for an insurance company.

AL: Hmm-hmm. So this Hathaway salesman and I, who grew up with, we grew up together,

Ronny Stevens, we drove to Washington, and saw George and Paul and, you know, we, he took us around. And, but here's a guy that was working and going to school, and my brother had a job there, and I guess that's where he met Sally -

RJ: She worked for some congressman.

AJ: New Hampshire congressman.

RJ: Congressman, I've forgotten who it was.

AJ: But she was in Washington too, and I think that's where he met her. But George did live with my brother for a year or two years before he got married. That's another sidelight.

AL: Yeah. Did your brother ever talk about his -?

AJ: Well actually, I think George was his best man at his wedding.

RJ: That could have been. Also, he's, Kathleen, the oldest daughter's, godfather.

AL: Hmmm.

RJ: But I don't know about the wed-, I don't remember, we went to the wedding, but I don't remember that George was the -

AJ: I think he was.

RJ: He could have been, because you -

AJ: Yeah, he was, he definitely, yeah, he was.

RJ: Okay, okay. Because they were married in Jamaica Plains, Mass., I believe.

AJ: Yeah.

RJ: But...yeah.

AJ: What else?

AL: Now, in 1982 and 1988 were the years that Senator Mitchell ran for reelection, because in '80 he filled Senator Muskie's seat. So '82 came up -

RJ: Oh, I was involved in that, yes.

AL: Eighty-two came up very quickly.

RJ: Yeah.

AL: Do you have recollections of that campaign?

RJ: Well, before he was appointed, I was in the legislature, and a close friend to [Governor] Joe Brennan's staff, legal counsel I believe, one was Robert Gibbons, and I think Robert ended up working in Washington with George, maybe as a, whatever the person's called in the Senate, page, not a page, but the head person anyway, on the floor, but.

AL: Is it the sergeant-at-arms?

RJ: Yes, Robert Gibbons I believe was that, and then after that a woman George named, when he was majority leader. But anyway, so I said, "So what are you going to do?" So they said, "Well call George to see if he will accept being the senator." And of course I think by then it was one o'clock in the morning and I was still at the State House, so I called George and he said, "Yes," and somebody else had called him too, and then they told me to write a note to the governor, because I guess there were a couple of other people who wanted the position. And so I did write a note to the governor and said that, "I think George would be the best choice."

But I, and I can't remember who – well, it's beginning to come, but maybe I shouldn't mention who they were – but it seems to me I remember two different people wanted to be the senator, but it could have been different from that.

AL: Well one of them was probably Ken Curtis.

AJ: Yup.

RJ: Yes, it was Ken, and I'm thinking of Flanagan.

AL: David?

RJ: David, but I'm not sure of that. I just rem-, yes -

AJ: Ken Curtis was one of them.

RJ: Yeah, he was not pleased, if I can remember.

AL: Yeah. It was a hard choice.

RJ: Well, it was difficult. And so this is why Robert probably was pushing me, Robert Gibbons, to act, saying, "Oh well, don't worry about it, that's going to happen." I didn't think it was important, because I just thought it would be an automatic choice for the governor to make. So then somebody called and told me to set up the Appropriations Committee Room for a news

conference tomorrow, which I did, and I don't remember much about the news conference except that it happened and then the rest is history; George became the senator.

AL: Yeah, right.

RJ: So I was very involved in that, and Joe Brennan listened to the people that maybe were not, well he listened to many people, but he also listened to the people who were proposing that somebody else be the senator, and I guess that's why it became imperative for me to take some action. And so I was always close to George's Senate staff here in Maine, and in Washington.

AL: You were, or weren't? You *were*.

RJ: I was, yes, very much so. And I stayed in touch. But, you know, everybody has their own schedule, they're busy, they had their own personal life and they're busy, and so we all know where we are and it's like good friends, and you pick up the phone later on and you get to know them.

AL: So you must have known Janet Dennis.

RJ: Oh, Janet's a wonderful person, I just saw her this summer. Probably she's gone back to Florida by now, yeah. And Janet and I always talk for a long time when she's in Maine. And she hates to fly. I think, though, she went to London just about now, to see her children and grandchildren, her daughter and grandchildren, and she was very apprehensive about that. I didn't know that she really hated to fly that much, but Janet was very good, a great staff person. I just, she did a good job, and I knew Janet and her whole family prior to her working for George.

AL: Oh.

RJ: So I knew who they were, the Sullivans.

AJ: Who?

RJ: Janet (Sullivan) Dennis.

AJ: Mo's sister, okay.

RJ: There was Moe and Theresa and Katherine.

AJ: I didn't know she worked for George.

AL: Yeah, and she worked for Senator Muskie before that, so that must have been most of her career.

RJ: I think George took most, as many people who wanted to move from Muskie's office to work for him. And he was very good about that when he resigned, he took care of his staff people.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: They all seemed to fit into some other position in Washington or Maine that they could – I'm thinking of Jeff Porter.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: Where are these names coming from?

AL: Yeah. You're pulling them from your memory.

RJ: Right, but -

AJ: He used to drive him around, didn't he?

RJ: Well he did during campaign time.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: But he must have been suspended from staff, to be in the campaign – you know, there are rules, and George would never break a rule. And we, you know, I can remember Jeff, when he met Heather, they had to get him back to New York quick, and I thought, I said, "What's going on in New York?" Well, I found out what was going on in New York.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: But, yeah, those were good years; all those years were good, with Muskie and George.

AL: Did you know the Gray family at all?

RJ: Very well, very well.

AJ: Jack Gray was a good friend of ours.

RJ: Jack, yeah.

AJ: Jack and Doris.

RJ: And...

AL: And Jack worked for the newspaper, right?

RJ: He did, and his -

AJ: And his brother did.

RJ: Oh, Howard, Howard Gray, who was what we would call an executive at the time. And somehow, he took pictures, or maybe he was in charge of the people who took pictures for the *Sentinel*, because he often would take aerial photos.

AJ: Oh, Howard.

RJ: Yeah, Howard.

AJ: Yeah. Jack worked in circulation, I think.

RJ: No, but I was trying to get to the point where the Waterville High School team, Swisher Mitchell's team, and my uncle who was the coach of the 1944 team, I was ten years old, I guess. So he, they took, they had this homecoming at the railroad station, so everybody was there. But I couldn't see, my mother had me down here, and they were up on this little platform. So I just said to mother, "Look, I'm going up to be with Uncle Wally." Well, what do I know, that these are all dignitaries, you know, I'm a little girl. So every picture that was taken in 1944 of this team, and Howard Gray had something to do with this, I don't know, I'm in. And nobody knows who that little girl is, and I'm applauding and Margaret Chase Smith is there. There's a picture beside the desk in the little office room, if you want to show her, with me and Margaret Chase Smith.

AJ: Where is it?

RJ: On the floor by the desk, if you want to get it, just to show her, because it's so funny.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: So they sent these victory newspapers all, to all the veterans and people serving, nobody knew who this little girl was. They called Wally in the middle of the night, and Wally said, "I don't know." So, the Mitchells and the, Ruth was there, but, so you know, we're just all embedded into Waterville history.

AL: Yeah, yeah. Well let me flip the tape...

End of Side A
Side B

AL: We are now on Side B.

RJ: Okay.

AL: And so – go ahead.

RJ: Go ahead. Do you have – I was just going to say – do you have other questions?

AL: Yeah, well, and so we started to talk about the '82 campaign. What was your role in that? It must have been Maine, or local?

RJ: Well, I did what every-, anybody wanted me to do. And of course I was in the legislature, so, and as a Democrat, and I mean I was just available, I didn't hold any position in the campaign, per se. Because that would have been too, I mean I would do anything that George needed to have done.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: However, it's important for George to see a lot of people, to include many other people besides his old, closest friends. So it, so I just worked it. I don't know what I did. I might have been running too, I could have been running. I probably started my legislative service in '80, so I might have been on the ballot as well –

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: - on both those times, because it was every other year –

AL: Yeah.

RJ: - for legislators.

AL: Now, over the years, have you ever gotten to know, by any chance, Shep Lee?

RJ: Very well, very well. In fact, oh, that was the new Portland paper yesterday, Shep always made sure that George had a good car when he came to Maine. And of course in the last few years Adam usually comes with Shep, Adam Lee, if there's something that, for George, whether it's at Cape Elizabeth or wherever.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: You know, go wherever they ask me to go, and Shep, yeah, we exchanged. I think Shep looks well and he seems to be doing pretty well, I guess.

AJ: Yeah, we went down to a fund raiser for the Seeds of Peace, I think, and he was involved in that, down in Cape Elizabeth.

RJ: That's correct, yeah.

AL: Oh. So any time, I've met him quite a few times over the years and he's one of those, such a warm, friendly –

RJ: Right.

AL: - person.

RJ: It's one of these people you feel is going to live forever. In fact, in the Portland paper, I think it was in the entertainment section or something, he attended some dance, oh, the 150th Anniversary of the Victoria Mansion.

AL: Oh.

RJ: And Shep Lee was there, of course, they mentioned.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: I said, "Shep's still going out."

AL: When you, do you have recollections of how Senator Mitchell's style was when he went through his campaigns? I know '82 was very, was a very tough campaign because he was so new, and he was running against David Emery and he was way behind in the polls at the beginning, and he came back and took the election.

RJ: Hmm-hmm.

AL: Do you have recollections of what his style was, or how he got word out?

RJ: Actually, I think George has never changed his style. He's still George, he, you, when you meet him and you're with him, you have a sense that this man has confidence in himself, he's there for all the right reasons, and he let's you know that. I mean, he doesn't mince words. I don't see him as a humorous person on the stump, or anywhere perhaps, but he just is –

AL: Serious, yeah.

RJ: He's very focused and he knows – and he lost a horrible election, which I don't even remember what year that was.

AL: Seventy-four.

RJ: Seventy-four.

AJ: Longley?

AL: Yes, who came from behind.

RJ: That's right, and beat, and so I think all of us who are political have to go through that, and it hurts because you don't understand why, and it takes a while to get over. In fact, Al and I went to see George, we had just moved back to Waterville and, to try, because Al being a businessman and in the higher echelons of business leadership, or management, he could tell something was happening. And he went down to see whoever was running the Waterville office and mentioned it, and they really didn't want to hear him, and so he mentioned it two or three other places but nobody seemed to be listening.

AL: Hmmm.

RJ: But he could tell. And most of our friends were from the corporate world and -

AJ: Well we wanted to -

RJ: I think -

AJ: - get him to go up to Calais, because, you know, it's a small town or whatever it is.

AL: Yeah.

AJ: But we knew people there, and they were Republicans, most of them, but they got me elected to the school board up there, and, matter of fact, the guy that owned the drugstore in town, we were at a cocktail party one night and they talked me into running for the school board and two other guys to run for the council, and this guy said that he would take all of his advertising dollars and put it into ads for us, as we were running this thing. So they were, you know, they would have helped.

RJ: They would have done whatever you said.

AJ: You know, I'm not saying he would have -

RJ: This would have been Woodland Paper Company, whatever the name of them, and it would have been all the people in the Calais area.

AJ: Georgia Pacific, yeah.

RJ: Yeah, Georgia Pacific, and they would have been of benefit, because when it's close, I mean I, George lost Lewiston, he may have lost Waterville, unfortunately, but it's those small towns that can make up the difference. And if somebody had listened to us prior to the election,

there would have been extra votes. I don't know what the numbers are now, I can't remember, but I do know that it might have made a difference.

AL: Yeah, yeah.

RJ: And I, of course we were furious, but so was the world, or our world. And there were a lot of other, a couple other things that seemed to skew that election, so because of that experience I think George recognized the seriousness, because he's a very intelligent man, of these campaigns and how important they are.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: And when you're talking to George, you'd swear you're the only person there, in the room, as he meets people. And I've been in places where I've had to introduce him to others, not as speaker but just people, and he focuses in on the person he's speaking with, and then he moves to the next one. And many large groups, I remember in New York particularly, I didn't know many people there but I happened to be standing by George, and I was just watching the whole event, it was some sort of a fund raiser for somebody, but, and George recognized who could be helpful to him, and who was not particularly helpful to him.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: That's sort of second nature to people who are political.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: But it's a rough, it's a rough game, a rough sport. But it's more than that, because people who do run for political office are giving of themselves. And I always compare it to a job interview, I mean you're out there asking people to vote for you, and that's it. And I remember saying that to Joe Brennan often. So I, like I said, I didn't have a particular role in those campaigns, I was just there, and people knew I was there. But it was important for George to widen the circle, which he did. And his intelligence came through, you could see the wheels churning as he's thinking about, 'Do I go here? Do I go there?' And he must have been a numbers person, although I think he was a words person too, but he knew what was happening.

I just remembered the English teacher that he loved so much at Waterville high school. Do you remember who that was?

AJ: Sweeney?

RJ: No.

AJ: Oh, Littlefield?

AL: I remember.

RJ: What?

AL: Elvira Whitten.

RJ: Whitten, Mrs. Whitten! Miss Whitten, maybe. Yeah. And then also the nun at St. Joseph's School that he stayed in touch with, I think, until her death perhaps, I think she's dead, but do you remember her name?

AL: I haven't heard this.

[p/o]

RJ: But George really was fond of her and they remained close, and he included her in some of the times that he was being honored someplace.

AJ: That's right, I remember, yeah.

AL: Okay.

RJ: Sister –

AL: I don't –

RJ: - Peter Maroon or them would know. Maybe even... but.

AJ: I don't remember her name, but I remember he did, there was some occasion where he -

RJ: A couple that I can remember.

AJ: Mentioned her.

RJ: Yes, he did.

AL: Yeah. I'll have to ask. I'll find out.

RJ: Yeah, I don't think John would know, or Paul, because they're much older than George. But as we talk to some of his old friends who no longer live here in Waterville, and I'm thinking of Peter and Paul Maroon, they would know, they –

AL: Where do they live now?

RJ: They live in Florida.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: And we're not very good about sending Christmas cards, but I think they live in Tampa, no, no, it's not Tampa, it's – I have their addresses (*unintelligible*).

AJ: Fort -

RJ: Oh, Fort Myers, yeah.

AL: Oh, my grandparents lived there for a few years.

RJ: So, but they're twins and they grew up and went to the same, in the same class as George and Al.

AL: Right.

RJ: And Peter particularly likes, has always wanted, we don't see him because he doesn't come to Maine very often, but some of his family is here, he always wants to be on top of things, I mean he knows all these things, [p/o].

AJ: Yeah, he'd be a good guy to interview, actually.

RJ: Of course you can do it by phone, correct?

AL: Yeah, but I'd rather fly down there.

RJ: Yeah.

AL: In say, February.

RJ: Well we're going down in November for a week; you can come stay with us.

AL: Okay.

RJ: Because we're going to be on the other shore, Orlando, but it's not that far apart.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: But it's -

AL: Are there other childhood friends that either live around here or have moved away that you think would be important to talk to? I'm still trying to gather, I heard a name, last name Saperstein?

RJ: Sherman Saperstein, yes.

AJ: Oh, Sherman.

AL: And is that somebody around here?

AJ: He lives in Arizona.

RJ: Yeah, he lives in Scottsdale, Arizona. And he doesn't come to Waterville any more at all, but they have a place in Boston that they own, for the summer.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: And they have two children and both those children live in the Boston area, the last I knew. And we just had a little reunion of friends of Al and George; we all got together at Janet Mitchell's house, Robbie's wife.

AL: Wife, yeah.

RJ: And we hoped, because this was in August, that Sherman would come up, but he -

AL: Oh, so you had a, just recently had a get-together with old, close old friends.

AJ: We get together every summer.

AL: Uh huh.

RJ: In August.

AJ: These are people that graduated from Colby, from Waterville, from the Waterville area, and -

RJ: From Waterville High School

AJ: And Waterville High School, not all of them.

RJ: No.

AJ: But most of them.

AL: Yeah.

AJ: We get together every summer someplace, usually at Janet's house.

RJ: Janet likes to have us go over there.

AJ: We usually have cocktails one place, and then we go out to eat, but this year she, we ate there at her house, must have been twenty of us.

AL: Wow.

RJ: Sixteen or twenty. Well Janet, I think she, we're getting too old to all just go out to eat so we each brought, Janet sort of said, "Why don't you bring something," and sort of suggested what she wanted. So, you know, we all just put this food on her dining room table, and it was like heavy hors d'oeuvres.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: And it worked out well because you could move about. When you're in a dinner, you sit -

AL: It's hard.

RJ: - and talk to people -

AL: Right, right.

RJ: - you're near, so, you know, you don't really get to visit. So Sherman Saperstein was supposed to come up, and he didn't. So they're planning on what they're going to do next summer, and we're lucky, nobody has died - you know, many of our friends are no longer alive, but - because they think it's important, because it'll be their 55th reunion, 50th, 55th reunion of Colby graduation, so you know, they're trying to see what we're going to do.

AL: Yeah. That's really neat.

RJ: We do what we're told.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: But, and they always say, "Well geez, George is over to Paul's, why doesn't he come?" And Janet never says anything, Janet just doesn't say anything, so, you know, I'm not going to say anything.

AJ: But we don't want him there, he didn't graduate from Colby.

RJ: No, but he went to high school with you all. That's true, I never think of it that way.

AL: Well, are there things I haven't asked you about –

RJ: Hmm-hmm.

AL: - your friend George Mitchell that you think is important to add, any stories or connections that I haven't known to ask about?

AJ: You know, I can't think of anything.

RJ: No, but I can say that the people who have known him through the years only have good things to say about him.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

RJ: And I think that's such a tribute to a person, because somebody has to hate you along the way. And, you know, we've lived a long time, and we're celebrating a birthday this Thursday, so, you know, it's just -

AJ: She keeps reminding me of that.

RJ: It's just, and we're so fortunate to be here, but it's just, I think that is an amazing tribute to the Senator. I call him 'Senator' when we're in public, and sometimes I call him 'George,' but it's just, you know, we've been nearby and have watched him become all that he has, and supported that really good and made the phone calls when we had to. There was some talk of him being secretary of state, when was that?

AJ: The last time we contacted his office was -

RJ: Oh, go ahead. The Red Sox?

AJ: My sons, oh, she gave me two tickets to the Red Sox, and two tickets to my youngest son to the Red Sox. The trouble is, she didn't have the tickets. She gave them to us for Christmas.

RJ: I had to –

AJ: So she figured she'd go online after Christmas, in January, and start, you know, trying to get these -

RJ: Oh, because you couldn't buy them before Christmas.

AJ: Get these tickets.

RJ: Because the box office isn't open, or the ticket office.

AJ: So, couldn't get the tickets, couldn't get the tickets, so finally we called, she called George's office and he made arrangements for -

RJ: Oh, we talked to that Mary, Mary in the Washington office, who was in charge of tickets.

AL: Oh.

AJ: So we ended up picking up the tickets at the box office the day of the game, and my two sons and Ruthie and I went, and beautiful seats, you know. They were very expensive, you know, but it was special.

RJ: It was your Christmas gift.

AJ: It was a Yankees game.

RJ: Oh yeah.

AJ: Yankee-Red Sox game.

AL: Oh, cool.

RJ: Actually, George was there.

AJ: I don't know.

RJ: Remember, we went to that -

AJ: Oh, that's right, that's right, he spoke -

RJ: Bowling alley or something.

AJ: That's where he spoke, right there, yeah.

RJ: And Katie Couric was with him, and she at the time was -

AJ: Seeing Werner, or one of them, I don't know.

RJ: Henry or Werner, and so she was standing beside George, and we were in a bowling alley restaurant place, right beside the ballpark.

AJ: It was right there.

RJ: Yeah, and, but, you know, you really don't get to talk to him then, because -

AJ: And we did, we saw him, we spoke with him that day, too.

RJ: Yeah, oh we talked with him, but nothing -

AJ: That's probably the last time I saw him. But I'll never take those kids to the game again.

RJ: Now, these kids are in the forties.

AJ: They're forty and forty-something, and what they found out was that beer was less expensive than Coke, you know.

AL: Oh.

RJ: They were so bad. Of course they have families, you know, but they weren't with their families, they were with us.

AL: Right.

RJ: They're standing there, and they had their hats, "Foul ball!" and Al was so embarrassed.

AJ: I'll never take them to a game again.

RJ: Well they must have been with us in this little restaurant.

AJ: Yeah, they were there.

RJ: And we saw Katie Couric and George.

AJ: Yeah.

RJ: And whomever she was dating at the time.

AL: Yeah.

RJ: But there were others there, some of the other executives -

AJ: I'm trying to think of what the occasion was, why were, now wait a minute, maybe that was another time.

RJ: That might be.

AJ: It was Maine Day, I think.

AL: Oh yes.

RJ: That could be it.

AJ: That was another time that we went down for Maine Day.

RJ: Well that was another time when the Mitchell Institute gave us those tickets to go on the train to, and what's her name, my friend, my good, I served in the legislature with, she was working in that office, I have her card. But anyway, she -

AL: Colleen or Bonnie?

RJ: Bonnie Titcomb.

AL: Yes, yes.

RJ: Yeah, she's married to somebody, yeah, Bonnie. She's still there, though.

AL: Yes, she is.

RJ: I was thinking that this morning, because we didn't make that effort this year to get tickets to get to the -

AL: The gala's this weekend, for the Institute, the fund-raising gala.

RJ: Oh yes, yeah, so we, yeah, I think Janet's on the board of the Mitchell Institute.

AJ: Janet Mitchell?

RJ: Yeah.

AL: And this is the end of the interview with Al and Ruth Joseph.

End of Interview