

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Patrick E. Hunt
(Interviewer: Mike Hastings)

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Mike Hastings: The following is an interview of the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project, an activity of Bowdoin College. Today is Saturday, September 27, 2008. I'm Michael Hastings, the interviewer. The interviewee is Mr. Patrick Hunt. This interview is taking place at 7 Sherman Street in Island Falls, the time is 2:00 p.m. Good afternoon, Mr. Hunt.

Patrick Hunt: Good afternoon.

MH: Could I start by asking you to state your full name, and asking you to spell your surname?

PH: My name is Patrick E. Hunt, H-U-N-T, my last name is spelled H-U-N-T.

MH: Could you give me your date and place of birth?

PH: August 19, 1946, in Bangor, Maine.

MH: And your, the full names of your mother and father?

PH: My father was Theodore E. Hunt, a third generation Island Falls family, and my mother was Margaret I. Doherty, D-O-H-E-R-T-Y, Irish Catholic ancestry from county Donegal, immigrated to Boston, Massachusetts, in 1860, and they met in Boston prior to WWII while my father was serving at the Boston army base. They were married in 1945.

MH: So your father grew up here in Island Falls, then.

PH: That's correct, he was a third generation Island Falls family, his great grandfather came to Island Falls from Thorndike, prior to that the family lived in Unity, prior to that in Gorham, Maine, prior to that in Amesbury, Massachusetts, and prior to that in Tewksbury, Massachusetts, and prior to that in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where they colonized in 1634.

MH: Wow. I'm actually, I'm a native of Morrill, not too far away from some of those places, outside of Belfast. Tell me your, what did your father do? You say he was in Boston where he met your mother, but was he, he was in the war?

PH: He entered the military service of the United States in 1940, and after finishing basic

training was posted to the Boston army base, where he met my mother, prior to deployment in the north of Africa with the First Armored Division. He trained in Death Valley under the command of General George S. Patton, and he participated in campaigns in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Sicily, Italy, the invasion of France and the Rhineland in Germany, and saw action at all those places, including Kasserine Pass and Anzio.

MH: And so he returned back to Maine right after the war?

PH: In 1945 they married in Boston, they moved to Bangor, Maine, where he entered Husson College, finished, and returned to Island Falls where he operated a restaurant, adjacent to this building, until the 1960s.

MH: In this building?

PH: Adjacent to this building.

MH: Okay, all right.

PH: And then in the 1960s [*sic*: 1970s] he became the village postmaster, which he remained until 1983.

MH: And your mother's story, what was her -?

PH: Her grandfather immigrated to Boston, Massachusetts, from Clonmany County, Donegal, on May 11, 1860, and settled in the North End of Boston. His son, Patrick Joseph Doherty [(her grandfather was also Patrick Joseph Doherty)], attended Boston College, high school, and Boston College, I think he was the first graduate in class, and was a successful salesman. His date of birth was 1876 and he died in 1962. My mother graduated from Charlestown High School in 1934 [and also came to Island Falls obviously with my father after he finished at Husson in 1949].

MH: That would have been when Husson was up on the hill in Bangor.

PH: Correct, it was called, in those days it was called Bangor School of Commerce, and I actually met Dr. Husson as a [child]. Stands out in my mind rather nicely, because in those days I think it was actually on Exchange Street.

MH: Right, right, I can recall in the '60s, when the old Penobscot Hotel was the men's dorm, where Maliseet Gardens is today, across from the new courthouse. And I remember the students going back and forth on Exchange Street. You say you were born in Bangor, did, how long were you, did you stay there?

PH: We were there until dad finished Husson, and we went to Boston briefly before we came back to Island Falls in 1949, and I think the doctor that delivered me was Dr. Feeney.

MH: Brothers and sisters?

PH: [] I have three sisters: Mary Margaret is retired and lives in Island Falls; Suzanne lives in Portland and works for the City of Portland; and Katherine lives in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, and is a school board member.

MH: So your early schooling was here in Island Falls for the most part.

PH: Correct, I went to Island Falls schools for twelve years and graduated in 1964, there were twelve [*sic*: twenty-four] members in my class, and then I split my education between [the University of Maine at Presque Isle and] Ricker College in Houlton, Maine, I entered the army in 1968 and served in the Republic of Korea, and returned and graduated from Ricker in 1971 with a degree in economics. Went to Massachusetts and took a job with the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States Department of Justice in 1971, and went to law school nights the last four years, between 1978 and 1982, and then returned to Island Falls in 1983 and started my law practice. And I've been here for twenty-five years.

MH: And I take it, it's a general practice, you do all sorts of things, or do you special -, I mean I went on your website and it sounded like you do some real estate law.

PH: One stop fits all, except we do not do contested divorces, criminal or child protection cases, or court appointments; but primarily real estate, bankruptcy, probate, civil, personal injuries, and things of that nature.

MH: I'm going to cycle back a little. What was it like growing up in Island Falls?

PH: It was wonderful. The streets were tree lined; there were baseball games every Saturday, [and it was] perfectly safe. We had a high school and a grammar school; we had a basketball game every Saturday [*sic*: Friday], and there were movies Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. In retrospect, it was a great community because there was an enormous amount collegiality and family orientation. There was no crime, period. There were [practically] no social diseases [that] I remember [], and it was a nice spot.

MH: Most of the jobs were the starch mill? Did I go by a starch mill on the way in?

PH: The starch factory [] came in 1963 or '64 when I was in high school. Primarily people in Island Falls were blue collar workers, some factory workers, woodsmen, some farming, very few white collar jobs. In the early 1950s, things became desperate and there was a mass migration from this pocket to Connecticut where people took jobs in defense factories, and the population of the area decreased by at least a third.

May I mention [] that Ed Muskie had the wisdom and foresight to recognize what was happening to rural Maine, and he encouraged two projects that were inspirational. One project

was to create a sugar beet industry in Aroostook County, which Republicans attempted to destroy by being negative and pessimistic, and it eventually worked. But it worked for a period of time, and it would have worked had they shared his positive attitude.

The second thing that he tried to do, which was very ingenious, was to create a hydro electric project at Dickey-Lincoln in the Allagash, which would have flooded two townships and created an inexhaustible supply of electrical power for all of New England and would have eliminated part of our dependence today on foreign power and foreign oil. The same forces that destroyed the sugar beet industry destroyed that, except in that case it was the electrical utilities and their powerful allies, [including] Margaret Chase Smith. They had the entire Maine legislature, and they also had Cliff McIntire, a congressman from Aroostook County. So they destroyed the project, they destroyed the concept, [and] as a result today America is more dependent on foreign power [i.e. oil]. And Ed Muskie was right.

MH: Now you said your father was a postmaster for a while. Was he politically interested in politics, or did he know Ed Muskie, or were they oriented toward that kind of thing at all?

PH: My mother's side of the family was far more politically oriented, being Boston Irish Catholic. My father was not politically oriented, but later in life (he was a cultural Republican) – but in the middle of his life he became disgusted with the class warfare and the economic deprivation of poor people [by the Republicans] and he became a Democrat, and he became interested. But because he was postmaster, he could not participate in politics, but my mother was always very active. Ed Muskie [p/o] was in Island Falls several times, and my parents always made it a point for me to meet him. I always remember the clarity of his speaking voice; he was obviously a man of very high intelligence.

MH: When did you first meet George Mitchell?

PH: [After] I joined the Drug Enforcement Administration in 1971. At that time it was called the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, and I was assigned to Boston, but we covered all of New England. I had an interest in Maine because that was my home state. Peter Mills was the United States attorney of the state of Maine. His office was in Portland, and he came from an old Maine family. Today the Mills are very, very, very politically active. In fact, he shared my interest in history. One of his ancestors was Rebecca Town Nurse, who was executed in 1692 in Salem, having been accused of being a witch. Peter graduated from Colby College. He was also a descendant of Peter Tufts, who founded Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts.

So the U.S. Attorney's Office, prior to the Jimmy Carter administration, was headed by Peter Mills, who was a native I think of Skowhegan, Maine [*sic*: Farmington, Maine]. He was a very interesting fellow; he had been at Colby where he had been an amateur boxer. In fact, he defeated a fellow once who had beaten a fellow to death in the ring. And he had served in the navy in WWII, and he had come from a well established and well known Skowhegan [*sic*: Farmington], Maine, family. He had [served] during the Eisenhower administration for eight years, and he had [served] during the Nixon/Ford administration for eight years.

Because the U.S. attorneys are political appointees and serve at the discretion of the president, and typically the senior United States senator of each state nominates who the next one is going to be, George Mitchell [*sic*: Edmund Muskie] was in a position to nominate that person. And although I'm not privy to why George Mitchell was selected, it was obvious to me that he was a mirror of Ed Muskie – both incredibly intelligent persons, razor smart, visionaries, altruistic, motivated primarily of love of country and love of the state of Maine, and the world in general. So [when] we heard in our Boston office that George Mitchell had been selected, and although we knew very little about him, there was a consensus that it was good because Ed Muskie had nominated him.

So my first trip to Portland to meet George Mitchell involved a drug case [p/o]. We [Hunt and Jack Crowley] entered [his] office and a fellow introduced himself as George Mitchell. He was wearing a dark blue Arrow-Dover shirt, short sleeves. His eye was steady, his handshake was firm – and Jack Crowley was with me – and he said, “What is this, the Irish mafia?” And I said, “Well as a matter of fact, I'm from Island Falls and Jack lived in Rockland for a while when he was in grammar school.” And he said, “Well, there you go.” And we talked about Island Falls, he knew people there of course. In fact, he had met my father and mother when he had [run] for governor, and he knew some people that Jack had known as well, because Jack had attended Chevrus High School briefly before graduating from Boston College High School [], and Boston College as well.

We talked about a case, then we walked down the hallway and met his assistant, Jim Brannigan. Jim had a firm handshake, was very bright, and we discussed the case. I noticed how unusually bright these two men were, [what] great listeners they were, and they asked questions that no one else had ever asked before. [p/o] And I noticed that the office had been rehabilitated. It had been freshly carpeted, the walls were painted, the furniture was organized, it was neat, files could be located, and the tone had changed dramatically. There was a positive upbeat atmosphere in the office. At that time, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Portland had three attorneys and one male secretary. That male secretary [] was Steve Ridge, and Steve Ridge had never been treated properly. All of a sudden, Steve Ridge had a modern work station, modern equipment, and his morale improved.

So over the period of George's tenure at the U.S. Attorney's Office, we had many cases, many conversations. He always answered the phone, which astounded me [p/o]. He developed outstanding liaison relationships with all the federal law enforcement agencies. That was unusual, because under the previous regimes in all the New England states, there was a fair amount of tension between law enforcement agencies, the FBI, the DEA, the Secret Service and ATF, Customs and Immigrations, and the United States attorneys. I think [it was] because of cultural issues—it seemed to me it was the Harvard crowd versus the Jesuits. The Jesuits being the law enforcement types and the Harvard crowd running the U.S. Attorneys' Offices.

George changed all of that. He would walk downstairs, he'd walk upstairs, he'd make a point to meet with the various special agents in charge—he would make a point to meet with the agents.

He had an uncanny ability to memorize names and faces. I suspect if George Mitchell saw me today, he would recognize me and my name. I think he probably knows, conservatively, conservatively, [one] hundred thousand people. [p/o] I also think he's the smartest person I've met in my life, and I've met at least two Nobel Prize winners [p/o].

Well, morale increased dramatically, convictions went up, indictments went up, and the track record went up. U.S. Attorney's [] Office stopped losing cases and started winning cases. In addition, the collegiality between lawyers in the state of Maine and the assistant U.S. attorneys improved dramatically, and that was a long time coming. In addition, George Mitchell made an attempt to reach out to other U.S. attorneys in New England. When he was in Boston he would visit our office, [and] he would make a point to visit the special agents in charge of the various law enforcement agencies in Massachusetts, [] New Hampshire, and Vermont as well. In addition, when he traveled to Washington, he always made a point to meet with the directors of the various agencies, and he reached out to them and he made a point to develop a greater sense of collegiality.

In addition, the relationship between himself and Judge [Edward Thaxter] Gignoux improved dramatically, and that was very much needed. Under the previous administrations, there was frightful tension between Judge Gignoux, who had been appointed by Eisenhower, and some of the United States attorneys. George had attended Bowdoin College, I think Gignoux had also. George had graduated from Georgetown Law School, I think Gignoux finished at either Harvard or Yale. But they got along and there was no tension, and things started to happen. And that's not to say that Gignoux did George Mitchell any favors, it's only to say it was a smooth working machine and things happened that should have happened to protect the public and to protect America.

[Around 1978] I thought I would go to law school, and I was looking for a recommendation. I called George and I said, "George, would you recommend me for law school?" He said, "Sure, Pat, but I don't think it'll do you any good because I'm not important." He recommended me and I was accepted into the evening program at the New England School of Law. I was very grateful for that because it's very hard to get in. [p/o]

Now at that time, he had hired as his assistant -

MH: Was it Jay McCloskey, or Paula Silsby?

PH: He had hired Paula Silsby as his assistant, and Jay McCloskey as an assistant. I do not know in what sequence, but it was classical George Mitchell. He hired two persons of high intellectual standards, high moral standards, and who were dedicated public servants. Jay eventually became the United States attorney, and Paula is currently the United States attorney. At this point in history, the U.S. Attorney's Office is very professional and not as politically oriented as it was in the '50s, '60s and '70, and part of the '80s, which has been a dramatic improvement for the Department of Justice []. And once again, that was classical George Mitchell. He made it a point to choose people that were well suited, and did not choose political

hacks.

I finished law school, and I was encouraged to become an assistant U.S. attorney myself by my co-workers, which was very complimentary. I filed applications, and in the meantime I returned to Maine in 1983 to start my practice in Island Falls. My first office was in the village barber shop, [where] the barber had had his chair ripped out by his creditors. I could see the ring on the floor where they had ripped it out. It was an ominous sign to a young lawyer in a town of 793 people. Well, the phone rang, I was offered a job as an assistant United States attorney in Miami, then lo and behold, I was offered jobs in Detroit and Los Angeles, and someplace else. Quite frankly, I was complimented because for a kid from Island Falls, Maine, to become an assistant U.S. attorney—wow!

So, it so happened George Mitchell was coming to Island Falls that week. At that time he was a United States senator. That was sometime in 1983. So I said, “I’ll visit George and ask for advice, whether I should stay in Island Falls as a lawyer or whether I should become an assistant United States attorney.” Now, you must keep in mind that in the old days, in the Boston office, you could not be an assistant United States attorney unless you went to Harvard, then Yale, or Yale-then-Harvard. And the social engineers, who describe themselves as liberals, had decided that no U.S. attorney—assistant U.S. attorney—could get that job without graduating from either Harvard or Yale. I always found that very offensive, extremely offensive. In Maine we’re more liberal. See, George had gone to Bowdoin then Georgetown, so our system wasn’t quite so class conscious.

So I met with George at the Town Hall and I said, “When you’re finished, may I ask for some advice?” He said, “Sure.” Steve Ridge was with him [p/o] doing favors for poor people, who couldn’t get favors from anyone else. So he said, “What’s up, Pat?” And I said, “I have come home, as I mentioned to you, and I got offered a position as an assistant U.S. attorney in three different cities, but I’m torn. Do you think I should stay here, or do you think I should go? I still have my pension rights, I have twelve years of service plus two years in the Army, and I can retire young and I can be, I can do what you did.” He said, “You know, Pat, sooner or later you’re going to come home anyway, so you might as well stay here.” So that was twenty-five years ago, and I’m still here and relatively prosperous.

[Then] he [i.e. Mitchell] was appointed by President Clinton [p/o] to help with the troubles in the [Northern] Ireland. I have a cousin, whose name is Joseph Patrick Doherty, who was imprisoned, we think wrongly, for killing a British soldier in a shootout. We would say it was a lawful combat death; the Brits would say it was murder. Of course it depends upon who’s writing history, and in their minds George Washington was a terrorist. We happen to think George Washington was a patriot, and my family happens to think that Joseph Patrick Doherty is a hero.

So Joe had killed a Captain Wainwright in a shootout in Belfast. I don’t think the Brits would have cared, except Captain Wainwright was the Queen’s cousin. So eventually he was captured and imprisoned at Longkeash Prison, without a trial of course. But he escaped, very daringly, by

carving a firearm, a fake firearm from a bar of soap, and escaped with fifteen or twenty other [IRA heroes]. They went to the four corners of the earth. He came to America and he was a bartender at Clancy's in New York City, in Manhattan, and the FBI arrested him. He was imprisoned in New York City for several years where I visited him on a regular basis.

Mary Pike was his lawyer and she took the case to the Supreme Court of the United States. At the appellate level she won, and he was found to be a member of a lawfully organized military organization; therefore, he was a prisoner of war, [and] therefore he could not be in jail. The case went to the Supreme Court, and the Reagan/Bush Supreme Court ordered him returned to Longkeash, and President George [H.W.] Bush sent him back in Air Force One, which was an absolute insult.

So in any case, when George became our roving ambassador to [Northern] Ireland, he worked out a plan where many political prisoners were released, both on the Orange side and the Green side, and Joe was one of those persons released. He is now instrumental in the peace process.

MH: How old a man is he now?

PH: Joe Doherty is younger than me, and I'm sixty-two. He must be low fifties by now. And by the way, Congress signed a petition demanding his pardon. Tom Allen was one of the persons who signed it, as a congressman, Olympia [Snowe and] Susan Collins didn't []. So Joe is now released, he's now part of the peace process. Several years ago Gerry Adams was in Portland and I went down to visit him with Ed Drinan, who was the special agent in charge of the DEA office in Portland. Gerry mentioned how grateful he was for the help that George Mitchell had given him in the North of Ireland and releasing Joe.

So I'll conclude this by saying, George Mitchell touched a lot of lives. You know, quite frankly, I think he would have been president except I think he made a big mistake. I think he thought that Bill Clinton could not be elected, and I think when he supported Bill Clinton for -

MH: Second term? You mean the second term or the first term?

PH: First term. I think that George Mitchell thought that Bill Clinton could not defeat George Mitchell [*sic*: George H.W. Bush] the first, and I think he thought he would run for the presidency the second time. As it was, Bill Clinton did defeat Bush one, and did defeat, did win the second election. But things worked out. He's so highly respected and so beloved world 'round, that his impact on history is there anyway.

MH: Did he ever talk to you about his own Irish roots?

PH: You know, George told me that he was adopted [*sic*]; he was half Lebanese and half Irish.

MH: His dad was adopted.

PH: [His dad was adopted, yeah; he was half Lebanese and half Irish]. I think he mentioned his, were they Kilgores, or Kildares?

MH: Kilroys.

PH: Kilroys, yeah, the famous WWII emblem, yeah, Kilroys. And I was intrigued with his Lebanese ancestry, because Lebanese Americans tend to be extremely successful in America, and we have a Lebanese population in Caribou, Maine, another Lebanese population in Portland and Waterville. And I thought, had he become president, he could have reconciled Israel and the Palestinians with his uncanny ability to bring people together, and by not pouring fuel on the flames [p/o]. I think he is the only person in my generation that could have possibly have reconciled the Middle East.

And I do know that he shares a lot of Jewish friends and I do also, and they found George very comfortable to be with. I think he could have been a catalyst to resolve that issue, which I think is the leading issue facing the world today.

(Pause)

MH: You've mentioned the staff people that he gathered around himself as U.S. attorney. Did you have much interaction with his Senate staff?

PH: None at all.

MH: Thank you very much for that story about your cousin, which I, that's exactly the kind of thing we're interested in, I mean because I don't think that that's out there, and actually the, we don't have a lot yet on his period when he was in the U.S. Attorney's Office so that that's all very, very helpful, we appreciate that. When he was doing the negotiations, did you have anything, any, much contact with him beside this episode with your cousin?

PH: I have not seen George in [] many years.

MH: Tell me a little bit more, before we stop this, I'd like to get your feelings about a couple things, and you can pick them in any order, or you can not address them if you care not to. But can you talk a little bit about how politics in Aroostook County are conducted or about the political process in Maine generally? I'd like to have your reflections on that, on those two issues.

PH: Aroostook County has traditionally been a Republican county, and the reasons for that are very simple. It was colonized by old Yankee stock from southern Maine, secondly by descendants of British Tories who fled New York City in 1783 and went to New Brunswick, settled the King's land, and then filtered into Houlton area, north of Presque Isle, commonly called the 'Bible Belt.' With the exception [of] St. John Valley, which was colonized by French

Canadians from Nova Scotia, the county has been traditionally Republican. But Democrats can do well here. Ed Muskie was the first one, and I think that was because of his high intelligence, his sincerity, and his altruistic views towards humans in general that people respected him in Aroostook County.

Interestingly the people who respected him the most were [] the wealthy farmers [], small businessmen [], and he even had broad support with Fundamentalist Christians. George Mitchell was respected in Aroostook County, but I did not follow that election when he ran for governor [in] the Democratic primary, and I don't know how well he did.

Mike Michaud is very well respected in Aroostook County and carries the county. Governor Baldacci is popular here. For a Democrat to win in Aroostook County, he must have a working class background, be a plebian, and relate to poor people who work with their hands. It's a mistake to run for political office in Aroostook County, or any part of rural Maine, and be an elitist and talk down to people, which George Mitchell and Ed Muskie never would have done.

Aroostook County is extremely conservative culturally, and economically. [p/o] Candidates who win up here tend to be economic moderates and social conservatives. Ironically, Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins always win in Aroostook County despite being social liberals and economic conservatives. Quite frankly, I think that's a knee-jerk reaction to the Republican mindset, and I don't understand it intellectually.

MH: You mentioned that when you first staffed your law practice in Island Falls, you talked about the barber's chairs that had been ripped out, and the people who'd gone to work, I guess you said, did you say in East Hartford?

PH: [In] the 1950s, the economy in Aroostook County was worse than deplorable. I remember this vividly – I remember poor people and farmers leaving town in a dusty pick-up truck, as people in Oklahoma left Oklahoma in the 1930s -

MH: Sounds like *The Grapes of Wrath*, yeah.

PH: Correct, and leaving the front door of the house open, flapping in the wind, to seek their fortunes in Connecticut. I remember that vividly. This town's population went from thirteen hundred or so down to eight or nine hundred in a five-year period. Once again, Ed Muskie had the foresight to know what the solution was. We had the highest electrical rates of any area in America, we needed cheap power, and we needed a secondary industry for farmers. The beet thing was perfect, because Castro had taken control of Cuba and America needed a source of cheap sugar. And the Republican establishment did everything possible to destroy it. The Dickey-Lincoln thing was so far sighted, it was unbelievable. Cheap electrical power, hundreds, well thousands of jobs created initially, followed up with hundreds and hundreds of jobs, and cheap power for all of the Northeast, which would eliminate our dependence on foreign oil. And he had the foresight to see this way back in the 1950s, way back in the 1950s. And he had the foresight to bring us a sales tax, which Republicans hated, but the sales tax made it possible to

develop our state college, our road system, it went on and on and on. So I'm astounded that Ed Muskie spent his entire life helping people, he could have been a multi-millionaire. And George Mitchell could have been [] a multi-multi-millionaire, [too].

MH: Well thank you very much. This has been very interesting, I appreciate it. It's nice for people to give me their time on a Saturday afternoon, I do appreciate it. And we'll sign off, and you'll be getting a transcript, and as I say, a release form. And if you have any other thoughts, we can always schedule another interview. Things you think that, or if you want to write anything that you think ought to be in for the record.

PH: Well I know so little about him, quite frankly, and these are just my memories from a long time ago.

MH: Well they're good ones, thank you.

PH: Thank you Mike.

End of Interview