

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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(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 September 17, 2009, and we’re at Preti Flaherty in Portland, Maine, with Tony Buxton, and this is Andrea L’Hommedieu. And Tony, I’m not going to ask you all the family background, education type questions; we covered that in the Muskie project which is located at Bates College. So today I think we’ll start just by thinking about when you first remember meeting George Mitchell in Maine.

Tony Buxton: Well it’s only appropriate that I don’t remember exactly when, but I came out of the service in August of 1970, and George Mitchell at that time I believe was Maine’s Democratic National Committeeman and was very active in the Muskie campaign which was starting to form for ‘72, Muskie was on the ballot and Mitchell was involved in that. I was a candidate for the state legislature, and I don’t recall seeing George during the campaign. I think I recall meeting him at Democratic State Committee meetings, which were of course monthly. He was already a revered figure, not only because of his proximity to Muskie, but because he was a player on the national scene.

AL: And so what were your first impressions of him? He had a reputation, but what do you remember thinking about him?

TB: Well, I was quite struck by George Mitchell, Severin Beliveau, and Bruce Chandler, each of whom were attorneys, each of whom had a significant role in the Democratic Party and seemed to move fairly easily back and forth between their role as attorneys and their role as the leaders in the Democratic Party, and yet none held public office, in the sense – Severin was party chair, I think Bruce may have been party counsel at the time, and his wife Nancy Chandler was, I believe, the Democratic National Committeewoman.

So I was just starting out and walked into this political party that was moving very rapidly against the Republicans and moving Maine. Ken Curtis was governor, Peter Kyros [Sr.] and Bill Hathaway were congressmen, and Muskie and Margaret Chase Smith were the senators, and Margaret Chase Smith was pretty quiet but obviously a force in Washington. The Congress was heavily Democratic, Nixon was president, the country was riven by the war, and I suppose when I began was roughly coincidental with the time when the Democratic Party began to move away from the war very aggressively. Obviously the war had been the cause of, or a major contributor to, Hubert Humphrey’s defeat in ‘68.

Muskie had been the vice presidential nominee obviously in ‘68, and remained an enormous force because of that. And there was a lot of eagerness in the political party, tremendous participation, tremendous grass roots organization, not much money, and George was, if Ed Muskie was the pope, George Mitchell was a cardinal.

AL: And so did you, ‘73-‘74 comes along, and George Mitchell decides he’s going to run for governor.

TB: Right, however, in between there’s an interesting event which I’ll tell you about, which was Mitchell running for Democratic National Committee chair, and I’m having a hard time focusing on the actual date of

that but I think it would have been just following the defeat of Muskie and Humphrey. And George ran, and it was sort of a harbinger of how he would be perceived throughout much of his political career, he was perceived by labor as being too moderate, and perceived by the anti-war factions, the McGovern people, as being too moderate, and he ended up losing by I think one vote for DNC chair.<p><p>And DNC chair mattered at that point. It doesn't matter that much now, it is more or less appointed by the president during Democratic times. And it was a real battle, he fought very hard, he used all of his Muskie contacts and much more, and it was his first foray into national politics on his own and I think served as the experiential base for the knowledge he used eventually to become Senate majority leader. And ironically, what contributed significantly to his election as Senate majority leader was the work he did campaigning for candidates selected by the Democratic National Committee.<p><p>**AL:** In 1986.<p><p>**TB:** That's right, after he became a senator, he devoted one weekend a month to traveling for the national party and became a beloved speaker at labor events. So, interesting experience.<p><p>**AL:** And Robert Strauss is the one who won that National Committee [Chairman]?<p><p>**TB:** No, Strauss was party chair during Watergate. Maybe it was Strauss, yes, I guess it was Strauss, you're right, it was Strauss, and Strauss of course was a very capable politician.<p><p>**AL:** Right, he was a strong candidate to go against.<p><p>**TB:** Yes, he was, yes.<p><p>**AL:** And so in '73-'74?<p><p>**TB:** George started talking about running for governor. There were many potential candidates, Ken Curtis did not have an heir apparent and had had a spectacular administration, truly changed Maine substantially, dramatically changed the structure and operation of state government. He was a Bobby Kennedy person and not really a Muskie person, in that sense, George was the leading Muskie person. Muskie did not seek to impose Mitchell on the state or on the party, but he made clear that he had a choice, he just wasn't going to say who it was and nobody doubted who it was.<p><p>I was working for Peter Kelley on the public power referendum, and I suppose Peter probably thought I was going to support him for governor, but I had been offered a job by Muskie managing the state of Maine for him, being his lead staff person in Maine, and I declined it so that I could work for a gubernatorial candidate, I wanted to run a gubernatorial campaign. So I talked to George and he struck me as obviously very bright and very organized, and I thought I would benefit from being associated with him, that I would learn a lot, and it turned out to be true.<p><p>**AL:** So tell me about that campaign, some of the dynamics.<p><p>**TB:** Well, this could be a treatise unto itself, but the important thing was, the war was essentially over but the country was still divided. Watergate had occurred and it was underway, the investigations were underway, and they continued for several years. Obviously the Senate stuff that was more prominent had passed, but there had been a substantial loss in confidence among the public in politicians, and that was only beginning to trickle into the political process in the parties.<p><p>At that point, a plurality of people, a majority of people, substantial majority in Maine, belonged to either the Republican or Democratic Parties. The Republican Party I believe had more enrollees than the Democratic Party, and Independents were third. Democrats were coming along quickly because of 1972, with the eighteen-year old vote coming into play the Democrats had made a big effort to register voters, register young people, and in fact Larry Benoit and I had headed that up in Maine and we did tens of thousands of enrollees.<p><p>So the movement was still there, but you could start to see the corrosive effects of the anti-war dissent in the political process. The McGovern Commission was revamping how we select a

Democratic presidential candidate, or had done that in '72, that's correct, after '68, and that really had changed things dramatically, it took a lot of power away from local political people and basically injected real democracy, in quotas, which is not democracy, into the selection process.

So when Mitchell started to run, he had to create an identity, which he did. His slogan was, "There are two Maines, there should only be one," and he used a very effective media to put his primary campaign in the position of being the front-runner, and he clearly was the front runner, once he overcame the name recognition of a couple of the other candidates. I believe there were seven candidates in the Democratic primary, Mitchell was spectacularly organized, Nancy Chandler handled a lot of that, but he had a lot of good people working for him. We had a campaign staff of about ten people, several of whom were paid the great sum of twenty-five dollars a week, and all of whom have stayed in touch ever since. I don't think there's ever been a campaign in Maine as highly organized.

When we came to the Democratic State Convention, for example, we had – and this was before computers, obviously – we had a card system with the biographies of every delegate, we had people assigned to that delegate, so that by the end of the first night we had a head count of which delegates were for Mitchell, which were neutral and could be swayed, and which ones were gone to somebody else. And when the other candidates came into the hall and saw the support that we had organized, much of it at the convention itself, they were extremely disillusioned. Joe Brennan said to himself, "It's all over, there's no way I can overcome this."

And that organization carried through into the primary day, and Mitchell won substantially, and interestingly won all of the mill towns. Maine then had a much more healthy industrial base featuring, typically, union labor at mills, and for example, right now in Rumford there is New Page, which employs probably eight hundred to a thousand people. It probably was three thousand then, plus there were three or four other mills, each of which employed three to four hundred people in very high quality jobs with benefits, retirement and so on. And those towns, which typically had five to ten thousand, usually fewer than five thousand but sometimes more than five thousand, citizens, those towns were an important part of the growing Democratic base of Maine.

I was technically the campaign manager, but no one should doubt that the campaign manager was George Mitchell. In fact, when George introduced me to Bill Clinton for the first time he said, "Mr. President, this is Tony Buxton who ran my first and only losing campaign," and at that point, I think that was 1992, and health care was becoming an issue and George was deeply involved in that in the Senate. And I said to the president, "Mr. President, if you know George Mitchell, I think you know exactly who ran the campaign." So it's been a point of contention ever since about who lost the initial general election campaign.

The significant thing that happened in the general election was that, Jim Erwin was the Republican nominee, a very good candidate because he was an economic conservative and a social moderate, and that was an appealing combination. And he had barely lost to Ken Curtis eight years, sorry, four years earlier, and had then served as attorney general, he was articulate and good looking, he projected strength, and he ran very well at first. As the campaign progressed, our level of organization had an enormous impact. For example, we had a – once again, there were no computers – so we had people in Waterville, family and relatives and friends who worked a letter system. George would see a thousand to fifteen hundred people every day, on a good day, and whatever he saw, we would get their names and their addresses, we'd get their name and we'd find their addresses in phone books. And out of that, there might be five hundred letters that would go out a day to

voters, or potential voters, who had met him, and they were, looked like a very nice personal letter, and they in fact were individually typed, and they had an incredible impact. So two weeks out, our polling, everybody else's polling, showed Mitchell winning. And then, and as I'm sure others have told the story, what happened was that the Republican candidate began to fade and Longley, Longley had started with about eight percent, mostly in Androscoggin County, and we'll come back to the nature of Longley, and he worked himself up to ten percent, eleven percent, twelve percent, and he did it largely by expanding his base out of Androscoggin County by assiduous campaigning in person. His personal characteristics were that he seldom slept, he was tireless, and he also had insured hundreds of thousands of Maine people through his insurance firm. He had a, you and I would call it a brokerage now, but he'd basically put together plans for businesses and schools and institutions where he and his people would figure out what their real actuarial risk was and not what the charts would say, and sell them a product that was tailored to them. And he was a master salesman, very intimidating, and the result was he knew a tremendous number of people. He maintained – I'm getting into where I don't want to go yet – but he maintained a process for mailing letters that kept five secretaries employed full time, and he would dictate his letters and they frequently would be two pages long instead of one sentence. So they were pure Jim Longley. So he gradually built up and at one point, I think two weeks out, he was probably at seventeen. But Erwin was like at twenty-seven, with Mitchell in the forties, and the Republican leadership, particularly Joe Soule and Ken McCloud were the leaders of the Republican majority in the legislature at that point, because the legislature was very mal-apportioned and weighted toward rural areas. They started an effort to woo Republicans to Longley. They just didn't want to have another Democratic administration. So, it wasn't going very well until they got the *Bangor Daily News*, which was then a very dominant paper, to endorse Longley on the Thursday before the election. And when that happened, it ignited an anti-politician backlash, it became possible to stick it to the politicians, and you could see the fires spreading. Our Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner was Sunday night in Lewiston, obviously two days before the election, and we had people out at the mills, all shifts, all the time, day after day. And one of them was my father, who was retired at the time and was helping out. He went to the mill in Jay on Sunday at three, for the shift change, and he, the reception he got was so bad he drove to the dinner to find me, to tell me what he was getting. People were throwing the things back at him. We got the same thing at the BIW gates. So what had happened was, the Watergate anti-politician sentiment, and the nature of the campaign that we had run, and the anti-politician approach from Longley and his attack on state spending, had moved Longley into the position where he had real enthusiasm. On Sunday, the local newspaper, the Portland paper had come out with an editorial saying, "Vote for your party." The newspaper then was strongly Republican and didn't like Longley, but was never going to say, "Vote for a Democrat." In fact, in 1964 when Barry Goldwater was running, they announced they were abandoning their practice of endorsing candidates because they couldn't possibly endorse Lyndon Johnson. Anyway, Bill Caldwell, who was kind of a moss-back reporter and editorial writer, wrote the editorial, but on the front page the story of the paper was of their poll, which showed Mitchell I think twelve points ahead. So here we were, sitting on an apparent lead, we didn't have day-to-day polling, this didn't happen then, and the emerging Republican Party was switching over to Longley, so it was a matter of who got to the finish line first. And we did not think we could get on TV, Longley got on TV by personally calling the

owners of the Maine stations and bullying them into letting him on TV, and he put on an ad in which he just sat in a chair and stoked the anti-politician sentiment, and then that line that will always haunt me, and it's classic Jim Longley, he said, "Let's (*unintelligible*)," and it sort of became the rallying cry for these folks, and on election day obviously Longley won by I think it was three percentage points, but the only county he carried was Androscoggin. Mitchell carried fifteen of the sixteen counties and lost the election, and it was clear on Election Day, to me, that that was likely to happen. It was not clear to George. The results came in from Waterville and we did not take Waterville by much, that came in at nine o'clock and George knew it was over at that point. So that was obviously a huge disappointment to George, it was a huge disappointment to the hundreds of people who had worked so hard for him, and it was a mistake for Maine. But in retrospect, I don't think George would have become the person he is, and has been, had he not had to figure out subsequently why it all happened. The postmortems on George in that campaign were that he was mechanical, methodical, and uninspiring; that when you got question 38a, you got to answer 38a. When President Ford pardoned Richard Nixon the Republican and Democratic candidates agreed that the pardon was probably in the national interest, Jim Longley astutely said, "It's wrong." And that sort of reasonableness on George's part clearly contributed to his loss. It was an angry time.

AL: Did it affect his campaign staff at all?

TB: What do you mean?

AL: In terms of, how did the cam-, because I know Senator Mitchell was fairly well reasoned about, and thoughtful about what does this mean, that Gerald Ford is going to pardon Nixon, in terms of your assessment that they made, that it was the best for the country, did it affect -?

TB: They did disagree. A very unusual campaign staff, way overqualified, and very hard working. We didn't have a lot of policy people acting as policy people; we had people running policy teams from the campaign, so I don't recall debating that issue with him at all. There were other issues where he was, where his question was, what's in the public interest? Not, what's good for me? And even Ken Curtis got a bit disillusioned with George. I think Curtis might have preferred Joe Brennan, because Joe Brennan was more in the Curtis mold, but his comments were that George would be a good governor and would run state government well. There was an issue about George's passion – where was the passion?

And at that point, I think it's fair to say, on a very simplistic basis, that George Mitchell was dominated by logic, reason, and legal argument. When you got into a disagreement with him, he would take your argument and carry it to an absurd conclusion, as a method of persuading you that your argument was wrong. And he was very good at it. Now, he learned that from Muskie, or he learned that from arguing with Muskie, I think Muskie had something George did not have at that state which was a spectacular political intuition. So, to draw a line, the difference between George Mitchell in '74 and George Mitchell in '82 was the loss in '74, the years in the wilderness, and having to rationalize why people who should have supported him did not, and what he could have done about it.

And I think what emerged in that period of time was a person more attuned to his intuition, and that capacity developed unendingly in the example I give of its height, or of the extent to which it developed, is his decision to not accept a Supreme Court nomination and instead marry someone he loved. And it really was an either/or, apparently. At many points in his career, I'm sure George Mitchell would have accepted the Supreme Court nomination. But having developed the rest of his person, there was not a question; I don't think there was a moment's doubt ever that he was not going to accept the

nomination. So I just contrast the '74 experience to that. It's somewhat difficult now to understand the '74 experience because it was highly improbable that an Independent could get elected in '74, and Longley was an extraordinary individual, very different from Angus King, who subsequently obviously was elected as an Independent. And now being Independent is the easiest route to statewide election in Maine, particularly for the governorship. So that was not the case then, and Longley was unique in his ability to do that. Sorry, I'm rambling.

AL: No, that's okay. He transformed himself after '74 as a campaigner. Did you continue to be involved in the '82 campaign?

TB: Yes.

AL: And so, before we get there, let's go to 1980 and the Muskie appointment of George Mitchell, were you involved, or on the periphery, or insights into -?

TB: Well, let me give you some background to that. When George Mitchell won the Democratic primary in '74, he made two sets of phone calls: first he called all of his opponents and genuinely thanked them for their effort – there was some vitriol between he and Brennan during the campaign, but other than that there wasn't much that was negative – and he had stayed in touch obviously with all of them, and asked them to appear with him the next day at a press conference. When Brennan said yes, Mitchell said, "I'll pick you up at your house and we'll drive to Augusta together." Brennan's wife never forgave him for endorsing Mitchell after the primary. Like many spouses, she took it very seriously, and Mary Kay was a former Miss Maine, she was an attorney and a formidable person in her own right, and it led eventually to divorce between them. But Brennan went, and it crushed him. And on the way back, Mitchell's in front, in the car, and Brennan's in back, and Brennan starts to cry. Not bawling, but weeping. No idea what he's going to do with his life; he'd given up his law practice substantially to run. So George decided that he would help, and Joe was a trial lawyer, and George was a trial lawyer, so George sent Brennan some of his cases, okay, and he reached out repeatedly. And when Brennan subsequently ran for attorney general from Maine, George helped him. And when people wonder why George Mitchell was appointed and not Ken Curtis, that's half the reason. Well, a third of the reason. A third of the reason is he probably was as, or more, qualified to be a United States senator because he'd spent a lot of time in Washington, and the Brennan people were convinced there had to be a quality nominee, so it was down to he and Curtis. And the other reason was that in a gubernatorial campaign, Curtis had supported Phil Merrill against Joe Brennan, which did not help.

But going back to your question, there is that build-up to the appointment. There was no deal between Muskie and Brennan as to who the successor to Muskie would be. Muskie told Brennan who he thought would be appropriate, but I'm sure he didn't say anything against Curtis. And I talked to George several times during the pending seat. I was a law clerk at the time and I said, "Look, I'll either endorse you or Curtis, whichever will help you the most," because I was so close to Brennan because I'd run the '74 campaign, and Joe has a very long memory, although he still remembers and still chides me for it, but we're friends. So that's how I think the nomination took place. There was a tremendous fight over that nomination. The Curtis people really went all out.

AL: They really wanted that?

TB: Oh, my goodness, they went all out, and it eventually led to a heart attack by Curtis. Curtis and Mitchell have always been friends but they were competitors, and I don't think they had any personal animosity to one another, but their camps -

AL: The staff people.

TB: The staff people really got into it. Now, George did not have a cadre of people doing that, which I think also helped him. And the harder the Curtis people pushed, the less likely it became and

so they had a decision to make which was, do we go all out, and they decided to go all out. And Brennan made the nomination. And there were a lot of people at that point who urged Curtis to run against George in the '82 primary, and but for the heart attack, he might well have done that.

I was then back in Maine in '80 and I was appointed general counsel in the State Committee, and there were very strong Curtis people organizing at that point, looking toward '82. And George of course started out as the person who had been boring in '74; people did not realize how much he had changed. And to answer the question I'm supposed to be answering, he put together a kitchen cabinet of people, six or seven people, to figure out what kind of campaign he ought to run and how to do it, and I was a member of that group.

AL: Who were the others in that group, do you recall?

TB: I think Woody Jones was there, maybe Jay McCloskey, Harold Pachios was not there, Severin Beliveau was not there, probably Bob Dunfey, probably Scott Hutchinson, to some extent Joe Angelone, who was a friend, Kermit Lipez.

AL: Oh, he was involved at that point?

TB: At a point he was involved. And people came and went as there were needs. I recall Kermit being involved in some of the legal analyses that we got into, but Kermit still would have been a Curtis person at that point. I don't recall us worrying a lot about Curtis, when this group finally got going. Larry Benoit was there, clearly. David, chief of staff David.

AL: Johnson?

TB: David Johnson, Charlie Micoleau. That's a lot more than seven, or five, so I'm not exactly sure who was on it, but I think it would be in that subset of people. And we would meet at George's house in South Portland every week or ten days and talk about how to do things, and it was a very interesting process because it was very thoughtful, very thorough, and not terribly political. Charlie Micoleau had advised George to go on the Senate Finance Committee, and he had done that and so he was dealing with tax issues and money issues, and therefore enhancing his ability and his ability to raise money. He was doing a lot for himself in Maine, he was campaigning, going around the state very regularly, he tried to speak at every high school to boost his public perception and likeability.

But as everybody knows, when the first poll was taken about a race with, by George being opposed by David Emery, George was thirty-eight points behind. So George adopted a strategy of supporting President Reagan when he was right, and opposing him when he was wrong, and what he was able to do was, because Reagan became very unpopular in Maine, he became the opponent to Reagan and so was able to build himself up on the issues that Reagan was doing poorly on. And Reagan had won a substantial victory against Jimmy Carter, a real crushing of the Carter approach to diplomacy and economic matters, and had started out to be very popular, and remained fairly popular as a person, but his policies were horrendous.

And as we went toward '82, we went into a very bad recession, equal in its severity to what we're into right now, and it happened very quickly, and on top of that Reagan's people were tearing up the safety net, particularly Social Security, they were knocking lots of folks off various parts of Social Security, and Social Security is probably the single largest source of income in Maine. And we now have the highest percentage of elderly people in the United States – we didn't have the highest then, we had the second highest, and interestingly, it was particularly high among the poor. So the issues that George had used in '74, he actually had a TV ad in '74 that was about Social Security, even though he was running for governor, helped identify him in '82.

I'm leading you all over the map here, I apologize.

AL: No, that's great. And he began getting his name out early, almost a year, wasn't it, before the election?

TB: Oh yes, oh yes.

AL: Very early.

TB: Yes, he got

his staff pretty well established, he inherited Muskie's staff, and he kept it pretty much the same but he made some changes, and then he set about to become better known. For example, remember, Ed Muskie had been in office then in the Senate for twenty-five years; Margaret Chase Smith had been defeated in '72; Bill Cohen was there, to become famous through Watergate and through defeating Hathaway in '78; the country was just beginning an economic stagnation that continues really today. So what George decided to do was to follow in the footsteps of Ed Muskie and Margaret Chase Smith, and he adopted the slogan of, quote, "Maine and the nation," which pretty immediately capsulizes what Maine people have come to expect from their U.S. senators, that they not effectively work for Maine, but that they have an effect at the national level above and beyond a single vote.<p><p>And the issues George selected were consistent with Muskie's [] legacy of strong environmental activism. Muskie at that point had done the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act and other bills, Coastal Zone Management and so on, without being, quote/unquote, a, he sort of invented the environmental movement at the legislative level but he was not anti-corporate in his doing it. He did it the way he did everything else, which was by gathering a majority of people who believed in doing something reasonably calculated to achieve a result.<p><p>Anyway, Mitchell picked up on the acid rain issue, and we did an ad about acid rain that had the effect of winning George a lot of support among hunters, fishermen, outdoors people who wouldn't normally have supported a Democratic candidate, and David Emery never got those people back. And it was an excellent example of people moving toward an issue because someone conceptualized it at a level that they had not heard of before; he put two and two together for people about the importance of Maine waterways and its relationship to acid rain. It was a fairly elevated concept, and it had a big effect on his campaign.<p><p>The other issues were obviously economic, a tax, Reagan was making taxation more aggressive, and of course it helped that '82 was a recession in a very significant Democratic year. So he won by thirty-eight points.<p><p>**AL:** And did you follow him at all once he was well established as a senator?<p><p>**TB:** Yes, he kept the kitchen cabinet together for quite some time.<p><p>**AL:** And so what was your role over those years?<p><p>**TB:** He would call once in a while, or his staff would call and say, "George wants to know what you think of this." And I was not reluctant to give my opinion, and he was always interested in the dialogue, in the exchange. And he had changed, started changing substantially, he had thought about why he didn't do well in '74, what personal characteristics, what personal strengths and weaknesses he had, and he had worked hard on it. He had become – he was never a cold person at all, but his way of dealing with an emotional issue was to deal with it rationally, and not necessarily to empathize, he didn't have that Bill Clinton, the lower lip being bitten, showing he was about to cry, and he never became like that.<p><p>On the other hand, he learned how to use his intelligence to create humor that reached people. He came up with this ridiculous cow joke, which he told a thousand times all across Maine, and the more he told it, the more people laughed, and it was just hysterical. You could see the difference between, if you will, a squiggle and a line, a line can be boring, a squiggle is interesting, but over time the line can create a beautiful drawing. And he used his very high intelligence to create a beautiful drawing, and to draw what moved people *and* what needed to be done at the same time, and let me give you a couple of examples.<p><p>Nineteen seventy-eight I was taking the Bar [exam], and my wife was interning with George in the U.S. Attorney's Office. So he called me one morning, he said,

“Why don’t you come down and we’ll go to lunch.” So I went down to the U.S. Attorney’s Office and he ushered me in and he said, “I’ve got to wait for a phone call.” So the phone call comes, and I listen to the conversation, and he says to the person on the end of the phone, whose name happened to be George, a Wiscasset attorney named George, he said, “George, I just want you to know that at our argument at the 1st Circuit tomorrow, I’m going to quote a case that’s not in my brief, and I want you to know what the case is, and I’ll drive somebody up to you with a copy of the case, because it’s a new case.”

So when he hung up I said, “So why did you do that? Why didn’t you just give it to him when you got there, or, why didn’t you surprise him?” Which, in retrospect, I should have known the answer to, but he looked at me and he said, “My job is not to win, my job is to see that justice is done.” So we leave the building and we’re walking toward Exchange Street, to a restaurant, and we run into a panhandler. And since I should have been panhandling the panhandler at that stage in my life, I didn’t give him any money, and neither did George. George stopped, took the man by the arm, walked him toward the restaurant, observed a woman going into the restaurant who was a waitress at the restaurant, he knew her by name, he called her over, he gave her five dollars and he said, “Would you please see that this man gets lunch?” I thought, ‘Holy Toledo’.

Now those are not the actions of a person who is either a craven politician or a mechanical, robotic person, and that was not done for public display. I’ve only said it twice, this is the second time I’ve said it to somebody who kept track of what I was saying, but it was an example of how he channeled his emotion into a result; I wasn’t going to give the fellow anything. If I’d had five dollars, I might have given him five dollars. George did not give him the five dollars, he ensured that the five dollars would be used for food and not booze, and that’s an interesting example of the emergence of that side of George. And I think that was typical of his tenure as U.S. attorney. He was a magnificent U.S. attorney, he never lost a case. When he came into the office he gathered his five-person staff – it’s now twenty-five, doing not much more – and he said, “I’m going to take all the good cases, you guys are going to get what’s left over to try, and if you don’t like that you should get appointed U.S. attorney.” *(laughter)*

But anyway, the people he had on his staff have continued since. Paula Silsby was his youngest assistant, she’s now the non-appointed U.S. attorney, still, and lots of folks came in and worked for him, including my wife and many others, and he set a lot of people on their way. Sorry, I’m rambling.

AL: Well that’s important to talk about. We’ve talked to a few people when he was in the D.A.’s Office because it’s important to talk about that early legal career as well. And so you’ve talked about some of his qualities, and here he is in the Senate, and you mentioned the kitchen cabinet group, I mean how long did that go, do you have a clear memory...?

TB: Well, let’s see, it went to ---

AL: Through his Senate years?

TB: No, well the elections were ‘82, ‘88, ‘94, right?

AL: Right, so he didn’t run in ‘94.

TB: That’s right, so there was ‘82 and ‘88. I think it became -

End of Side A

Side B

AL: We are now on Side B.

TB: I recall the kitchen cabinet staying active through the ‘88 campaign, and I was deeply involved in the ‘88 campaign. We tried to expand; we did expand the group in the ‘88 campaign, and intentionally brought in newer people, younger people, and women to a greater extent. George was one of those sort of perfectly democratic people anyway; there was nobody who was closer to him than anybody else, in terms of making up his mind on an issue or an important decision. Everybody had their say, who wanted to.

AL: Face-to-face, or through a chief of staff?

TB: Well, I think that depended on what the

issue. I mean clearly you had to work through your staff some of the time but a great many people, let's put it this way, he didn't have a clique around him. He had people who advised him, and if their advice didn't stand the test of logic or common sense, they probably didn't get asked again to give him advice.

He did develop a smaller set of friends, for example Harold Pachios became, starting in '87, '86, what George's staff called the 'first friend,' and he gave him political advice as well, on Oliver North's speech and so on, but he also was a friend and George needed that to get away from Washington. At the same time, he had set himself on a course where he didn't do all the parties that some senators have to go to in Washington. He would go read history, he became a voracious reader of history. That's a really important step I think in his life, and he's always been a reader, but he would go find people and talk to them about this treatise or that treatise on history, and I think that was a way to get away from the terrific political environment that he was in. And as I indicated, prior to becoming majority leader he had this policy of traveling one weekend a month, for the benefit of the party and became a speaker in great demand around the country, and made an enormously effective group of fund raisers.

AL: I was about to ask you if you had a sense of what his view was, or how did he handle fund-raising?

TB: Well, he had no hesitancy to ask people for money, but he was not a panderer or in a sense a person who did just that. The campaign finance system in effect then was not the same as it is now, but you still had to report everything, and you had limits on what you could raise for each person. He had decided that he could not match some of his opponents for the majority leader's job in total dollars raised, so one thing he did was, he asked some of us to give \$5000 in a series of contributions to people he would bring to Maine, and so he brought different senators to Maine for fund raisers that may have netted them twenty thousand dollars, and that seemed like to those people a fair amount of money for Maine and so that was the limit of his obligation.

At the same time, he put together a terrific group of fund raisers nationally, and for example, I was on the Democratic National Committee from '84 to '86 and I dealt with a lot of them, and I would say that by '84 George was probably the most important senator to the Democratic National Committee. He had a role in who got elected to the various positions, and particularly to things like the finance chair of the National Committee. He did something no one had ever done before, without being a candidate for the presidency, he became a national political figure to people who wanted to raise money to improve the country.

And there are people who are great fund raisers, but not in the U.S. Senate, and he became a great fund raiser through his network of people, particularly places like Florida, California, where there's real money, and that became very helpful when he started looking for candidates to run, so the Democrats could take the Senate back. He was able not only to find candidates, but he was able to go to them and say, "I'm going to have you meet with so-and-so, so-and-so and so-and-so, and they're going to help you raise money." And that was particularly true in Florida and some of the other places where he found good candidates.

AL: And so after he leaves the Senate, or do you have more to say during the Senate years? I mean you weren't in Washington, you were in Maine, and so -

TB: No, and I was only a little bit involved with him then. I think this has probably been said to you by other people, but something happened during the George Bush Forty-One administration that was pretty significant. John Sununu was chief of staff, John Sununu was a person who was extremely bright, he'd been governor of New Hampshire, and he was an ideologue, very conservative person, but a high tech conservative, that is almost a Libertarian, not a Dick Cheney kind of

conservative. And he became chief of staff by getting Bush Forty-One through the New Hampshire primary, and the Bush people were impressed by his level of organization.

But Bush Forty-One sort of ceded the presidency to Sununu, and at one point Sununu called in the legislative leadership and said, “Look, we’re not going to do anything, we’re just going to sit this one out. The country’s doing fine, we’re not going to do legislation, you guys might as well go home.” Well, that created a political vacuum – George filled it. He effectively became the leader of the country by being Senate majority leader. He didn’t seek it, but the country needed to have some things done, and he stepped up. And that’s the most significant part of, in my view, his Senate majority experience. I don’t have the tale that David Johnson and others might give you about that, and Martha Pope I think is an extremely important person here, and probably for a variety reasons as or more important than David, and they’re both spectacular human beings. She was a formative person in helping George, and obviously played a role in Northern Ireland and apparently got rich doing it, having won a libel lawsuit against the tabloids. And I think that’s the most important thing about his Senate majority leader’s position, and I think lots of people can talk to you more about what he accomplished.

What I observed was the complete development of George as a person. And not that he was less than he should have been before, but his emotional side developed in parallel with his intellectual side and I think it made an enormous difference in what he has done, what he did there, and his decision to move beyond it. There are very few people who have achieved high public office in the United States who did anything significant after they left it. George Mitchell has. Jimmy Carter has. It’s not a big – Bill Clinton has; Bush Forty-One, Bush Forty-Three, Ronald Reagan, LBJ, they all sort of stopped. Part of it is, they’re probably exhausted because the job is so difficult. But in George’s case, I think it is not celebrity, it is dedication to achieving certain change, and it is an absence of ego.

AL: You were talking about friends, his small circle of friends earlier. Who was Donny Peters, and what was his relationship to the Senator? Before he was senator, I think.

TB: Oh yes. Well, I actually don’t know Donny Peters that well. Donny Peters, to my recollection, is a Portland area businessman who may have been Lebanese, and the Lebanese connection is a very big connection with George, both in Waterville and after. And George’s friends were the people with whom he would recreate. For example, after he had a trial, as a private attorney or as U.S. attorney, he would take the next day off after the trial was over, and he had a routine he went through. He would go play tennis with a friend and get his exercise in, then he’d have lunch with a bunch of friends and they’d laugh and talk, and it was sort of a celebration to him that marked the end of one period and the start of another one. And those people, they would tease George and sort of deflate his ego a little bit, and he would do the same thing with them, and it was pretty funny stuff, pretty funny stuff, and there was no room for back stabbing or mean spiritedness, it was all fun. But I don’t know Donny Peters that well.

AL: What about Marshall Stern, because he was active in the Democratic Party?

TB: He was. Marshall, I’m sure you know about Marshall. Marshall was a really, really good guy, a son of Ed Stern, who had been a Superior Court judge in Bangor and who was famous for plugging his transistor radio into his ear so he could listen to the Red Sox while he was presiding over a trial, and the lawyers would have to say, “Your Honor, Your Honor, Judge Stern.” Marshall built a very successful law practice, and did so with substantial legal skill and some bluster and took a lot of cases others wouldn’t take, he would take tough, kind of the politically unpopular

cases.<p><p>If George was in Bangor he would stay with Marshall and spend a lot of time there, and I think they got together socially. And Marshall remained a good friend up until his tragic death in an automobile accident, and I think George was very saddened by that.<p><p>**AL:** So after he leaves the Senate, he does the whole Northern Ireland thing,

which you made reference to, and the steroids investigation for baseball, and before that began the Mitchell Institute; so much after a Senate career, and now the Middle East envoy [position].<p><p>**TB:** Right, not to mention the fact that he became head of the largest law firm in the world.<p><p>**AL:** Right.<p><p>**TB:** Small thing.<p><p>**AL:** Right.

Did he practice in that law firm, was he actively practicing?<p><p>**TB:** Yes, George's real career, he went to work for a seventy-person firm in Washington, D.C., Verner Liipfert, which was originally a Texas firm, and also came to work here. He was here in Preti Flaherty one day a month at least, and was available by phone. And I worked on a number of cases with him, and it was fascinating. He was by far the most easily accessible lawyer in our firm. And when you called him up and said, "I want your help on something," he would, right then, he would say, "Okay, what do you want me to do, when, how," and so on. And you had to be ready for him, because when you put the phone down he would do it. As opposed to most lawyers who will get to you in a month.<p><p>He did not have a staff other than two assistants, he did not have an associate who was carrying his bag, whatever, didn't have a coterie of people sort of attending on him, he didn't – he just did things. And it was a remarkable experience. I got involved in a case in which the family of Ann Landers had founded a vodka company called Millennium Vodka, they created the brands Belvedere and Chopin Vodka, and they were so successful that they acquired a competitor making the same thing, Belvedere and Chopin Vodka, same bottles, same alcohol, everything, and it was being done out of France and Poland. Their stuff was being made in Poland.<p><p>The intellectual property case became active in sixty-five countries, and George was brought in through me by the family to try to reach some kind of settlement with the people who were knocking off the product. Ultimately, the case did settle with a French company buying the Millennium Vodka Company from the Landers family. It was a good example of the kind of case he would work on, something involving international commerce, requiring people who can, by their presence in a room, be considered significant. He did many other different kinds of cases, there were some he would not do, and he did not involve himself in the billing of cases, he just said, "You bill me however you want to bill me, that's up to you, what you collect." And Harold Pachios can give you a lot more information on that sort of thing.<p><p>But the Verner Liipfert firm was very small, it was only seventy lawyers. He eventually became head of the firm, they were going through some challenging times. He brought Bob Dole into that firm, okay, about the time that Bob Dole was advertising Viagra. And of course they'd been opponents in the Senate, and it made the firm bipartisan. Verner Liipfert was then merged by George with an antitrust firm out of Baltimore, about five hundred attorneys, the name of which escapes me but others will remember, and George became head of that firm.<p><p>And then that firm merged with DLA, which was then the largest firm in the world and became 570 persons larger, became DLA Piper, and ended up with about, at that time, when George left, about three thousand attorneys. Just a massive law firm, exceeded in size only by some of the accounting firms, when they had lawyers, and they no longer do that I think, and that was I'm sure very lucrative for George and occupied a good part of his time. He had to give that up in order to do the Middle Eastern presentation he's now doing, because he became, as

you know, an employee of the federal government, of the State Department.

AL: And you're a Mainer, so you see the Maine perspective. I'm interested to know what you think people in Maine will remember George Mitchell for, as opposed to what they might remember him nationally. I think in some ways it's different.

TB: How do you mean, what's an example?

AL: In terms of the Northern Ireland Peace Accord, or is it the Mitchell Institute that gives educational scholarships to Maine students?

TB: When George was with this firm, we did an event where we sponsored, I think it may have been the Maine Development Foundation annual dinner, and George spoke there, and I think it was at the start of Bush Forty-Three. And if that's any indication of what people think of him, I do not believe there has ever been a public official as highly thought of as George Mitchell in Maine. He spoke that day about economic development, and his message was that economic development is the key to world peace, that most war results from young men being unable to feed their families, and he used Northern Ireland as an example, and the Middle East.

And when he finished, people were virtually begging him to run for president, people I never saw in my life, just all walks of life, at the Maine Development Foundation dinner, because he brings to life, he embodies the highest development of human character and intelligence, and a willingness to use it for achieving good. When you look at figures across the world, whether it's Pope John Paul, Mother Teresa, Mikhail Gorbachev, whoever, we judge them all by the same standard: are they really good people who have sought to achieve the changes that the world needs. And I think that's how George is perceived in Maine.

Certainly there have been many other popular people. Bill Cohen, because of Watergate and his sort of iconoclastic approach to the U.S. Senate was revered, but he's not done much since being secretary of defense that people are aware of. Margaret Chase Smith was that kind of person, and is becoming an expanded version of that through the repetition of her story. We'll see what happens with Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, as [Chris] Potholm points out, they are following in the steps of Margaret Chase Smith and they may yet achieve something beyond that.

But what George has that verifies his intelligence, character and universal skill, skill at the scale of the universe, is what he's done beyond political life. You know, in political life, somebody always votes against you, although when George ran the last time [] he got a majority of Republicans to vote for him, and I think he won eighty-nine to eleven or something. And after the campaign was over he said to me, "Jasper Wyman," he said, "Jasper Wyman tried to run a good campaign," he said, "he had great position papers, he thought things through, he made the effort you should make as a candidate." He felt kind of badly that he thumped him so badly.

Anyway, I think George has gone way above the call of political life and ascended to a higher level. He has caused great change, he has done it without corrupting his own reputation or himself, and I think he'll be remembered as that. I hope he is remembered – that's why I'm interested in the writing of the books, I tried to convince Muskie to write a book about his life, I failed, many times. George has written books, but not about his life, and I don't think he will. History is the repetition of a story; the story has to be told. That's why you and I are doing this today, so someone can tell a story later on, and I wish George would do that. I just don't think he's found the time.

AL: He's a little busy still. And he has two young kids.

TB: Yes, he does, and he's very disciplined and very devoted to his family, so I understand.

AL: Are there things that I haven't asked you that you feel is important to add? A question you wanted me to ask that I didn't think of?

TB: Well, I'm sure that when I leave here I'll think of a hundred things

that I wanted to say about George. One thing I want to tell you is, I have his campaign records from I think '74, which I have repeatedly promised to get up to Bowdoin and haven't done yet.

AL: But now it's on tape. *(laughter)*

TB: What else did I want to say about George. Well let me tell you just a few things. He endorsed the attorney who ran against Angus King as the Democratic nominee, when King ran for reelection, Tom Connolly. And my law school had arranged to give George an honorary degree and I was marching with him in that procession from the receipt of the degree. And he said, "I'm going to endorse Tom Connolly tomorrow." And I said, "That's great." He said, "Some people have told me not to do it, because he's not a serious candidate in their mind," he said, "but he's the Democratic nominee and I'm a Democrat." And I said, "That's perfect, I'm glad you're doing it." And he did it, and he didn't have to. There are people who might have said, "Well, let's see, will I diminish my reputation if I endorse some guy who's going to get only two percent of the vote?" And there were a lot of Democrats who endorsed Angus King because they thought it was to their personal advantage. George saw that differently, and I thought that was kind of an interesting.

AL: Angus King had a Democratic background, right?

TB: He did, but he decided that he was special and that he couldn't beat Joe Brennan in a Democratic primary, so he ran that way. But then Angus became a different kind of person, and I think Angus basically served as a Democrat, I think he tended to, he was very much of a centrist, a Chamber of Commerce Maine centrist, but on spending issues and taxing issues and those things, he was pretty liberal. In fact, he spent a tremendous amount of money, he and the legislative leadership of that era spent a tremendous amount of money that they didn't have later on. I think Angus has always been a Mitchell supporter, for example. As a matter of fact, I know that to be true. And he's always been generous to the Mitchell Institute.

AL: What else do I want to say? You probed me on friends.

AL: Did you get a chance to get to know his family?

TB: Yes, I knew his first wife; I met his second wife a few times. I knew Sally, I knew Andrea, I knew the extended family very well and loved them dearly.

AL: Johnny and Paul and Robbie.

TB: And Barbara, yes. I mean obviously they idolize George, and they've been very kind to him, and he to them. And they're all substantial in their own right. And his nephew, Jim Mitchell, Susan's brother.

End of CD One

CD Two

TB: ... an employer, a former employer, there continues to be a legacy of Mitchells.

AL: Now can you clarify this, I think there are two Jim Mitchells?

TB: Yes, there's Jim Mitchell, no, there are several, there are many Jim Mitchells, there's Jim Mitchell married to Libby Mitchell, who's not the one. Jim Mitchell is a lobbyist in Augusta now, very effective lobbyist. During the '74 primary all the Mitchell kids from age about eleven to seventeen would show up every Saturday in some city and leaflet the city, and they were good, boy, they didn't stop for anything.

AL: Family's very important to George. He tells the story, and he's been very public about this, of his father being the custodian at Colby College, and his mother working the night shift, so that she could be home during the day with the kids, in the textile mills. It is not possible to separate George Mitchell from those origins. It formed him completely, and he tells those stories very well, and very fully and with great respect.

AL: And of course Waterville during that era was a spectacular community. The combination of the industrial base and the college, Colby College, gave Waterville a fabric of life that was wonderful. Very strong Franco American community, very strong Lebanese community, and I suppose an English community as well, and it was a very

healthy community. It's much less healthy now than it was then. And of course Harold Alfond was there, he was rising and the wealth was accumulating and being put to good uses. There were many other significant civic leaders, the Chandlers, that you're going to talk to, were there: Bruce was practicing law, and there were just numerous others. Interestingly, George never considered local politics, but I think he got a great deal of strength out of the community.

Have you talked to Scott Hutchinson?

AL: I hope to speak with him this week or next week.

TB: Good, good. He was really the finance person during that time. There were others who raised a fair amount of money, and Scott was the coordinator. Scott was the first Democratic bank executive in Maine. In '74 the legislature went Democratic for the first time since '64, which was the Johnson landslide, and that was just an aberration, it went back very quickly, though it hasn't really gone back – it's gone back twice I think since '74. But the overall demographics of Maine have worked very powerfully for the Democratic Party, or for people who call themselves Democratic candidates, it's better. But the Democratic Party has gotten significant, to the point where we now have a majority of (*unintelligible*) seats in Waldo and Hancock County, which were just seventy percent Republican communities, or counties in the seventies.

So there was a very serious level of partisanship in Maine, and Scott Hutchinson gave the party a lot of credibility. He was a big fund raiser for Curtis and for Mitchell, and very devoted and a very stand-up guy. And just to give you an idea of how serious this stuff was, there also was a lot of ethnic and religious bias. Franco Americans were looked down upon, other minorities were looked down upon, the only blacks in Maine were a scattering living in Maine communities, and then Brunswick Naval Air Station and Loring Air Force Base, or the other air bases when they were open, Bangor and others, so we just didn't have a lot of diversity.

When George Mitchell was working for Bobby Kennedy, he then decided to come back to Maine and practice law, so he interviewed with Maine firms and ended up going with Jensen Baird, basically because of Mert Henry. Mert Henry saw the value of having George, Mert was the lawyer for Margaret Chase Smith and sort of her young guy, so he saw a sequel in George and thought that it would be good for his firm and they had a good practice together.

But before George got there, he interviewed with a prominent Portland firm, and went in for the interview and sat down and the hiring partner said, "You didn't put your religion on your resume." And George of course is Catholic, Maronite Catholic, and George said, "Does it matter?" And the partner said, "You are Catholic, aren't you?" And George got up and left. That tells you the kind of Maine that Maine was then, people - I said to a partner of mine recently, "You don't understand, there was a KKK burning crosses in Rumford," and the person said, "I didn't know we had black people in Rumford in the 1950s." I said, "It wasn't the black people, it was the Catholics."

And today that's just unthinkable, it's politically incorrect but more importantly morally bankrupt. It was a fact of life in Maine at that time. And so for men and women like Ken Curtis and Ed Muskie and George Mitchell to emerge was not just a matter of going out and being considered on the merits, it was a matter of overcoming, you had to get eighty to ninety percent of the available votes, because some of them were never going to vote for a Catholic or a Democrat or a Catholic Democrat. So it was an exceptionally difficult task and required a great effort. At the same time, it formed character, and I think Maine at that time helped form George's character. Obviously his family played an enormous role, his educational experience, his work as an interpreter in Intelligence in the military, and his experience with Muskie. But the primary force beyond his family and his

parents was Maine as it existed then, and it forged in George Mitchell a character that is straight and true, and which gets everything out of his abilities that is there to get. And it's a remarkable example for all of us of what a human being can be, and what we should all try to do with what we are given.<p><p>**AL:** Great, thank you very much.<p><p>**TB:** You're very welcome.<p><p>End of Interview<p>