

## ***George J. Mitchell Oral History Project***

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**Diane Dewhirst (1)**

*(Interviewer: Michael Hastings)*

**GMOH# 195**

February 17, 2010

**Mike Hastings:** The following is a recorded interview of the Senator George J. Mitchell Oral History Project, an activity of Bowdoin College. Today is February 17, [2010], it's Wednesday, I'm in Washington, D.C. at the home of Diane Dewhirst. Could we begin please, would you state your full name and spell your surname?

**Diane Dewhirst:** Diane Dewhirst, D-E-W-H-I-R-S-T.

**MH:** And your date of birth and your place of birth.

**DD:** May 28, 1957, Framingham, Massachusetts.

**MH:** Lastly, for identification purposes, your mother's full name and your father's full name.

**DD:** Joan Priscilla Audubon, Robert Thornton Dewhirst.

**MH:** And let's begin by, this is going to be much about you and we hope much about the Senator. Tell me about your parents.

**DD:** My parents met on a blind date; my mother lived in Queens and my father lived on Long Island. My father was in the Merchant Marines, having graduated from Kings Point, and my mother was at St. Joseph's College for Women, where she went for two years and then worked for the phone company. They were lower and middle-middle class, New York, although my father was born in Washington and my mother was born in New Jersey. My father is very interested in geography, travel, history, politics, sports, sports, and sports. My mother was very interested in politics but was less outspoken about it until her later years. They are both still living; I am very fortunate.

**MH:** Still in New York?

**DD:** No, they live outside of Boston in Hingham. My father is suffering quite badly with Parkinson's disease and is in a nursing home, and my mother is at a senior community near him, but it's full of challenges. I was born in Boston but my father was in sales so we, oh, I'm sorry, they met on a blind date, were married. I think about two years later my father was in the European theater of the Korean War, [p/o] he was a vet, and then came back and did sales for an energy based firm selling steam traps and other energy related materials, that my brother now

does. And my mother worked in the home, and there's four of us, boy-girl-boy-girl, I'm the oldest girl. We lived in Boston, and then I was raised largely in Philadelphia.

**MH:** You said your father was a sports fan. What sports particularly?

**DD:** Baseball, largely. Stan Musial was his idol.

**MH:** For whom does he root now?

**DD:** Since he's in the Boston area, he's still a Cardinal fan. In fact, for Valentine's Day the kids and I just sent him a [blanket] for the beginning of spring training, of the Cardinals, but we also sent him a Boston Red Sox calendar with all the spring training dates listed in it. And he's also very interested in the Nationals; we have a new baseball team here in Washington, [the stadium is] walkable from where we are right now. The boys played little league, Babe Ruth, American Legion, I spent many of my high school weekends traveling through the ACC to see my [older] brother pitch [for Duke]. [ ] My brothers were pitchers – and my father saw I think every game but one when they were in college, that they played.

**MH:** Did he play when he was young?

**DD:** He did, he was a shortstop, he played for Kings Point, and he played for Stewart Manor, which is a town on Long Island. So sports is very much a part of our life.

**MH:** Did your mother share his love for sports?

**DD:** No.

**MH:** No, not at all.

**DD:** But she came to love it because of her children, and it was a bond that they would have. But I have vivid memories of her, we would all go off to a game in Philadelphia and I'd be like, "Mommy, are you sure you don't want to come?" And she'd be like, "I'm sure I don't want to come." And when we would watch my brothers play, and inevitably they were relief pitchers and they would be brought in with bases loaded and tie score and two strikes and whatever, and she would go to the car. She'd just be like, "I'm going to the car." But it was something that united us, and frankly unites my children with my very ill father right now, so it's a great thing.

**MH:** So you have three siblings.

**DD:** I do.

**MH:** Where are they located?

**DD:** My older brother Bob is in Denver, Colorado. He does sales of energy [products]

through the same company that my father worked for. My younger brother Raymond is in Milton, Massachusetts, and he does development of health clubs in the Boston and Northeast, and my sister Susan is in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and she works for Tom's of Maine.

**MH:** Tom's of Maine, okay.

**DD:** Yes, she sells toothpaste!

**MH:** Is that where Tom's of Maine is now based?

**DD:** No.

**MH:** It used to be based in Kennebunkport.

**DD:** It's in Kennebunk, and since Colgate took them over they are now in, it's still in Maine but it's further south. I can't remember. But since Colgate took them over about two years ago, things have changed somewhat, so she's not in Kennebunk anymore but it actually worked out for her, because she's closer to home.

**MH:** Tell me now, you mentioned Hingham, you've mentioned other places, where did you spend most of your time growing up?

**DD:** Philadelphia, outside of Philadelphia, in Montgomery County, which is a suburb northwest of Philadelphia, in a town called Blue Bell.

**MH:** Two words? And what was that like?

**DD:** Do you know that song – I'm dating myself here for the young person who will be transcribing this – actually this is my mother's song, "Little boxes, on a hillside, little boxes made of ticky-tacky, little boxes on a hillside, and they all look just the same" [Malvina Reynolds's *Little Boxes*, 1962). Suburbia. But it was great.

**MH:** So you spent early school years there?

**DD:** Yes, from age four to age eighteen, and I went to high school there, I went to Gwynedd-Mercy Academy, the Sisters of Mercy, off of [Route] 309 in Philadelphia.

**MH:** There are a lot of Sacred Heart Academies in Philadelphia as well, right?

**DD:** They were one of our [rivals]; we played field hockey against them.

**MH:** Were you a field hockey player?

**DD:** Not very good, but I tried hard.

**MH:** What else did you do in high school?

**DD:** I was interested in politics. I actually first campaigned leafleting for a Republican governor, Ray Schaeffer, but the woman across the street from me was a Democratic county chairwoman, and she drove us to school, and my father, who was a Republican, although voted for Obama, blames her for me being a Democrat. But I leafleted in I think it was '72, I guess, and then was always interested. And we always were interested in current events.

**MH:** You were twelve or thirteen then.

**DD:** Yes, but we were always interested in current events and what was going on.

**MH:** Was this a family wide thing, or was it just you and -

**DD:** No, it was mostly me and my dad. I think it actually was a way for me to be in touch with my dad, to kind of, I didn't play baseball, so it was a way. In fact last night I was on the phone with him and I was asking him about whirlpool treatment, and did I order the present for my mother, and how is he feeling and did he like the Olympics. And then just as clear as a bell, eighty-two years old, suffering from the latter stages of Parkinson's, he says, "So what do you make of the politics?" I said, "Well, what do you mean.?" He said, we talked about the economy, he said, "I think the economy's going to come back for November; I think you guys are going to be okay."

**MH:** Has he suffered from Parkinson's for a long time?

**DD:** Twelve years. He got it late in life, you know, that's considered late. Actually I think it's now fifteen. I don't know, it seems like forever but it made it so that he and my mother can't live together anymore, so it's the hardest thing I've ever done.

**MH:** And so your sister is the closest one to them?

**DD:** My brother, he's in Milton. So I grew up outside of Philadelphia, was always interested in current events, but thought I was going to be a sports reporter, wanted to be the print version of Phyllis George, who then did *NFL Today*, and went to school, my father changed jobs when I was a senior in high school, he moved and it [worked out] that I could stay in Philadelphia [with my mother and siblings] to finish my high school. And so my mother and my siblings stayed with me, and my father moved himself. I went to Ohio University for two years, where I majored in journalism [ ]. I loved Athens but two years of Athens, Ohio, was plenty, and transferred to Northwestern, got a political science degree and graduated from Northwestern. It took me a little longer because I did internships, and I had been sick [in college] and whatever, but got my political science degree from Northwestern in Chicago.

**MH:** The Herskovits were out in Northwesernt, weren't they, the anthropologists, it's a name

that comes back to me, Melville Herskovits? Did you focus on American politics?

**DD:** Yes, I did. I had worked on Jimmy Carter's campaign in '76, in Athens, because of a boy, but traveled all throughout southeastern Ohio doing the Pumpkin Festival, and the Apple Festival, and I had a red Skylark with a black roof, and I used to fill it every weekend with materials, and I would get to the beginning of a parade route and I would pass it out and say, "I don't want to see one piece of paper back." And the big controversy then was, [Howard] Metzenbaum was also on the ticket, from Ohio, at the time, and there were some counties that were not allowed to stuff the Metzenbaum materials in the Carter materials, because when you do leafleting you stuff them all together to get the biggest bang for your buck. And I can remember having pre-stuffed, and having to unstuff at the parade route because the districts were such that they did not want Metzenbaum's literature in with the Carter literature. I think that's the first time I've ever told that story, but anyway.

**MH:** What internships did you (*unintelligible*)?

**DD:** I took – this is getting way into me, but anyway – I was sick my freshman year in college and I had to drop out of school. I made up for it somewhat in summer, but when I got back I thought it would be fun to do the campaign so I took an independent study for the campaign, that was one. Then I transferred that spring, and when I got to Northwestern my best friend from high school said, "I have an empty apartment for spring semester, why don't you come to Washington [D.C.] and do an internship?" And I thought, 'oh, that sounds like fun.' So I knew it was going to take me longer to get out of college anyway because I had been sick, so I did an internship with Common Cause, and worked on two very successful initiatives (*spoken in jest*), the ERA and D.C. voting rights. I stayed here that spring, did the ERA, got hired to do a part-time job for D.C. voting rights when it was up for a vote in the Senate in '78. It was very exciting, it was a real lobbying campaign, whatever, it was very, very fun. It was only part-time, I think I got paid a nickel, and I also counted employment statistics for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the second-worst job I've ever had in my life. Oh God, it was horrible.

**MH:** So that was your first exposure to D.C.?

**DD:** Yes. I'd been here [with my family and] on field trips, because of Philadelphia, I'd been here [as a high school student] with the Presidential Classroom, and with my parents and whatnot, but it was the first time [I worked here] – and I loved it, I thought 'oh, what a fun place to come back and visit, or maybe work for a couple of years.'

**MH:** So when did you finally get back here?

**DD:** I came back in the fall of '79 after I graduated. I had had a [political science] professor at Northwestern named Bill Crotty, who had given me a lot of good advice, and I said, "I think I want to do a presidential campaign, but maybe everybody else is going out in the field." I did Ab [Abner] Mikva's congressional race in '78. I finished up with Common Cause, got back, and got drafted into his [campaign], which I also took -

**MH:** Great guy.

**DD:** Fabulous. But it also took me longer to get through school because I only did three credits instead of four when I was supposed to be doing [four], but met great people who I'm still in touch with today, and I keep running into Mikva people who I worked with. Best campaign I've ever worked on, by the way. So when I finished up [school] I said, "I think I'm going to go to Washington."

**MH:** Who was he running against?

**DD:** I think he ran against [John R.] Porter, who eventually replaced him because then a year later he [was appointed] a judge. I think it was Porter. So I came here and I took another internship – it was really fun graduating from college and telling my father that, you know, you've put me through four years of college and I want to go to Washington and take another internship that has no money – and I worked at the Democratic National Committee. And the reason I worked at the Democratic National Committee was because I applied for a bunch of internships in the fall, because it's easier to get an internship in the fall than it is in spring, and the guy who was the intern coordinator was a graduate of Northwestern, and that's the only reason I got that job.

**MH:** Were you doing press work, or -?

**DD:** No, I was going to do anything. He put me in the chairman's office because I graduated from his college, and on my [phone] console I had the chairman's office, the convention early numbers, and the communications office, and then four [or so] weeks later there was an opening and I got hired to be a receptionist, and then I moved over into the press office and did that for three-and-a-half years.

**MH:** Who was leading the Democratic -?

**DD:** John White was from Texas, was the chairman.

**MH:** He replaced Strauss, right?

**DD:** Yes, because Strauss went over to Carter-Mondale, and John White was at the DNC. I didn't do this with my people [(whom I interviewed for this oral history project)], I didn't do this much depth.

**MH:** That's all right, you're an important person.

**DD:** Oh please, oh gosh.

**MH:** You got different kinds of people, too.

**DD:** Okay, but I didn't do this with all his staff.

**MH:** That's all right.

**DD:** Okay, well, a little bit maybe, but not this much. But anyway, Bob Strauss had gone over to run Carter-Mondale shortly before Ted Kennedy decided to challenge President Carter. John White, who had been at Agriculture was the chairman, he was the chairman when I was there. Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful man, gave me lessons that I will never forget.

**MH:** So a lot of direct contact with him.

**DD:** Yes, because I answered his phones. In fact, one day when I was getting really discouraged about the phones, because there was some protest and we were getting – I wasn't the switchboard operator, I was the next person who got – and he came out and he said to me, "You have the most important job in the office." I kind of looked at him, I'm twenty-whatever, and he says, "Because every person on the end of that phone is a potential voter." And I never forgot it. I still use that line with kids I hire today. He also said, be very careful about how you treat- There was this reporter, who I will not say who it was, for the *New York Times*, who was a wonderful reporter and tenacious but [could be] a pain in the butt. And John C. came out and said one time, came out of his office, he said, "You've got to be careful about how you treated people in school, because the kid who you teased in the parking lot, or the kid who you called a nerd in science, he's going to end up being the *New York Times* reporter."

**MH:** John C. is?

**DD:** John White, John C. White, right, sorry.

**MH:** No, that's okay, it's good for the transcriber's benefit.

**DD:** So then we lost the election big time in '80.

**MH:** These were tough years to be head of the DNC, in [November] of 1980 you had Reagan's election, correct?

**DD:** November of '80, right, and John White was out, and Chuck Manatt from California was put in, and Ronald Reagan came in for "Morning in America," and I was all set to go back to Northwestern to get my master's degree, because I was going to fix the cities, I was going to be an urban planner, and I was all set to go. I had taken my GMATs, I had my application in, ready to go, and the guy who was the executive director [of the DNC] at the time, Gene Eidenberg, who I'm still friends with today -

**MH:** How do you spell that?

**DD:** EIDENBERG. I was walking him down [17th Street] to an interview, I was now doing press work and I was walking him down to an interview at KDKA, which is the oldest radio station in the country. And he said, "So, what are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to go get my master's degree in urban planning from Lou Masati," who he knew, at Northwestern. He said, "Why are you going to do that?" And I said, "Because I've always been interested in cities and how they're set up and whatever, and I really think that's the right thing for me to do." And he shook his head and he said, "We need people like you to stay and fight," he said, "this is going to be some tough years," he said, "but the [Democratic] Party's not going anywhere, but we need people like you to stay and fight." So I did. I never left. Anyway, he doesn't remember that. In fact, when I saw him at the convention in Denver last summer I said, "Do you realize the reason I'm here?" And he said, "Yes, and look at you now, you're married to a great guy with three wonderful kids and you've had an experience of a lifetime, good for me."

**MH:** Okay, now, so we're up to 1980. Mitchell is now in town as a senator, right? What are you doing before you start working for George Mitchell?

**DD:** I worked at the DNC, at the Democratic National Committee until the middle of '83, and I first laid eyes on George Mitchell at a Compliance Review Commission meeting that the DNC was having. Compliance review is a – I have this knowledge that is so worthless, but -

**MH:** Please, this is why we may have to do two or three of these interviews.

**DD:** Oh, God. The Compliance Review Commission is a subset of the Democratic National Committee which reviews delegate selection rules for the [national party] convention, to make certain that they comply with national party rules. And the state of Maine has constantly, consistently, wanted to violate the rules by going outside the window, which is a window of time which is set up for caucuses and primaries to occur in a sane fashion so that people cannot be having a twenty-four hour, 24/7 election cycle, which now is the norm.

**MH:** Why do you think Maine does that?

**DD:** I think a lot of states do it to get a jump on, because they don't feel like they count enough. So if they're earlier in the process, they can count more.

**MH:** Like wanting to have the first presidential primary.

**DD:** Yes, and get some attention, and frankly, it's an economic incentive to do it. I mean it's smart on a lot of -

**MH:** So was the Senator arguing on Maine's behalf?

**DD:** Yes, in front of -

**MH:** Your first disagreement with the Senator.



**DD:** Well I, believe me, I was a press aide, but was a glorified press aide, Xerox operator really, and the chair of the Compliance Review Commission was Nancy Pelosi, who was the California state chair, close to Chuck Manatt. And it was Ken Curtis, if I recall correctly, it was Ken Curtis, Joe Brennan, George Mitchell, and I want to think there was another one, another white guy.

**MH:** Severin perhaps?

**DD:** I think it was Severin.

**MH:** Severin Beliveau, probably.

**DD:** I think it was Severin, I think it absolutely was, because I think he was, it was either Severin or Harold [Pachios], because they would rotate the -

**MH:** He was the state party chair at the time, I think, Severin was.

**DD:** And they came in and argued to be outside of the window, and I think they got it, if I recall correctly, they got it. So that's when I first laid eyes on George Mitchell. But going quickly, I then left the National Committee to go work for ABC for a year-and-a-half, for Hal Bruno who was [head of the ABC] political unit, because the Democratic race was so contested with Jesse Jackson, Walter Mondale, Gary Hart and others, that they wanted to have someone who knew delegate selection rules, and I thought 'oh, work at a network, how fun is that.' And it was fun working for Hal.

**MH:** Did you have to travel a lot?

**DD:** I did, I traveled with the broadcast, I traveled with Peter Jennings and David Brinkley, it was very fun. Went to Iowa. That's when, [before extensive cable], they used to do coverage from the primary and caucus locations, so we went to Iowa for a week, we went to New Hampshire for a week, we went to - this was in '84 when they had Super Tuesday, so we went to Atlanta for a weekend. And then Peter Jennings and David Brinkley would anchor [ ] out of New York, so we'd go and set up the weekend before. We would do a ten-to-eleven [p.m. evening broadcast], well I think on Iowa and New Hampshire nights we did them longer, but at least a ten-to-eleven special, and then go into *Nightline* to do the coverage of them. It was a big deal. You didn't have cable, so it was really a big deal and it was very competitive between the networks, there was no CNN either [like cable is today]. (*Note: CNN was founded in 1980*).

**MH:** So what exactly, when you were out in one of these primary states, what were you doing?

**DD:** I'd be talking to Democratic contacts and doing research, and then feeding it to the reporters.

**MH:** Were you actually writing any of the scripts for the evening broadcast?

**DD:** No, I would feed it into them.

**MH:** There was a writing group that did that.

**DD:** Yes, yes, but I would have to update the delegate selection board, that was a big deal, depending on what weekend you had and everything, that was a big deal.

**MH:** Tell me what that was, how did that work?

**DD:** If South Carolina had a primary, or actually they had a caucus, and that would take place all day on Saturday, in time for the Saturday night broadcast, if you were on a call that weekend, you would have to then say: Mondale got four delegates, Hart got two delegates, Jesse Jackson got two delegates, and undecided are two delegates, so the tote board which you're going to show on the broadcast that night needs to be updated with x, y, and z. And I can remember Sam Donaldson calling down, or Davy Newman was his name and he was Sam Donaldson's producer, and he called [ ] and he said, "Sam Donaldson wants to go over these." And I'm like, "Oh, you're kidding me."

So I go downstairs and I've got my notebook there and whatever and I give him the totals or whatever, and then he asked me a question and I said, "Okay, one second, one minute," and I'm going through [my notebook looking for the answer]. And he said, "Young lady, this is television, we don't *have* one minute." And I was like, *aaargh*. By the time I got back up [to the political unit] on the seventh floor the telephone is ringing, and I pick up the phone. He says, "Diane?" And I said, "Yes." And he says, "This is Dave Newman" (the producer). And I said, "Yes." He said, "Welcome to television," he said, "you've been baptized."

**MH:** Did you ever use that Donaldson line on anybody else?

**DD:** No, no, I don't think a lot of people would get away with using that except for Sam Donaldson.

**MH:** So of the experiences you've described, both as interns and going to university, or after you got out, these different jobs, which one of them did you draw on most when you worked for George Mitchell? Or did you draw on any of them?

**DD:** Well, what happened next I think will tell you what that is, because I'm not sure I know the answer to it.

**MH:** Tell me what happened next.

**DD:** What happened next was my job ended, at the end of the [1984] campaign. And I stayed

on for the inaugural, for Reagan's inaugural, just doing field stuff, field producing and stuff, no big deal. My job for the inaugural was to ID the marching bands for the inaugural parade, which ended up going inside because of the blizzard that year, so it was interesting. And then I was going to work on a WWII special, but television was nasty, television was very competitive, it made politics look like a sandbox, I mean it was tough. So I got engaged, and I was set to travel before, I had been planning to travel after this job was over, got engaged, still was going to travel, and Audrey Sheppard called me, and Audrey Sheppard was the political director at the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee [DSCC], and it was during the second term, for '85-'86, so it was the second term, the last two years of the second term of Ronald Reagan, and Democrats were down 55/45, so the idea of them ever winning back the Senate was going to be tough. And George Mitchell was the head of the committee. And Audrey called me and said, "Would you come in to talk to us?" And I had never run a press shop myself.

**MH:** How did you know Audrey Sheppard?

**DD:** From DNC stuff. And she said, "Will you come in and talk to David Johnson?" I said, "Sure." So I went in, and I said, "But I'm still going on my trip," and I went in and before I left I got the job. And I, to this day, thank David for - And I guess I met Mitchell but it was very perfunctory. What had happened was, the House Campaign Committee [DCCC: Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee] under Tony Coelho had really come into its own, they'd used what technology was available to them, they did not consider themselves like a subset of the DNC, they really came into their own. Bentsen had been the head of the Senate Campaign Committee before Senator Mitchell took it over in '85, and Bentsen was very much of an inside player, working the money channels, working the member channels, all that type of thing, but didn't really have a public persona with it.

What Mitchell had decided to do was to rival Tony Coelho and to put [staff in place], you know, so this was the first time they had a press secretary, director of communications, whatever, a flak, at the committee, so I was the first flak for the committee. David won't like this, but I also think that the idea that I was a woman and I was inexpensive was a selling point for me, because they had lots of white guys - no offense to white guys, love them dearly, married to one - but they did not have a lot of women [at the time, and in the beginning]. And given that that was the year that Barbara Mikulski was elected and a lot of women were running and whatnot, it made sense to have a woman. It was smart on their part.

**MH:** How big was the staff?

**DD:** Thirty-ish?

**MH:** And David was still chief of staff over in Mitchell's office.

**DD:** He had moved over to be executive director.

**MH:** And so Rich -

**DD:** Became the, Arenberg -

**MH:** Arenberg became the, right.

**DD:** Right, became the AA, and Martha Pope had been over at Environment and Public Works and came over and was LD, right.

**MH:** After Charlene [Sturbitts] left.

**DD:** Right, right. So I was hired there, and came back from Europe late in spring and started to work for Mitchell. And I mean, we were, it was hard because we had no candidates, and [many] candidates that we thought we were going to get, we ended up not being able to recruit. That first year was really, really tough. And I came in right when Mitchell had done, well, when I was not there, Mitchell had done a National Press Club briefing. And some of the reporters who I had known from DNC days had gone to it and they called me and they said--- I guess I started in mid-May and I guess he had done it in April--- and they said, "Never let him go in front of the press again without any news." "We love him," they knew him from Muskie days, a lot of these reporters knew him from Muskie days, but they said, "it was not good, it did not serve him well."

But like many senators and elected officials, in fact still today, they see a problem and say, "Let's throw a press conference at it." And I would often have to use those guys who had said to me, "Don't let him do that without news." I would back him up and say, "Okay, why are we having a press [conference]? Why is the caucus telling you we should have a press conference? What is our news?" So we spent a lot of time developing ways to get the Senator, and a national message, because it was in our best interests to nationalize this race, against Reagan and what had been going on. Not against Reagan, but acknowledging Reagan and not let it be just about Reagan, but let it be about our candidates. We needed to get a national profile, not nationalize the race but get a national profile for our guys in order to have any chance money-wise or credibility-wise. And so we spent a lot of time figuring out ways to get Mitchell in front of the press and get his visibility up, whether it was through informal lunches that would be a dividend to pay off later, whether it would be bringing in pollsters who had a good poll on a guy by the name of Kent Conrad, who was the tax commissioner, who was never supposed to go anywhere, but had a poll and showed you a way to get there [i.e., to win]. [In North Dakota], we spent a lot of time doing that in those two years.

**MH:** Did you find Mitchell receptive, for example, when these reporters called you after that first press conference, did you find him receptive to the way you were approaching it?

**DD:** No. Oh, you know, we did it together, we really did do it together. I knew in my gut just from my brief experience that what they were saying was correct, but I didn't have an immediate solution because we were in dire straits, we were not in good shape at all. So we would really break it down by race by race by race, so when a candidate came in, we'd try to

decide if there was something we could put them out front nationally with. And then what I did do, which I'm proud of to this day, is we came up with a list of reporters who we knew, in November – I didn't do this by myself but I organized it – and November of '86 would be important to how the committee was judged. And back that summer, of '85, we plotted out who we were going to meet with. And even if it was, and it was literally, Jules Witcover, come in and have a tuna sandwich with the Senator, and the three of us would sit at this little table in his office, and he'd talk some middle class tax cut stuff that was going on in the Finance Committee, but he'd also just kind of talk. And sometimes we'd get an article out of it and sometimes we wouldn't, but it was a [down payment]. And we did that with twenty-five reporters.

**MH:** Now did George Mitchell have a press secretary in his personal staff office as well?

**DD:** He did, he did, his name was Ed Hatcher.

**MH:** Did that require some coordination with Hatcher, in other words, or was he looking mainly at the Maine press?

**DD:** He was looking at the Maine press and the official side. I didn't mean to suggest that this was being pitched as an official thing, but it would come up because it was news of the day. No, he was actually pretty, I would not have been as gracious as he was, he was very gracious, and I would have been much more, my competitive juices would have been flowing more, but Mitchell was very trusting. David was very trusting, too. But we kind of all, Keith Abbott, who was the finance director, David Johnson who was the executive director, and Audrey Sheppard, [the political director], and I, and then the political team: Page Gardner, Robin Wright, Jeff Ledbetter, who were [ ] the trackers with the races themselves – I'm certain there are some important people I'm forgetting, but those were kind of the main folks, and we would plot what we thought was going to be happening incrementally in the races, and very often it didn't lend itself to news.

So we tried to anticipate when there would be natural occurrences. For instance, Labor Day, September is always a time when [media calculate] what's going to happen, anticipate off-year elections and what the effect of that's going to be. But like I said, we spent a lot of time laying down, I had a lot of tuna sandwiches with the Senator in his – I think he had grilled cheese and bacon – in his office, and it paid off.

**MH:** Where were the offices?

**DD:** Four-thirty South Capitol Street, down the street.

**MH:** So just a hop, skip and a jump from his office in the Russell Building. So how long did you do that?

**DD:** Two years. And we won, and it was great.

**MH:** What were the numbers when you finished that? You said it was 45/55 going in.

**DD:** I think it was 56/[44], and it was 55/45.

**MH:** Right, there was one switch, somebody either resigned or, Shelby switched parties.

**DD:** Afterwards, right, later on down the road. And then Senator Byrd took over, and Ed Hatcher left his job in October. And when we go to do interviews, Mitchell -

**MH:** This was in October of '86.

**DD:** Yes, went to go work for the Electrical Association or something. And so I was out of a job in November and I kept thinking, I didn't know what I, oh, I thought I'd do a presidential [campaign], because it was a presidential year, I thought this was a good ground for a presidential -

**MH:** Were you married by this time?

**DD:** Yes, I was married in '85, and my husband, [Bob Hickmott], worked for [Representative Tim] Wirth [of Colorado], who was one of our candidates. So when we used to go do interviews, very often it would just be the Senator and I, and he would drive, I don't even think I drove at the time. And I can remember getting in the car and he said to me, during our post election stuff, and he said to me, "Rich Arenberg's going to call you." And I said, "Okay." And he said, "I want you to think about coming to work in the Senate." And I was surprised, I guess then I talked to Rich and then this was a follow-up with the Senator, because the Senator wouldn't have said this without talking to Rich first. And then I said, "I'm going to tell you what I said to Rich: I don't know anything about the Senate, I don't know anything about legislation, and I've never set foot in the state of Maine." And he said, he kind of looked at me, and I don't know if he said it or if Gayle Cory said it, but it was kind of like, "But you know me, so we'll do this."

So I moved over to the Senate office in the Russell Building. And he was up for reelection, and he was a very successful but mid-level United States senator from the state of Maine who was up for reelection, and I was kind of intrigued with that because I thought, okay, here I'm really going to get to know a state, and I'm going to have to figure out a reelection campaign, and Jasper Wyman - Was that his opponent?

**MH:** That's correct, Jasper Wyman, at the Maine Christian Civic League.

**DD:** Right, was his opponent.

**MH:** A minister.

**DD:** Yes, and Mary McAleney and Martha [Pope] and Larry [Benoit], and I got to know the

field staff, and we all came up with game plans. I did not go on the campaign, I stayed in Washington and Kelly Currie ended up doing the - No-no-no-no, Marsha Diamond I think ended up doing the campaign. And it was fun to get to know a state, and it was fun to get to know a press corps, and I really thought that's the track we were on, and then Iran-Contra came along.

**MH:** Let me cycle back, and who was reporting for the Maine newspapers, the *Bangor Daily News*, the *Portland Press Herald*, when you joined the Senator's personal staff?

**DD:** John Day for the *Bangor Daily News*, Steve Campbell – is that right? – for the *Portland Press Herald*.

**MH:** Mike D'Antonio had left by that time.

**DD:** Yes.

**MH:** Tell me about John Day and Steve Campbell and their relationship -

**DD:** And Paul Monahan, [who passed away while Mitchell was in office].

**MH:** Who did Paul Monahan work for?

**DD:** The chain up there, the Lewiston?

**MH:** Oh, right, the *Lewiston Sun Journal*.

**DD:** Yes, an afternoon paper I think it was. I know it was, in fact.

**MH:** What was your relationship with these three?

**DD:** Well, my relationship was a conduit, because Mitchell had relationships with them. Throughout my two years with him [at the DSCC], I always thought that that [1974] governor's race really put an imprimatur in his head, because he would always, always, always return phone calls to the Maine press, always, always, always spend time with them, was up there, even as he had to travel to do fund raising for the DSCC, he was always connected home. He always felt that [Maine] was his home and acted that way with regard to the press. So it wasn't like they needed me, frankly. I mean they needed me to organize things and book things and all that type of thing, but because the press corps was so small, you had Augusta, which had a lot of radio and the wires, you had Bangor TV, Portland TV, Lewiston, you had two big newspapers with heavy, heavy, heavy editorial boards and a lot of persuasion, at least it seemed at the time. You had Mal Leary, who did the Capitol News Service, who was the person who fed all the radio stations throughout that big huge state, so you had to take care of him – do I have the right name, Mal Leary?

**MH:** That's correct, Mal Leary later worked for Maine Public Radio.

**DD:** Right, but he had a -

**MH:** He's still running it for Maine, he's independent now but he still does work as a stringer for Maine Public Radio.

**DD:** Jerry Harkavy was the AP guy. And I don't mean this in a belittling way on any, but they really didn't [need me], he had relationships with all of them. The television guys I did work [with], because we had a new satellite service in the Senate that the television guys didn't like, because you'd send them pre-packaged stuff and they were used to getting George Mitchell raw and they didn't want, so that took a little bit of wooing, and I'm not even sure how successful I was in doing that. But he would go home and we would do television, we'd find a reason to do television every weekend, or he'd go and visit them on Sunday mornings. And when Iran-Contra came along and he had a lot of the national attention, we took good care, I give him a lot of credit, he took good care of the Maine press. I don't know if they felt that way, but they had access.

He wasn't always as forthcoming as they wanted him to be, frankly, throughout his career. He was very guarded about how he dealt with the press. And I can remember going, this is later, when he was Senate majority leader, and in Washington, for national newspapers, and for local newspapers and regional newspapers, but then there was always the desire to have what was the inside story and what I used to call a tick-tock, after the fact, or they'd like it even better, I never agreed to do them during, but I'd say, "Can you sit down with so-and-so and go through what happened and who said what to whom and whatever, and just give them a little flavor of this?" And he would do it to a degree, but he wouldn't do it to the degree that they wanted, or frankly that at times I encouraged him to do. And he would always say [something like], "They want inside stuff that's going to make some of my colleagues look bad." He said, "If you can tell me that I never have to go to them for a vote again, I'll do it, but I always have to. One day you're working with John Chafee and the next day you're not. So if you tell me that I don't have to go back and ask them for a vote, then maybe I'd consider doing it, but I'm not going to do it."

And it was hard to argue with someone who had Senate majority leader in front of their name, and was elected [by] eighty-one percent [of the] people, and I was elected by no one. So I respected that. I still felt that he could have been at times a little bit more forthcoming, to show a little leg at times, and it may have helped in certain situations. But he, for the most part, got pretty darn good press, largely of his own doing.

**MH:** When I ask these questions, I'm interested in the stories that you have. But I have one question that I'm going to ask, and if you don't want to answer it or just want to be brief I have no problem with that. But the question I'm truly interested in, somewhere around this time, it seems, both of our senators were divorced. Was that a difficult thing for the office, and was there a press angle to that, was it something that required a lot of discretion? How did you handle it? We hadn't had a lot of divorced politicians of national stature in Maine up until that



point and then, I was away in Africa, I had left the Senator's staff in 1984, and I read about this from very far away and I was thinking to myself: what do you suppose the office was like during that period?

**DD:** Because I was new to the office, if there was a hubbub about it, I wasn't aware of it. Because even though I worked for him for two years, I wasn't part of the daily flow, which becomes very much the essence of an office. The one circumstance that I remember vividly that I was involved with – yeah, I think this has been in print, so I'll go ahead and say this, and I think my memory is correct on this, I think it was right when I got there, I think it was in early '87, and the Republicans were polling and we found out, I think through a reporter, or maybe through Larry, I can't remember.

**MH:** That would be Larry Benoit.

**DD:** Larry Benoit [Maine state director], sorry, that they were asking about his divorce. And because it was coming through a press question, I had to go in and tell him. And that was hard, that was hard to do and that was hard to watch him.

**MH:** A very private man, at least from my viewpoint, and I was thinking how difficult it must have been for him, to be a public person during that period.

**DD:** Yes, he was, it hurt him. I don't mean hurt him politically, I don't know, I don't remember exactly, I mean he won with eighty-one percent so how can you, but it was painful to tell him and he looked pained.

**MH:** Not a lot of inquiries or anything like that?

**DD:** Oh, there was scuttlebutt but, you know, and then he was a divorced man so then he would date and there would be questions that would come up and I would just have to kind of go in and, I would never put it in the form of a question, I would always just say, you should just know, so-and-so reporter saw you with so-and-so, whatever, and I'd never leave it for a discussion, just because I knew him well enough to know- "Just so you know, so-and-so, dah-dah-dah-dah-dah."

**MH:** Tell me about the transition from the, at this point you're going from personal staff to the majority leader's?

**DD:** Oh, well, when we won.

**MH:** And actually, I want to say that we're nearing the time you wanted to wrap this up, and I don't want to rush this. So you decide when you want to end, all right?

**DD:** Okay, we'll end at 5:20. So we went through the two years in the office, he won reelection, he had decided that he was going to run for majority leader when Senator Byrd

stepped down, and Senator Byrd stepped down from being majority leader to take over as chair of the Appropriations Committee, and [Mitchell] ran against Senator Inouye and Senator Bennett Johnston, who were much more senior than he. And the race among the fifty-some members of the caucus was a very private race. I was privy to some things but not everything, probably the only person who was privy to everything I'm guessing was Martha, maybe David, and maybe not even them everything, but certainly Martha worked closely with him as far as vote counts. I can remember him saying, after the fact, "Gosh, George, you'd be a great Senate majority leader," ---that wasn't a 'yes.' A 'yes' was: "I will vote for you on the first ballot for Senate majority leader." So he was a very careful vote counter, always was. I was pretty confident he was going to win, just because he was smart, they were talking about needing someone who was good on television, he was good on television, he was younger, and he won, and it was pretty thrilling.

**MH:** Did you have any ideas that it would affect your life significantly?

**DD:** I had no idea, I had no idea of the time commitment that one does when you – and I wasn't even certain. So when he asked me to come over to the Capitol that was a pretty cool thing.

**MH:** Meaning to the Majority Leader's Office.

**DD:** To the Majority Leader's Office, yes, and to have a staff. I'd had two or three people [in previous jobs], but I had eight or nine people, including the television studio and coordinating for – and I'd only been working in the Senate for two years, and here were these other people who had been around for years and years and years and years and years. So yes, and for the first two years I think he'd even admit, we walked around like a deer in headlights, it was hard, it was really, really hard, and you had the first years of Bush, and you had – yes, do I have that right? Yes, it would be the first, Bush was '88 to '92, and it was very hard.

And I can remember one example directly affecting Senator Mitchell and press was, he was [the author of] oil spill legislation, before [Exxon] Valdez happened, had long been an advocate of it. And when [the Exxon] Valdez [oil spill] happened, he reintroduced his bill, just like he had for whatever. But the difference was, it was a banner headline across the nation, and that to me, I mean now when you say it, you're like, well of course, he's the Senate majority leader, Valdez had happened, but that to me was like, oh my God, the megaphone, and choosing timing of when to do things makes all the difference in the world. It was a page three across the banner piece in the *Washington Post*, and in every newspaper in the country.

**MH:** I'd like to talk to you a little bit about Iran-Contra, but I'm thinking that maybe we should save that for next time, and I also want to talk about Judge Thomas.

**DD:** Oh yes, well that was when he was leader. Iran-Contra was before he was leader, so yes.

**MH:** Are there any legislative, other than the oil spill bill that particularly stand out in your

memory before he became majority leader, in terms of issues that he got more attention, or (*unintelligible---two people speaking at once*)?

**DD:** You know, Iran-Contra sucked up everything from a press perspective and really put him more on the national map. So from my time it was, in those two years, it was the campaign, it was Iran-Contra. Oh, you know what? Yes, there was. He was the chair of a subcommittee on the Environment and Public Works Committee, he was the chair of the subcommittee of the long-term care subcommittee for Finance, and he introduced a very significant long-term care bill that, if we'd enacted it then we would be in much better shape as a country, and Americans would be better off as far as long-term care is concerned today, which we still haven't enacted, by the way. But he had the foresight to see that. There was also a bill that he did in Finance called "spousal impoverishment," about not requiring spouses to have to spend down in order to qualify for [health care] when they otherwise could have had resources through their spouse, and that he did with [Senator Barbara] Mikulski [of Maryland].

But the thing that he did big time, and it was an experience for me because it was a bipartisan effort and I had never worked in a bipartisan way before, was taking the clean air issue and turning it into a health care issue. He had a hearing in '87 that brought in the pediatricians, the American Lung Association and some experts on asthma, and showed about how clean air has a direct effect on health care, on the health of Americans. Now maybe that had been shown before, but it wasn't as directed, it wasn't as succinct, and now it's commonplace, but I give Senator Mitchell, Kate Kimball and Martha a lot of credit for devising that and coming up with that, and approaching clean air not just as a tree-hugger issue but as a health issue, so that was a big thing there.

**MH:** Why don't we stop it here, and we'll proceed at another date.

**DD:** Okay.

**MH:** Thank you very much, Diane Dewhirst.

**DD:** Thank you.

*End of Interview.*