

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Jeff Nathanson

(Interviewer: Mike Hastings)

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Mike Hastings: This is Mike Hastings. This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project conducted on July 29, 2008. The interviewee is Jeff Nathanson, and the interview is being conducted in the Number 2 Portland Square, the headquarters, or corporate offices of TD Banknorth. Jeff, if we could begin, if you could give me your full name and the spelling of your last name, date and place of your birth, and your parents' full names.

Jeff Nathanson: Sure, thanks Mike. My name is Jeffrey Nathanson; last name is spelled Nathanson, N-A-T-H-A-N-S-O-N. I was born on July 10, 1958, in Biddeford, Maine, and my mother's full name is Toby Yetta Nathanson, maiden name Jacobskind, and my father's full name is Jon Allen Nathanson.

MH: Could you spell your mother's, Yetta?

JN: Yetta, Y-E-T-T-A.

MH: And her maiden name?

JN: Maiden name is Jacobskind, J-A-C-O-B-S-K-I-N-D.

MH: Okay, thank you.

JN: And Allen, excuse me, my dad's middle name is spelled A-L-L-E-N.

MH: A-L-L-E-N, very good, thanks.

JN: And, I apologize, Jon, J-O-N.

MH: Okay, this is helpful for the transcriber, to get names right. Every so often I may ask you to spell something. You're an only child? Or, you have a brother, as I recall?

JN: I have two brothers and a sister.

MH: What are their names?

JN: My older brother's name is Jay, and my younger brother's name is Jim, and they live in,

they work together in a family owned business and live in Richmond, Virginia, and my sister's name is Judy.

MH: Let's begin with your parents; can you kind of give me your mother's story?

JN: Sure. My mom's story, depending on where you want to start, but she was born in Miami, she grew up, if you can believe it, on a dairy farm in Miami, and was visiting a childhood friend one summer who lived in Old Orchard Beach, and she met my dad on a blind date, and I remember the family story goes that he asked her if she could, as they were driving down Main Street, Biddeford, if she could ever see herself living in Biddeford, Maine, and she looked around and said, "I wouldn't live in Biddeford if it were the last place on earth." And six months later they were married and she was living in an apartment above Day's Jewelry Store on Main Street in Biddeford. But she was, as best I can tell, an activist, growing up. When she went to the University of Miami and she was very involved in Democratic politics. When she moved to Maine she -

MH: So as a college student she was involved.

JN: As a college student, yup, and I'm not exactly sure in what capacity but I seem to recall stories of her being very active. And when she moved to Maine, one of my recollections of her growing up was that she was always involved in something, usually some aspect of Democratic politics locally, and at the state level, anything to do with charitable events in Biddeford and Saco, where we grew up, she was involved.

MH: Is she still living?

JN: She is. She and my dad live in, we recently just relocated them from western Florida to Richmond, Virginia, so she could be closer to my brothers, because her health is deteriorating but very much alive, as is my dad.

MH: And your dad's story?

JN: So my dad's story. He was born in Greenfield, Massachusetts.

MH: That's out in the western part of the state?

JN: Western part of Mass. My grandfather was a rabbi and he at some point, I don't know exactly when, but he became the rabbi in Biddeford, there was an orthodox synagogue in Biddeford, and my dad moved to Biddeford. And as best I can piece together his youth, he went to public school in Biddeford, Biddeford High School. If you think of Spanky and the Gang, that was sort of my dad and some of his friends growing up in Biddeford, sort of a little bit of a rebellious childhood, always getting in, never crossing a line but always getting close in terms of some of the shenanigans. And there were people that, well known names that people would recognize in the community, Barney Osher, Sam Cohen, my dad, Bernard Osher, they were the

kids who were roaming the streets of Biddeford back when he was a kid.

He, from a political perspective, we used to joke that he was known as Tobie's husband. As much as my mom was involved in local activities and politics, he was not. He, I guess you might say in today's language, empowered her to, enabled her or empowered her to do her thing, but they owned a business, family business together and he was focused on the business. As would she during the summer time – it was a seasonal business, but then in the off season her passion was politics and getting involved in the community and his was puttering and doing other things.

MH: What was the business?

JN: They owned a number of fast food restaurants. In Saco they owned a fast food restaurant called Tobie's Drive-In, located across from Thornton Academy, and that was a seasonal business. And then they also owned all of the fast food stands in the amusement park in Old Orchard Beach at Palace Playland.

MH: How did they get involved in that?

JN: Well, so the Old Orchard fast food establishments – that I know. The Osher family owned the amusement park, and at some point, it must have been in the early '50s, one of the stands became available and Barney Osher offered it to my dad, and in fact it was probably at least forty, maybe a little more, years later, when my dad retired, he's probably one of the only business people that I've known who operated in the same location for forty years as a tenant-at-will. They were personal friends, never had a lease, always had a handshake, and that was just how business was done back then and it continued through to this day.

Tobie's, the drive-in restaurant in Saco, I don't recall. It may come to me. I can picture the name of it, but it was a small place that they bought in probably the early '60s.

MH: I remember driving by it, on Route 1.

JN: Yeah. And then ran it for ten, fifteen years or so and decided to build a new building and had the local builder, Paul Dorais, build the new building for them and tore down the old one.

MH: Paul?

JN: Paul Dorais was a well-known local builder.

MH: Now, I remember visiting you and your brother in either the summer of 1983 or 1984 at a bar in Old Orchard. Was that also part of the family enterprise, one of the family enterprises?

JN: It was, it was, that would have been at the Beachcomber, which was a nightclub.

MH: I remember it was very dark.

JN: That my family owned. And by then actually I might have owned it because at some point, we ran it for ten years, I ran it for ten years with my brother, but for the last four or so I owned it, just because I bought it from my parents, wanted to get it out of their estate, frankly. But that was, so the way that came to be, that was a similar kind of thing. That was, the Beachcomber was an old roller-skating rink and it was in the middle of the amusement park, and at the time, in probably the 1977-ish, Barney Osher owned the amusement park and he asked my dad if he would help oversee the running of the amusement park. Barney's nephew, Sam Osher, had been asked to run the amusement park on a day-to-day basis and part of that oversight was, if he wanted, he could also run the Beachcomber. So my dad, I remember the day, my dad came to my brother and I (Jay was four years older than me) and said, "In addition to running the pizza place and the hotdog stand and the clam stand, do you think we could run a nightclub?" So, I was eighteen and my brother was twenty-two and we said, "Sure," not knowing a thing about nightclubs but we jumped at the chance, so that's how that became part of the 'empire,' so to speak.

MH: So when did they, when did your parents kind of retire from being active business people in Biddeford-Saco?

JN: They had a phased retirement. I would say that they probably sold Tobie's last in 1997 or so, and so retired ten years ago, eleven years ago or so.

MH: Well, I'm glad to hear that they're still with us.

JN: Yeah, and they're doing well.

MH: Tell me about what it was like – you mentioned the orthodox synagogue. I mean, there aren't that many synagogues in Maine, are there many south of Portland?

JN: No. In fact, south of Portland, I'm only aware of two. There's a synagogue in Old Orchard, and there's one in Biddeford, but I'm not aware of any synagogues farther south than that.

MH: And did a large part of your growing up life and the community center around the synagogue, or around other things?

JN: Well, it certainly was a part of my life. I wouldn't say that it was centered around. As a child, for reasons that you'd probably have to ask my mom, by the time that I was growing up, I was born in 1958, and in the late '50s, early '60s, the synagogue in Biddeford had become, it couldn't afford its own rabbi and so it had a dwindling congregation, and we belonged both to that synagogue, Etz Chaim, but also to Temple Beth El in Portland, so part of my childhood, preparing for my Bar Mitzvah was to, three times a week, drive into Portland to go to Hebrew school, and so it was more -

MH: In a small congregation you wouldn't have had a Hebrew school, I guess.

JN: No, but in fact, fast forward to today, there's somewhat of a resurgence at Etz Chaim. It still doesn't have its own rabbi, but there is a Hebrew school and it's no longer an orthodox congregation but nonetheless, there is a little bit of a resurgence. So growing up, about the only thing, there are a couple of memories, things that come to mind growing up in Saco of the Jewish faith, one was that there weren't many Jews, and in fact in my high school class, there were two kids.

MH: How big a class would that have been?

JN: I want to say approximately five hundred.

MH: Five hundred in a class?

JN: Yeah.

MH: Pretty good sized school.

JN: I may be wrong on that, but that's my recollection. And, number one, and number two, that, well three things maybe, number two, because I had to go to Hebrew school three times a week there were all kinds of sports that I couldn't get to play, and I didn't think that was fair. And number three, well, let's just say number two, I can't remember number three.

MH: Now tell me about life and what was it like living in, you lived in Biddeford, right?

JN: No, Saco.

MH: You lived in Saco, okay, so the big restaurant was in Saco and you lived there. And did you go to Thornton Academy?

JN: Went to Thornton Academy, yeah. Went to public school in Saco and graduated from Thornton Academy in 1976.

MH: And summers you were working in family businesses, or were you, what were you doing when you were growing up in Saco?

JN: So, growing up in Saco was probably, we joke today about some of the things that we did as kids that you wouldn't even dream of doing or allowing your kids to do today. But it was a carefree childhood. We used to come home from school and just go out with Don McGaffin and John Harvey and just go play basketball or football or whiffle ball, whatever, and the rule was you had to come home when it got dark, and that was pretty much it. We'd wander around the neighborhood, had a great childhood. Summers, because my folks were in seasonal business, I worked – and I don't know if there's any statute of limitations on child labor laws, or if there's

an exemption for family members – but I started work when I was eleven.

MH: Doing what?

JN: Making Italian sandwiches in Old Orchard. I used to have to stand on a milk crate to be able to reach the counter to wait on customers and to make Italian sandwiches. But for whatever reason I decided when I turned, the summer I turned eleven that it was time for me to start carrying my own weight and went to work full time for my parents, so. But I had a great childhood. Saco was a great community to grow up in.

MH: Other than your parents, are there people that you particularly remember as being big influences on your life when you were growing up, I mean before you went off to college?

JN: Sure, well two in particular. One definitely would have been Bernard Cohen. Bernard was my dad's best friend, and he married late in life but prior to his getting married, he was, we called him Uncle Bernard, but he was as much a father to me as my dad was in many ways, and he was a major influence on me. He was one of these guys who, he and his brother Sam owned York Bottling Company, which was a family owned soda manufacturer/distributor, that ultimately, they dropped the soda manufacturing, became a beer wholesaler for Miller, and everybody thought that Sam and Bernard owned the business together, but in reality Sam owned it and Bernard worked for him. But he was one of these guys who, the influence that he had on so many people locally, in terms of just leading a good life, and he was, as we say in Yiddish, a *mentsh*, and when he passed away, in approximately 1977, when I was in college, there was standing-room only in the synagogue and, you know, only a tenth of those people were Jewish. Just because he was such a well respected and well liked member of the Biddeford-Saco community. So he had a major influence on me, just in terms of teaching me that there's a difference between right and wrong and you kind of know what it is and if you always do the right thing you'll be okay.

MH: And the second person?

JN: The second person I would say was a little bit later, after his death, but would have been his brother Sam, whom I got to be very close with, and has since passed away as well.

MH: Any teachers that you can recall that were particularly noteworthy?

JN: I would say two. Have to dig deep. Mr. Davidson, who was my fifth grade science teacher, strict but fair, and sort of opened our eyes to the larger universe out there, and Harriet Patrick, who was my seventh grade Latin teacher, who taught me -

MH: Wow, Latin in seventh grade.

JN: And I blame this on her routinely, but taught me -

MH: What's her name again?

JN: Harriet. Mrs. Patrick, Harriet Patrick, who taught me the difference between i.e. and e.g., among other things.

MH: And so after Thornton Academy, where did you go?

JN: I went to college at Williams College, graduated in 1980.

MH: Why Williams?

JN: Well in hindsight, going to Williams was one of the best things I ever did, and probably one of the luckiest things that ever happened to me. But in answer to your question, why Williams, two reasons: one, I fell in love with the campus, and made the assumption that no matter where I went to school I could get a decent education if I applied myself, and made the decision that Williams was a place where I'd like to spend four years. And the second reason, which turned out to be not particularly relevant, but there was an airport in North Adams, right down the street, and I had, with Bernard Cohen's encouragement, gotten my pilot's license when I was sixteen, and decided that if I went to school near an airport that I might fly, keep my flying up while I was in college. But I didn't quite do the math and realized, I hadn't anticipated that once I got to college I wouldn't have any money, so I couldn't afford to fly while I was there.

MH: So you got your license when you were sixteen. Did they have a flying school in Biddeford?

JN: Mmm, yup. Beach Thurlow.

MH: Really. Do you still have your pilot's license?

JN: I do, but it's, in the interest of full disclosure, it's not current. So I would have to fly for a few hours, take a medical exam.

MH: Great. I never knew you had a pilot's license.

JN: So when I, I remember driving around New England with Gig Kirk, who was in my class, and we were looking at schools and he and I went on a road trip, with our parents' blessing, and toured a bunch of college campuses, and I came back and apparently told my parents I was going to Williams.

MH: And you went four years straight through?

JN: I did, but I spent a semester at Mystic Seaport in spring of my junior year.

MH: Yes, I still have home and framed in my house a photograph that you took of the prow of

a boat. It's kind of, it's from the deck, looking down. I think it's of the Charles S. Morgan.

JN: Could have been, yeah.

MH: A very nice photograph you took at Mystic.

JN: At Mystic, wow.

MH: Yeah, and you gave it to me, I think you gave it to me when I left the office.

JN: I'd forgotten that.

MH: What did you study?

JN: Biology and environmental studies, I was a biology major and environmental studies minor.

MH: And it was, Williams turned out to be a good choice, you say.

JN: Oh, it was fabulous.

MH: Why?

JN: Well, for two reasons I think. It was, the academic environment, it was really all about learning, and the faculty were committed to trying to open up students' minds to new ideas. And then the other, equally important I think, were the relationships that I forged while I was there. And in fact, just fast forward thirty years or so, just got back, spent the first week in July at my college roommate's ranch in Montana where about twenty families got together, and that group of people, not as many, but pretty much every year since we graduated in 1980 have gotten together once a year since then at different places. So those relationships that we forged back in the fall of 1976 were, are still vibrant today.

MH: Have you steered any other young people toward Williams?

JN: No, I can't say that I have. I certainly, if people ask me about it I talk very fondly about the school and encourage people to apply. The reality is that it's become so competitive to get in that I don't really, I don't kind of want to get people's hopes up, and the fact that I went there really carries no weight – so as soon as you start talking it up, people think that it does. But nonetheless, it was a great school.

MH: So Jeff, you must have gone to work for Mitchell fairly soon after you graduated.

JN: I did.

MH: Can you, how did that link get made, can you remember the circumstances?

JN: Sure, sure. So I graduated in 1980. Because we were, my brother and I were running the Beachcomber, I knew what I was going to do that summer, where most of my friends from college were either going to graduate school or going to work on Wall Street or going to work someplace. I knew what I was going to do that summer, but beyond that hadn't really made up my mind. Obviously, during that period of time, I was aware that Mitchell had been appointed to the Senate and Muskie became secretary of state in the Carter administration. That fall I worked on Severin Beliveau's, no, Harold Pachios's campaign, and remember -

MH: Campaign for?

JN: Governor. No, no, excuse me, I apologize. Harold was running against David Emery, so for Congress. And I remember talking to Mike Aube; we were working out of the Biddeford office, and just talking to Mike about working on Capitol Hill. He had worked for Muskie and Mitchell, and I pretty much decided at that point that that's what I'd like to do if I could figure out. I had come up with this idea before that campaign, that I'd like to try to figure out how to work for Mitchell, but I didn't quite have a clue how to go about making it happen. And so I ran the Beachcomber that summer and then worked on the campaign that fall, and I remember talking to Mike and his suggestion was that I get in touch with Jim Case, who was the AA, Mitchell's AA at the time, and one thing led to another. It took several months. I remember going down and being asked to write a couple of letters, he gave me a couple of constituent letters out of the pile and said, draft a response. And a couple months went by and eventually Jim called up and said they'd like to hire me. They didn't have any money to do it but, so they figured out a way for me to come down and work part time for Senator Byrd and part time for Senator Mitchell.

MH: Really, you were working for both.

JN: Well, but what I was doing for Senator Byrd was running an elevator in the Capitol, so. Five hours a day, and then -

MH: (*Unintelligible*). Interesting.

JN: And that actually was, from my perspective, I remember when I talked to Jim and he told me what they had in mind, I mean I didn't know what I was qualified to do but I figured, having graduated from Williams, it might be something other than running an elevator in the Capitol. And I remember talking to two of my professors/mentors at Williams, one named Tom Jorling, who was an assistant administrator to the EPA in the Carter administration before he went back to Williams, about the opportunity, and another guy named Bill Moomaw -

MH: How would you spell that?

JN: Moomaw, M-O-O-M-A-W, who was Senator Bumper's energy advisor, who had also

gone back to teach at Williams, about this opportunity. And they said, “If you are serious about trying to get a job on Capitol Hill, you’re crazy not to take this.” I mean, we know people with Ph.D.s who take these types of jobs because it’s all about getting your foot in the door. What you do with it after that, if you work hard and prove yourself it’ll lead to something, if you don’t, then fine. But you’re trying to do the impossible, you’re trying to get a job with a junior senator from Maine, with no experience, and here they’re offering you this job. Now, maybe it’s not ideal from your perspective, but if you’re interested in trying to get some experience on Capitol Hill, you’d be crazy not to take it. So I did.

MH: So you were only on the elevator for five months.

JN: No, it was much less than that; it was about maybe three, two, two or three.

MH: Did you have just one elevator, same elevator the whole time or did you move around?

JN: No, for the most part I moved around. So, I don’t know if this is interesting for posterity’s sake or not, but nonetheless it’s sort of my story, but I learned, I was told not to worry because I’d be in a senators-only elevator and I would get to know the senators and it would be quite an experience. So I learned very quickly that in elevators, as in other things in life, there’s a pecking order. And the new kid on the block does not get the senators-only elevator. So if you go to the Capitol, there are six elevators in the main elevator bank, and then in the bowels of the Capitol there’s a staff-only elevator, and that’s the one I got. And not only that, there were ‘no smoking’ signs everywhere and people routinely would get on this elevator, and one senator in particular, I thought it was Stennis, would smoke a stogie on the elevator, right by the ‘no smoking’ sign. And I hated cigar smoke, but anyway. So I did that for a couple of months.

MH: And then you were full time in Mitchell’s office.

JN: Well not exactly. So what actually happened was, there was a transition in, at the AA level, and David Johnson came on board. So David was not there when I was hired but soon after. Jim, there was a transition and Jim left the office and David – Jim Case left and David Johnson came on board. So I did this elevator thing for a couple months, and I was working in the office, Mitchell’s office, part time and working, running the elevators. And I remember having a meeting with David and asking him, making sure he understood what my career aspirations were, and they weren’t, because frankly there were some people who had these jobs who thought, their view was that, they had the system beat, they got a paid a decent amount and all they had to do was run the elevator. That was not my interest. So he explained to me that they liked, the office liked the work I was doing, but that they just didn’t have any money in the budget and so I shouldn’t be hopeful that this would transition into anything full time any time soon.

So with that, at the same time, coincidentally, my brother called and asked if I’d be willing to come back to Maine for the summer to help him run the Beachcomber, and so I made the decision to do that. And I talked to David and explained my family had a need and I was going

to go back to Maine and appreciated the opportunity to have had the experience I had in the office but that, given that it wasn't a full time position that I, and based on my family's need, I had made the decision to go back to Maine. So he understood and, fine, and I remember the very last day that I was in the office, it was my last day, he said, he called me and he said, "Hey, I've got some great news. We figured out a way to hire you, we'd like you to work, we'd like to hire you full time." And I had a real dilemma, and I explained to him that although I'd love to, I had made a commitment to my family and I couldn't go back on that. And so I fully expected that that was the end of it. And he said, "Well how about if we keep the position open until after Labor Day, you can come back and work for us then?" Which to me was a dream come true and I immediately said, "Yes." So I left in June, early June as I recall, to go back to Maine -

MH: That would have been June of '81?

JN: June of '81, correct. So having started in just a few months earlier.

MH: So tell me, when you came back, what were you doing?

JN: So when I came back, my recollection was I think I got a promotion of sorts over the summer, without knowing about it. Because my recollection was that I had been hired to work in the mail room, drafting constituent letters, because going into the 1982 election, you know, that responding to constituent inquiries is a major part of a senator or a congressman's responsibilities, and so I was asked to, there was a backlog or whatever, I was asked to just help work on that. But then over the course of the summer, I seem to recall getting a call from David asking if instead of just doing that, if I would run, in addition to drafting letters, but if I would just run the whole mail operation and get it in shape for the '82 election. So I said, "Sure." So when I came back in September that's what I was doing. Steve McGrath I think was the person that I was working with, and he and I just burned both ends of the candle and -

MH: Was that over in the, in some side building?

JN: It was, yeah, it was.

MH: Way in the back.

JN: It was, yeah.

MH: Yes, okay. And I did my time in that room as well.

JN: As I recall.

MH: I think maybe you replaced me.

JN: I think yes, I think now that, it's all coming back to me.

MH: I was with Bob Flaherty and Ed Flaherty and David Lemoine in that awful room in the back of that building. I remember it had no air conditioning, or that worked decently. Okay, and so you were doing the mail operation. But you weren't there for very long either, I don't think.

JN: No. So then at some point, and I don't remember exactly when but it would have been, sometime in early '82, maybe in the spring of '82, David Ray made the decision to come back to Maine. David was one of the Senator's legislative assistants, and I remember, I don't know if you remember Tom Gallagher but -

MH: Very well.

JN: But I remember when David made the decision to leave, I thought I would like to apply for that position, not his specifically but for a legislative position, assuming that one needed to be filled. And I convinced myself that I wasn't going to apply because we were heading into the '82 election, we had gotten the mail room in shape and things were humming and there was no way David or the Senator were going to, even if they thought I might be able to do the job, give me the opportunity until at least after the election. And Tom Gallagher said to me, and this was a great piece of advice, I remember him telling me to let them make that decision, don't make it for them. If you're interested in the job and you think you can do it, apply. And then if they think, if they don't want to give it to you or think that you're not qualified, let them tell you. Which to this day I thought was great career advice. And so I applied and was lucky enough to get the position.

MH: So now who were you working with, who was, who do you recall in the mix?

JN: Not only do I recall, I can picture where they sat. I think we were in the Russell Office Building, as I recall, 244, but I'm not sure.

MH: It was a very crowded room.

JN: It was. But to my immediate left was Estelle Lavoie, and I believe to her left was Bill Anderson, then Charlene Sturbitts, Tom Gallagher, and Mike Hastings.

MH: I was trying to figure out the sitting order, and I think you got it.

JN: I think that was, I'm not certain but I seem to recall -

MH: I think you've got it, I think that was it. And it was a very small room. I remember there were literally just inches between some of the desks.

JN: Right, oh sure. I mean literally; Estelle, who was somewhat of my mentor, was no more than six inches away.

MH: I can recall at that time, we just looked on the OSHA web, it wasn't a website, but we

looked in the OSHA manual and we had I think less than, I think the OSHA manual called for 256 cubic feet per employee, and we were running about 160, and that included all the air above our heads. It was very, very tight. What were your legislative responsibilities?

JN: Well, so when you look at that – I'll answer the question in a moment – when you look at those six people, there were probably four specialists, including yourself, and a couple of generalists, and I was one of the generalists. So my areas of responsibility were veterans' affairs, governmental affairs, judiciary, and that's it.

MH: What do you recall in terms of your contact with the Senator, as one of his LA's?

JN: So, a number of things. I would say incredibly bright, hard working, honest, serious, high expectations but very fair.

MH: I cannot remember, was he on the, he was on the Veterans' Affairs Committee? Did you do committee work, or were you just preparing for floor votes?

JN: No, I was preparing for floor votes, yeah. I actually think he was on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, but he didn't have a staff at the time.

MH: And you were there for how long, Jeff?

JN: Until the spring of '83.

MH: Spring of '83, so you actually left before I did, okay, spring of '83.

JN: In fact, I was traveling in Europe and I remember, I seem to recall writing you a letter about the concept of mutually assured destruction.

MH: Yes.

JN: Why we needed so many nuclear weapons.

MH: Do you have any particular memories about your couple of years in the office?

JN: Well sure, I have lots of memories. That it was a heady time for a kid right out of college, to be working on Capitol Hill – lived at 211 A Street, right behind the Supreme Court and could walk to work.

MH: Did you have your own apartment?

JN: No, I shared a house with a Williams friend who bought a house on the Hill, she worked for Bradley. And it was, for me it was just a tremendous learning experience about politics and the process. I remember coming away thinking that the issues that we dealt with, everything

seemed to be a crisis, this is the most important vote ever. And then if you just went outside the Beltway, you realized that people actually have lives and what you were doing didn't quite matter to them as much as it might have mattered that day in the office. But nonetheless, a respect, tremendous respect for the role of policy and the ability to help people, make people's lives better. And frankly, the role that somebody as honorable and as decent as Senator Mitchell could play in that. I remember he used to have a litmus test – I don't know if he made this up or he borrowed it – but the three questions he used to ask were these: "Is it good for the people of Maine? Is it good for the country? Is it consistent with my conscience?" These were the three criteria that he would use.

MH: Do you recall, did you have any particular issues that you dealt with or problems, Maine problems that kind of stand out in your mind that you focused on?

JN: I don't in terms of Maine problems, per se, because as a generalist, basically dealing with, and I think I may have mentioned three committees, I think there was a fourth, I think there was energy as well. But in any event, there was one piece of legislation that I specifically recall working on that was a unique experience for me, and that was, and I may get this not exactly right, it was quite a while ago, but nonetheless, it was a reauthorization of the Crime Control Bill that was coming up, and there was an amendment that Senator Mitchell and Senator Specter cosponsored regarding the Speedy Trial Act. And the amendment had to do with detaining, criteria under which you could detain somebody without a hearing, and then the impact of the Speedy Trial Act and whether certain criteria would apply or not apply, and Senator Mitchell and Senator Specter cosponsored an amendment. And as would happen, when you get notice that the amendment was going to be taken up on the floor for consideration and so you get the word to go meet the Senator on the floor and sort of be down on the Senate floor with Senator Mitchell and the other senators, was kind of a heady experience.

So we got on the floor, Specter had risen and was giving his arguments in favor of this particular amendment that he and Senator Mitchell cosponsored, and Senator Biden said, well Mitchell looked at me and he said, "It sounds like Arlen is confused about the impact of the amendment, go find out." So I walked across the aisle and I go to the Republican side of the floor and I asked his staff guy, Kevin, I can't remember his last name, I said, "Kevin, your boss seems to think this." He says, "Oh, no-no, you heard it wrong, our understanding of the amendment is accurate." I said, "Okay." So I went back and I wrote on a legal pad to Senator Mitchell, 'we're okay, our understanding is correct.' And he had been recognized and he was giving his argument in favor of the amendment, which I had written, which was kind of heady stuff, again. Anita used to write the speeches, but floor statements, which are more factual, you know, we could write, or whatever, I could write.

MH: That's Anita Jensen.

JN: Anita Jensen would, was a fabulous speech writer. So Senator Biden, after Mitchell finished his remarks said, well there seems to be this disagreement between the Republican and the Democratic cosponsors of the amendment, why don't we take a brief recess and reconcile the

differences. So Senator Mitchell turned to me and he said, he looked at me and he said, “If you’re wrong, I’m going to kick your you-know-what.” And my heart just fell. So we walked across the aisle and we talked to Senator Specter. And for some reason I had brought the U.S. Code with me that showed that Senator Mitchell’s understanding of the impact of the amendment was correct. And Specter looked and he said, “George, if I had known that I never would have cosponsored the amendment.” So meanwhile his staff guy is -

MH: Out on a limb.

JN: So in any event, fast forward, [] they amended their own amendment to be clear on what the impact of it would be, and there was a roll call and we were winning. And then word started to spread, you could tell people were being told, I can’t remember who was managing the bill on the floor, but in any event, that the amendment had been modified and people didn’t quite understand what they were voting for, so they actually started to change their vote and we ended up losing by a little bit. But that experience has stuck with me forever.

And I remember David Johnson, you may have been there, Mike, I don’t recall but I know you were working there at the time.

MH: Floor managers would have been Kennedy and Hatch, I believe.

JN: I think Biden might have been, but I don’t remember on the Republican side.

MH: (*Unintelligible*) the Judiciary Committee, I assume.

JN: Yeah, yeah, so maybe it was. But in any event, people listening in the office on the squawk box couldn’t tell whether Senator Mitchell was correct or not, and whether he was modifying the amendment because he was incorrect or not, so David immediately came down on the floor and said, “What’s going on?” I explained it to him but they were all nervous that: number one, for the Senator because we didn’t want to embarrass him; and number two, for me. But anyway, that experience has always stuck with me.

MH: Any other experiences like that, that you can recall?

JN: Not so much specifically like that, but I would say just having worked for Mitchell before he was elected, and then through, taking some time off to volunteer for the ‘82 campaign, and having come back and go from such a tremendous deficit and beat David Emery was, that was exciting stuff.

MH: Have you kept in touch with any of the folks that you worked with in the Mitchell office? Where are they now? Estelle?

JN: Well, Estelle is at Preti Flaherty, practicing -

MH: Which is almost next door, isn't it?

JN: Yes, a stone's throw, practicing health care law primarily. And I haven't really kept in touch with other folks, although coincidentally, in a sort of a small world story, I had a meeting for work at the Fed about two months ago, and we were in a back entrance, my boss and I were being admitted through security in a back entrance of the Fed, and it was raining, and I looked up and Tom Gallagher came walking in with a couple of colleagues, because he too had a meeting at the Fed, separate meetings. And I hadn't seen him since 1983.

MH: I see him on TV from time to time.

JN: Yeah, occasionally, right, and he was with a firm, some econometrics firm.

MH: At least the last time I saw him on TV, it labeled him – it always seems to change – but it was something like International Investor Advisors or something like that, it's a consulting firm.

JN: And then I talked to David Johnson recently. He's actually moving to Maine and retiring from his lobbying practice, moving to Maine. Bump into David Ray occasionally in Portland, and am involved a little bit with the Mitchell Institute. It's not with these individuals per se, but a little bit tangentially with the Mitchell Institute.

MH: Ever keep up with Bill Anderson?

JN: I'd love to catch up with Bill but I haven't. And I actually, the woman whom I shared a house with in D.C. is a lobbyist for Continental, and she knows Regina Sullivan. And a couple months ago, I didn't see Regina, but Nancy touched base with her just via e-mail, and would love to see Regina too, but -

MH: So where did you go after 1983?

JN: So 1983, when I left the Senator's office, traveled, did a little bit of traveling in Europe and then went to law school in 1984, at B.U.

MH: And ended up at University of Maine Law School.

JN: I did. I didn't really enjoy B.U. I mean, first year of law school doesn't have a reputation of being fun for anyone, I don't think, but the academic environment at B.U. was not what I was used to at Williams, and it seemed just a little bit too cutthroat for me, and so I took a little bit of time off and then, took a year off actually, and then transferred to the University of Maine and had a great experience there. But never intended to practice law, but always thought that -

MH: Right from the beginning you did not intend to practice law?

JN: Never, no, no, but I always thought, I'm a generalist by preference, and I thought that a law degree was one of the last general degrees you can get. And it's been incredibly helpful in business, but -

MH: Did you go immediately into business, after law school?

JN: After law school, this was in 1987, I convinced some local real estate developers, I wanted to get involved in real estate development, and I convinced some local real estate developers to hire me as a project manager on a large project they were developing in Gorham, Maine, and went to work for them, trying to get the permits for a twenty-year sort of one hundred million dollar project, planned use development type of a project, right at the peak of the last real estate bubble. And as the bubble started to burst, we realized that the project really was not, even if we came online, we would be coming online at the wrong time of the cycle, and ultimately we were able to sell the land, about 262 acres, we were able to sell the land to Regional Waste Systems for some use that they had in mind.

And so at the time, I was a project manager without a project, and Maine Savings Bank was ramping up and hiring people like me to help deal with bank-owned property as developers were turning over properties to the bank. So I went to work for Maine Savings Bank as a project manager in what was called their OREO group, other real estate owned, and did that for a couple of years until the bank failed in the spring of 1991. Fleet acquired them, and then so I got into banking sort of through the back door. Fleet acquired the assets of Maine Savings Bank, and then from there I did workouts, got onto the lending side, I've had a series, a number of jobs at various banks, and six years or so ago I decided to leave Fleet and join People's, which became Banknorth, which is now TD Banknorth.

MH: Did you find that the legal background has been helpful all this time?

JN: Oh, it's hugely helpful, hugely helpful.

MH: It's always interesting to me to see how people go through their career and where they end up. Sometimes you have no idea that you start working for a senator and end up as a chief of staff of a, East Coast operations for a bank.

JN: Well it's a, it is, it's hard to connect the dots. But actually some of the, many of the skills and things that I learned on Capitol Hill apply in business today. It's very, it's a relationship business, understanding people and what motivates them and trying to articulate a vision and get people rallied around behind it, whether it's in the public sector as a senator who is working, or in the private sector as we're doing.

MH: So how many people report to you, per se, here at the bank?

JN: Here? It's sort of an inside joke that you would think that as chief of staff you'd have a staff, but I have none, so I'm sort of the right hand guy to the number one guy.

MH: Okay, that's the president for -

JN: The CEO of TD Banknorth. So my role is one of trying to help him move his agenda forward, but it's not through direct staff reporting lines, it's more through sort of articulating, trying to influence the direction that the particular issue is moving or whatever, get other people to do the work, actually.

MH: In this, I mean we're reading this week about the number of foreclosures and failing banks in various places. I would suspect that your other real estate owned OREO is probably good preparation for some of the downturn we're seeing right now. I mean the banks are being challenged right now, because they're basically having a lot of real estate they have to unload.

JN: Yeah, so, in theory you're right, but in reality we don't have the same problems that many of the other U.S. banks have because, frankly, for a couple reasons. One, we never got into sub-prime lending by design, we didn't invest in sub-prime investments on our balance sheet, number three, we're relatively conservative lenders, both TD Banknorth, People's, lived through, almost failed in the late '80s, early '90s so, sort of part of the DNA -

MH: Then it rebounded.

JN: It rebounded, but the DNA was to be relatively conservative. And Commerce Bank, which we recently acquired, had a relatively conservative lending practice as well. So you put all that together, and being in the northeast, which although the economy is not booming, is not subject to the same housing problems as California, Florida, Nevada, and some of those other states. So when you put all that together, we're not seeing the same problems that other people are in the industry. So although in theory it would help if we had the same problems as a practical matter, we're not seeing it, so knock on wood, we're feeling lucky about that.

MH: Now, I mentioned to you earlier that I have this photograph that you took when you were a student at Mystic. And every time I pull the photograph out, I remember something that you said to me, and that was, and I don't know how we got on the subject, but you said that one of the things that your father lived by was the idea that there are people who give in this world, and people who take, and that the challenge before you as a young man was to figure out how you get in the former category rather than the latter. You've done a lot of work in, I mean I see your name from time to time in public service and civic things. Can you talk a little bit about the things you do for the community?

JN: Sure. Well, I don't remember that conversation that you and I had, but -

MH: I'm sure you had with other people too, describing your dad.

JN: But it is something that I learned from my dad and from both my parents actually. But, so I learned from my parents that giving back to the community is just part of what you do, it's

part of making the community a better place. So in my case, whether it's been through work or otherwise, I've been involved in a number of organizations over the years. Most recently, I'm currently the president of the Cancer Community Center, which is an organization in South Portland, Maine, that provides individuals with, support services to individuals who are touched by cancer, or their family and friends. And that's been, I did that actually, I got involved in the Cancer Community Center because of Uncle Bernard who died of cancer in 1977. I've been involved in Special Olympics over the years, currently on the board of the Cromwell Center for Disabilities.

MH: What is that? I don't know.

JN: The Cromwell Center is an organization that basically advocates and believes that all individuals have certain rights, regardless of disabilities, and whether those are physical or mental challenges. It's a disability awareness organization, goes into the schools and provides a number of programs. And actually there's an interesting, it's serendipity in a way, Jamie Kaplan is our executive director. I don't know if you know Jamie, but Jamie -

MH: I know who he is.

JN: But Jamie has a relationship with the Senator, had a relationship with the Senator, and in fact was special counsel or was involved in the Iran-Contra hearings. And I remember, I was at a charity auction at which they were, I think it might have been the Susan Curtis auction, in any event, they were auctioning the tie that Senator Mitchell wore when, at one of the hearings when he told Oliver North that God doesn't take sides in American politics, and I bought that tie and I have it, and Jamie Kaplan was sitting to his right at that hearing, and fast forward fifteen years or so, twenty years or so.

MH: Was he bidding against you for the tie?

JN: No, he wasn't, he wasn't at that dinner, but now he's executive director of the Cromwell Center and I'm on their board.

MH: Okay, so he's not a practicing lawyer.

JN: No, he's devoted his efforts to the Cromwell Center. I've been involved a little with the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, which is a fabulous organization locally. So I learned from both my parents that if you can do your little part and make the community or the world a better place that that's, that that's a *mitzvah*, and that's a good thing.

MH: Are there any things that, anything you want to state for the record that I haven't asked you? We give everybody the opportunity to talk, you know, we don't think of all the questions, and so is there a question out there that you'd like to answer that I haven't asked.

JN: Well, so it's not a question, but maybe a couple of things. One, for the record I'd like to

say that I miss Gayle Cory, who was a mentor of mine (and others, I believe), worked for Senator Muskie and Senator Mitchell, and she was an amazing woman. I learned after the fact that she was Buzz Fitzgerald's sister, which I didn't know, and I got involved – Angus King is a personal friend and I was lucky enough, honored enough, to be sitting in his living room when he made the decision to run for governor. And Buzz Fitzgerald was there as well, and I got to know Buzz through that campaign and had great admiration for him and then found out many years later that he was Gayle Cory's brother. So it's just a small world.

MH: Tell me about the connection with Angus King, how did you get to know Angus?

JN: I got to know Angus – it's amazing, all of these threads and how Capitol Hill and George Mitchell play a role. When I worked for the Senator, my best friend, my girlfriend and I at the time and my best friend, who was a guy named Jeff Curtis (he was married at the time to Andrea Cianchette), and Andrea and Jeff and Sarah and I would do things together every weekend. And they decided to, they left Washington, traveled around Europe, rode their bikes around Europe, came back to Maine [and] ultimately got divorced. And Andrea, and I remained friends with both of them, and when I was, the year after I, it must have been in 1984, '85, after I left B.U. and came back to Portland, Andrea called me out of the blue and said, "Hey, I'm going to have dinner with Mary Herman, whom I work with in Augusta, and her husband Angus King. You might have heard of him, he has a show called MaineWatch." And I think they were going to Alberta's, famous Portland restaurant at the time. "Would you like to go with us." So I said, "Yeah, sure." So that's how I met Angus and Mary, and stayed friends, and occasionally they'd come down to the Beachcomber and visit and dance, and I'd see them a couple times a year.

And then we remained friends, and I remember talking to him about, at the time, it seemed to me, I don't know about others but it seemed to me that there was a lack of leadership in Augusta, and I put a bug in his ear that he ought to consider running for governor. And he said, "You know, you're not the only one who's mentioned that." And apparently I wasn't, I didn't know, but nonetheless, anyway, so one thing led to another and he called me and said, "You know that crazy idea you've been talking about?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well, a few people are going to get together at my house in a couple of weeks to talk about it. Are you in?" And I said, "Sure."

MH: So were you on a campaign committee for him?

JN: Yeah, so, I guess so, I mean I was -

MH: In a kind of kitchen cabinet.

JN: Yeah, I mean I sort of, I have these early memos, you know, crazy stuff. I was persona non grata I think within the Democratic Party for a while but, because Angus is an Independent, but we all make a -

MH: Have you been involved recently in the Democratic Party?

JN: Other than being an Obama fanatic, no.

MH: I remember, I would ask you, were you working in Senator Mitchell's office when Andrea Cianchette was an intern?

JN: Yes.

MH: I have a very vague recollection that she got mugged or something.

JN: Ooh, I don't recall, that I don't know.

MH: And she beat up the mugger. Or she chased him. If you see her, ask her, because I can't remember. I see her name from time to time, and I said to my wife, I said, "I think that's the intern who, somebody tried to mug her and she slugged him and then chased him." It was a very amusing story.

JN: So my recollection, I don't know about that story, but my recollection at the time that Andrea was there, Jeff, her husband, was clerking for, they knew each other, they met in law school, at the University of Maine, and he was clerking for a federal judge, I'm not sure who, and she had transferred to one of the law schools in D.C. and was finishing up her degree. And I think, and also working in the Senator's office a little bit.

MH: If you see her, ask her.

JN: I will. So this was fabulous, I appreciate the opportunity.

MH: Any other last comments, or is that it?

JN: Maybe just one last thing. I mean, I'll always be indebted to the Senator for the experience that I had working for him. It was a relatively short period of time, but it was a unique experience and one that I'll always treasure. And I think just in hindsight, over the last twenty years or so, being able to watch the Senator's career, whether he's helping to bring peace to Northern Ireland or influence things in the Middle East, or trying to make baseball a safer sport, he's certainly made the world a better place and I'm honored to have been a tiny little part of that, and appreciate this opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

MH: That's the last word, thank you very much. It's July 29, Jeff Nathanson has been the interviewee, [and] this is Mike Hastings signing off.

End of Interview