

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

Bowdoin College Library, 3000 College Sta., Brunswick, Maine 04011

© Bowdoin College

Estelle Lavoie

(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)

GMOH# 016

June 9, 2008

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College, the date is June 9, 2008. I'm at Preti, Flaherty, Beliveau and Pachios in Portland, Maine, interviewing Estelle Lavoie; this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Estelle, could you start just by giving me your full name?

Estelle Lavoie: Yes, my name is Estelle, middle name is Annette, Lavoie.

AL: And where and when were you born?

EL: I was born November 23, 1949, in Lewiston, Maine.

AL: Is that where you grew up?

EL: Yes.

AL: And I know we talked some about your background in a Muskie Oral History interview, so we won't go too much into that. But can we skip ahead to the first time you have a recollection of meeting or interacting with Senator Mitchell?

EL: I remember clearly. I started working for Senator Muskie on September 17th of 1973, and that fall there was a fund raiser for George Mitchell in Washington because George was running for governor. And the fund raiser was at the Washington home of then-Senator Joe Tydings of Maryland; it was at his dacha on Macomb Street in Washington. I think it was on Macomb Street. And the dacha means it was a, I guess, a Russian-styled house [and it was] in a very wooded area of northwest Washington.

And I was at a table with Gayle Cory, it was dark, and we were outside. It was warm weather. And along came George Mitchell, to whom I was introduced by Gayle, [p/o] when he was running for governor. I remember him as a seemingly likeable man with a very nice smile, and that was the first time I met him.

AL: And because you both had a Maine connection, did that give you something to talk about or-?

EL: We didn't talk very long, because I was pretty much introduced and then he was going to

go inside and greet all of the donors. I mean, I was just a staff person at the table, and Gayle had wanted some help that night, and I suspect they may have wanted me to know George Mitchell because he was really a protégé of Senator Muskie, and they very much hoped that he would become governor. He certainly had the talent and the intellect, and Senator Muskie wanted to promote him, so...

And it is also true that I came to know him in the ensuing six or so years because he was an attorney in private practice, and he would call me to help his clients. So even though he didn't win the gubernatorial election in 1974, I continued to have contact with him, and sometimes he'd come to Washington and he'd want to meet with me regarding his client matters, that sort of thing. So we were known quantities to each other. I was never a best friend in the way that Harold was, but I think that Senator Mitchell liked my work and had confidence in me, so he would call me whenever he had something.

AL: And so looking ahead, when did you come in contact with him as a staff member, how did that happen?

EL: Well, in April of 1980, I think Cyrus Vance stepped down as secretary of state for President Jimmy Carter, and Senator Muskie was going to be nominated in his place. And the way I found out about it is, I was at home studying for law school exams because I went to law school at night, and [] I received a call from Jim Case, who was then the administrative assistant – that position is now called chief of staff – for Senator Muskie, and he said, “Well Estelle, I don't know if you've been watching television.” I didn't want him to think I was, I took vacation time so I could study, and I said, “No-no, I haven't.” And he said, “Well, Senator Muskie is going to be nominated for secretary of state,” and he said, “Don't worry about your job. If anything, your job prospects are probably enhanced.”

So of course I was thunderstruck by the news, and I also felt that, given the Iran hostage crisis at that time and the fact that Jimmy Carter was up for reelection and that he hadn't fared very well [in his first term]. I thought it was a six- or seven-month job for Senator Muskie and [wondered] why [he would] step down from his [Senate] position. But he did. And I think he went over to the State Department in very late April of 1980, or very early May, and a few of the staff went with him to the State Department, notably Gayle Cory, Leon Billings, and Carole Parmelee.

And so there was a period of about three to four weeks when there was no senator in that seat, and it was the responsibility of then-Governor Joe Brennan to appoint a successor to fill the unexpired term that went through the end of 1982. So there were two-and-a-half years left in the term. And speculation was rampant in the press as to who would be appointed. All we on the staff could do was watch the news clips from Maine every day, and I remember former Senator Hathaway, who had been defeated for reelection in 1978 two years before, very much wanted the job. There was discussion of Ken Curtis, as I recall, who was a former governor, and George Mitchell, [who] was also on the list.

And I remember thinking that of all the names that were floated, I would only be willing to work

for one or two, and George Mitchell was at the top of the list, because I had come to know him and I respected him. And he was nominated by Governor Brennan, and he was sworn in on May 19th of 1980. So I became his staff person on that date and I remained on his staff until June 1st of 1984.

So I was on his staff for a period of four years, and [at the start of his first term] he very much wanted all the Muskie staff to remain in place because he knew we had long held our positions, he knew all of us [personally]. We were of the same political party, and also I think Senator Muskie had spoken to him when he knew that George was going to be the nominee and he said, "I hope you'll keep my staff."

So then I began to work for Senator Mitchell, and, in a way, it was sad because he was the most junior member of the majority party in the Senate, and seven months later he became the junior member of the minority party because with Ronald Reagan's election, not only did Reagan take the White House, but he took the Senate with him which became Republican. And all these Democrats were thrown out of office. It was what we call now a wave election – that Ronald Reagan had tremendously big coattails and proceeded to change many things.

So in the years that I was in the Senate with Senator Mitchell, it wasn't very exciting for him because as a junior member of the minority party, there wasn't much he could do by way of legislation or leadership or anything like that. And I think that in – I don't remember if it was in '86 or '88 – he became the chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, and he helped win back the Senate. It may have been in 1986.

AL: I think that's correct.

EL: I will say that I had understood early on that more senior members of the Senate took notice of him early on, because they saw that he was very bright, and they made him – fairly early in his Senate career, although I don't remember the year – deputy president pro tem [of the Senate]. [This] was really an honorary title, but still was a gesture on the part of the leadership to tell other members of the Senate, "This is a guy to watch."

And so, in the first years when he was in the Senate, he was rather shy about initiating legislation and that sort of thing, I think in part because he was a very cautious man, and he didn't want to make mistakes. And when you're in the legislative branch and in the public eye, your mistakes can be magnified, and I think he wanted to get to know the legislative process more before doing that. And it was really after I left that he took a much more prominent role, and then of course he became majority leader very early on. And so it just showed how, after I left, [] he really grew and developed greatly [in] the job.

AL: Hmmm.

EL: And he made all of us so proud.

AL: Now, what specific issues did you focus on in the Senate on his staff? Was it a lot of what you did for Senator Muskie, or was it a lot of new things?

EL: Yes, yes, generally it was on the domestic front, not foreign policy or armed services. I was a legislative assistant in the areas of health, education, what used to be called welfare, housing in particular, Native Americans – in those days they were [] called Indians, today they're called Native Americans – arts and humanities, that sort of thing.

I did a lot with housing. In the late '70s, and early '80s, particularly late '70s, in the Carter years, there was a tremendous amount of federal subsidy [money] available for multi-family housing, specifically for elderly and handicapped and families. And there are many developers in Maine [] that I helped get federal money. In those days it was real money, and there was a way for developers to make a profit, and there was an effective reuse of old, abandoned buildings into housing that is still efficient today. There [were] many old mill buildings, long since gone silent, that were renovated all around the state, from Bangor to Saco and everywhere else.

It was really a good thing to see, and I would just say from a public policy perspective, I'm really sorry that the source of funding [] dried up over the years because there really hasn't been much new housing built, or substantial rehabilitation of existing buildings, for lower income people. When you really don't build much housing for a quarter century, it has an effect. There has been some because of a [federal] tax credit, but not like in the late '70s.

AL: Now, the Indian Land Claims Settlement case.

EL: Yes.

AL: Was that during your time or after?

EL: It was during my time with Senator Muskie, and the very beginning of Senator Mitchell. The case began in the fall of 1976 [] with newscasts that there was a tribe on Cape Cod, the Mashpee Tribe, and [] they had filed a lawsuit claiming their ancestral lands. It had a chilling effect on real estate transactions, because title examiners couldn't certify [] clear title because of the possible claim against individual[ly owned] properties by the tribe.

Well, not long after that, I'm not sure if it was '76 or a little before, but in 1976 the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Tribes asserted claim to two-thirds of the land mass of Maine, in the northern and eastern part, and the same concern arose. And I remember like yesterday that [] Senator Muskie received a letter from then-Maine Attorney General Joe Brennan about this Indian land claim, and I knew [] it was very serious. And rather than try to [] draft a response, I went [directly] to see the senator and I said, "I have a letter from Joe Brennan regarding [an Indian] land claim." And he said immediately, "I want a delegation meeting." He wanted a meeting of the Maine [congressional] delegation because he understood the stakes.

And so the matter went on for four years, and there were land transactions that took place in

Maine, but there was a lot of anxiety. I think there was a lot of prejudice toward the tribes. And in [the 1978 election] it was an issue. Because I think that Senator Cohen, who ran against incumbent Senator [Bill] Hathaway, was against the land claim, and also, I think that's when Joe Brennan ran for governor, and his slogan was, "Not a Nickel, Not an Acre" and he went to every Lion's Club and Rotary Club in the state and made that statement.

So Jim Longley was governor, and I remember that Jim Longley, I think, and Joe Brennan, came to a delegation meeting in 1976. And as I was told later, Governor Longley had a private meeting with Senator Muskie, as well as a meeting with a bunch of other people, but he wanted Senator Muskie to simply extinguish the claims. But the claims could not be extinguished under [the U.S.] Constitution without compensation, and it could not be simply wiped away – it could not simply be wiped away.

And so legislation was introduced, I don't know if it was in 1978, and [p/o] there were communications with the White House. This had a great deal of attention at very high levels, because I remember going to meetings at the White House with White House counsel. And what then-President Carter did was appoint sort of a master, a former, I think, federal judge, Judge [William] Gunter [p/o] who might have been from Georgia, and there were meetings in the Senate with Judge Gunter, and his goal was to try to mediate a solution [with] the tribes. And the tribes wanted a lot of money for their claim, and I remember their then-attorney Tom Tureen [p/o] said to me once on the phone [], "You know Estelle, the more time passes, the more the price tag goes up."

So at any rate, with the help of Judge Gunter, legislation was introduced in settlement of the claims, by which [all] the [tribal] claims [] to Maine land [were] extinguished in exchange for the tribes receiving an eighty million dollar settlement. This was for about five thousand people.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

EL: So some of the money was in trust so that individual tribal members could receive, I think, monthly payments, and some of it was going to be given to the tribes outright so [] they could spend it on economic development, on whatever. And so the legislation was signed at the White House by President Carter on October, I think it was 1st, of 1980, in the first ten days of October. And I remember how happy the tribes were.

And a very sad postscript is that in October of [] 2005, on the twenty-fifth anniversary [of the settlement], there was an article in the *Maine Sunday Telegram* [in which] some tribal members said that the worst thing they ever did was agree to [it] – the worst thing.

So, I handled the Indian land claim for a time, but then it went to someone else because I was not an attorney. I started law school in August of 1978. My own view is you don't have to be an attorney to be a legislative assistant, but it was still given to an attorney [on the staff]. So I didn't handle it throughout, between '76 and '80; but for [the first] couple of years [the claim] was a real threat to the State of Maine, and so it had a very high profile.

AL: And Tom Tureen, was he the attorney that represented the tribes?

EL: Yes.

AL: And he's a Maine attorney.

EL: Yes.

AL: Can you talk about some of the other staffers that you worked with over the years, and personalities and who worked with you closely, that sort of thing?

EL: Well of course, over a ten-year period there were a lot of different people. I guess two stand out as having been there almost the entire time: Anita Jensen was a legislative aide [who] had a near photographic memory, and she read books all the time and her knowledge of U.S. and world history was simply prodigious – I mean, prodigious. She could turn out a speech on any subject on a dime. And I would see instances where other staff members were supposed to produce a speech, didn't do it at the last minute – you know, the Senator needed something, and it was Anita who would always save the day, who would always save the day.

She and I have always been friends. And we didn't quite work side by side because in the first several years I worked on projects – I worked on discreet problems that individuals or businesses or municipalities had with the federal government. I was more of an advocate and an intermediary, and she did legislation [and legislative correspondence]. But we were always good friends, we always hung out together, and so I've always had enormous respect for her.

She retired in her early fifties because she had twenty-five years in the Senate and she [could] get a nice Senate pension, and you don't have to worry about that pension ever going away.

And then there was Gayle Cory – Gayle Cory whom we all loved and adored. Gayle, I think, went down to Washington as a young woman, and she did all kinds of things in the office. She was intermediary with the Senator's spouse – would talk to Jane Muskie every day. She knew all the big contributors, she would handle special cases like State Department intervention if some person's daughter were [] kidnapped or [held] in a foreign country, you had to get State Department intervention. [People] would call her and she would handle those cases.

And she was really one-of-a-kind and was really universally loved, absolutely universally loved. [] She went with Senator Muskie to the State Department. She was gone for less than a year because then Carter lost his job, so did Muskie, and then Muskie went with Chadbourne & Park, [] a law firm, so she came back to the Hill. But she was really a peer, I think, of George Mitchell. They were reasonably close in age, and they had known each other for many years – for many, many years – and so he absolutely wanted her there. And so she came back and she was there until I left, and sometime after I left, George made her postmistress of the Senate, so she got a new job.

Then, I'm trying to think of other people I've worked with. Bill Anderson did projects and legislation, as I did, for Senator Mitchell, and he has a development company of his own in Los Angeles. His father may have been one of the founding members of O'Melveny & Myers, which is a very distinguished law firm.

AL: Yeah.

EL: And he started off practicing law, he went to law school and went with O'Melveny & Myers, but I think he found he didn't like the hours [] and so he started his own company. And I think he continues to work long hours, but I think he's very satisfied [p/o].

And Jeff Nathanson was another good friend. Jeff and Bill and I all worked right next to each other for a time in those latter years, in the middle '80s, and I remember Jeff did Veterans' Affairs, and I don't remember what other topics. Jeff has been a bank officer in Portland for many years, and the last I knew, he was a senior vice president for BankNorth. And he had told me that, the last time I saw him, which is maybe a year ago, he thought he was going to lose his job because of course it was People's Heritage Bank, and it was bought out by BankNorth and, you know, whenever you have these mergers –

AL: Right.

EL: - you know, they say, "Well we're going to consolidate for efficiency," and then there's a big layoff.

So I don't know if he's still there or not, but I can tell you that in the early part of this decade, two of his bosses were on the board of the Mitchell Institute, and they raved about him and they said, "That Jeff, he can do anything. We give him -" special projects, that's what he did – they'd give him these various assignments and he'd just do them and do them well. And so he was just very, very versatile in the field of banking. So Jeff is a good friend. And I think of legislative assistants who I didn't work with directly. There was Charlene Sturbitts –

AL: Oh yes.

EL: - who did strictly environmental [] and there was Tom Gallagher who did tax on the Finance Committee. I did Medicare and Medicaid on the Finance Committee, but he did tax, and he's since gone in the private sector. And in the days when Louis Rukeyser still had his Friday evening program, he invited Tom Gallagher more than once for a perspective on Congressional legislation on things that would affect the economy and he'd say [to him], "What do you think is going to happen?" [] So, of course Rukeyser has been dead now for a couple of years, but I assume that Tom is still doing well. I assume he's still living in Washington. But the last time he was on Rukeyser, he was with a company whose name I didn't know, I mean it wasn't a large publicly traded company [to my knowledge]. So –

AL: Did your career on the Senate staff overlap Larry Benoit's at all?

EL: Yes, oh yes. Well, Larry was on the staff for Senator Muskie and then Senator Mitchell all of those years, and he stayed with Senator Mitchell until the end, I believe, until '94. But of course he was in Maine and I was Washington. Periodically we would talk when we had matters for constituents, and we [while] didn't talk that often [] we've always been friends.

AL: Are there others I haven't asked you about?

EL: Well... Mike Hastings?

AL: Yes.

EL: I saw Mike last month. [There was] a dinner in Portland – the World Affairs Council gave Senator Mitchell its first international award – and so I saw Mike. I saw him at the beginning of the reception and we walked out of the building together, so we've always been good friends. We usually don't have much occasion to see one another, but there was a time on Senator Mitchell's staff when he and I had desks right next to each other. I remember that room wasn't particularly crowded, which was probably the only time in all those years on the Hill that the office wasn't too, too crowded.

But he had made an effective transition from a Republican congressman to a Democratic senator, because he used to work for Bill Cohen. So, we still talk and, I guess we're still as politically observant as we always were. I guess you can't work for someone in high elective office without developing antennae about how the world works and what you think is going to happen and that sort of thing.

So those are the ones [who] come most closely to mind. There were others, there was Leon Billings, there was – I'm thinking of chiefs of staff.

AL: Right.

EL: There was Maynard Toll; he was the first one when I arrived with [] Senator Muskie. [After] Maynard Toll there was Leon Billings, then there was Jim Case, David Johnson, so there were quite a few chiefs of staff over the years.

And then I knew people on the committees. I knew David Johnson because he used to be in Intergovernmental Relations. There was Karl Braithwaite, who was also on the Environment and Public Works [Subcommittee], and Charlene [Sturbitts on the same subcommittee]; and who was head of IGR? Who was head of IGR? I can see his face [Al From]. He's head of the Democratic Leadership Council.

AL: Oh, I almost know who, I can't come up with it.

EL: I haven't seen him in many years. He did come to Maine for a dinner maybe five or ten years ago.

AL: Yeah, I will have to look that up.

EL: Yeah. Who else? Well, there was [the staff director] of the [Senate] Budget Committee, there were two, there was Doug, I don't remember his [last] name [Doug Bennett]. And before [him] it was John McEvoy.

AL: Oh, John McEvoy, yes.

EL: John McEvoy, yeah.

AL: So a lot of Muskie's staff –

EL: A lot of Muskie staff.

AL: - were there, at least in those early years.

EL: A lot of Muskie's staff [] stayed for a long, long time. People stayed for a long time because Senator Muskie was really a beacon, he was just really, tremendously intelligent, tremendously honest; and then George Mitchell was the same, and nobody wanted to leave their jobs. Because it was just an honor to work for [people] like that.

AL: Did you have a sense that the senators felt, that they were loyal to their staff as well?

EL: Yes, sure.

AL: That was reciprocating?

EL: Sure, sure. I mean, they were busy and didn't have much white space on their calendars, but I think they appreciated us.

AL: Can you talk about, I don't know how many different chiefs of staff were there during your period with Senator Mitchell.

EL: Probably two.

AL: Did, and then their leadership, how they led the office, and in terms of Senator Mitchell and his style, management style, or was it really the executive that led the office and created the style? I guess I'm asking, I'm not asking a very clear question.

EL: No, I think I know what you're getting at.

AL: Yeah. I'm trying to see, what was the style of the office, how did it differ or change with different people in the leadership role?

EL: I don't think the style was significantly different between each senator. I think I may have seen Senator Mitchell a little more often than Senator Muskie, but I really didn't have much contact on a day-to-day basis because I just had a tremendous amount of work to do. And every once in a while our paths would [cross], and of course both of them knew very well who I was. But I don't know that there was that much of a difference.

And in the years that I was with Senator Mitchell, he was not as active legislatively as Senator Muskie had been. But there was a difference in seniority, and there was a difference in the political party controlling the Senate, and that made a big difference – it made a big difference. Senator Muskie had been in the Senate from 1958 and he was until 1980, so he was very comfortable with the legislative process. In 1976 he became chairman of the new Senate Budget Committee, so he also had all the responsibilities that came with that. And so he was used to being in a leadership position, whereas George started out more slowly but quickly rose to the occasion.

AL: Now, 1984 was the year that you departed, and you said many other staff left that year as well. What feeling did you have from that – there were a good number of people who left at the same time?

EL: Yeah, I think I left and then I think Mike Hastings did. Mike went to work for Catholic Charities in Africa. He went to The Gambia – I don't know if that was the only country – but he was in Africa for a number of years, took his wife and two sons. And I think David Johnson left that year to set up his own lobbying firm, in the fall I think. So, there were still plenty of long-timers, but I think that George [Mitchell] and David Johnson had a good relationship. It turned out to be a mutually beneficial one because over the years David Johnson has done a tremendous amount for the Senator, particularly as relates to the Mitchell Institute.

The Senator left the Senate in 1994, and I think that fall there was a big fund raiser in Washington that was organized by David, I think, to raise money for the Senator's scholarship fund. There was no Mitchell Institute at that time, not until January of '99 – because the Senator had begun the scholarship fund by setting aside a million dollars in leftover campaign money, and then he had two fund raisers that year, one in Washington in September or October, and one in Maine at the Holiday Inn in December, as I recall, and all of that was to add to the scholarship fund.

That's what was most important to him. If he wasn't going to stay in the Senate, and he was smart enough to know that since he was exiting the Senate and the place where he was in a position to do favors for people, this was really the last time [] he could hope to raise serious money for that scholarship fund.

So David was very helpful to him then; [and] over the years David helped get line-item

appropriations for the Mitchell Institute several times. I mean, we don't have a twenty million dollar endowment for nothing.

AL: Wow.

EL: Yeah, we're only going to be ten years old next year and no charity can expect to have that kind of an endowment.

AL: That's wonderful.

EL: Yup. But, you know, Maine students and their families are the beneficiaries.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

EL: So it's certainly a worthwhile cause.

AL: Absolutely. And you were there sort of during the formative years, when it was the Mitchell Scholarship Program?

EL: Well, I guess we'll just skip over to that, because the Senator called me in mid-1994 and said he wanted to establish a scholarship program. Because he had announced on March 1st, I think, of '94, that he was going to step down from the Senate.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

EL: Which came as a shock because he had been raising money for over a year for his reelection. And I remember then-new President Bill Clinton had come to [] Portland at the Eastland, in June of 1993, for a big fund raiser for [the Senator's] reelection. So [his announcement] came as a surprise.

And then he decided, on his own, that he wanted to create the scholarship program, and he wasn't quite sure how to do it. And so Trish Riley – who today is Governor Baldacci's chief person on the Dirigo Health Plan – [] said to him one day, "You ought to give the money to the Maine Community Foundation in Ellsworth because they manage many scholarship programs." So he explored it, and he called me [in May or June of 1994] and asked me if I would work on it with him. And I did, and we came up with the parameters of a scholarship program: that the money would be given to students going to a four-year college or university in Maine; and they would need to graduate from a Maine high school; and the awards were to be made on the basis of three factors: on academic excellence, [] community service, and [] financial need.

And so I had drafted a gift letter and an attachment and dealt with the [Maine] Community Foundation. He gave most of the money that he had left over from his [reelection] campaign to the Maine Community Foundation for the scholarship fund, and he had a few hundred thousand dollars that went to Bowdoin College because he was going to give his papers and he wanted

them to have some money with which to set up the whole thing. It takes money to do that.

So the Maine Community Foundation agreed to [set up his scholarship fund], and it was in the original gift letter that there would be an advisory committee to the foundation [for his fund]. And [] the foundation would [] solicit applications from Maine high school seniors, and they would do most of the evaluation, they would winnow down the number [of applicants] to maybe something like seventy-five. And in the first two years, in '95 and '96 I think, there was enough money to provide twenty students with a \$2,500 scholarship.

And there aren't many of us who have been working on the scholarship program throughout – there are about four of us, I would say. We would meet at Bates College [during the first four years] because Bill Hiss was kind enough to make the Muskie Archives available to us and [] feed us and bring in food, and we would [] read the applications [given to us by the foundation]. And then, really all of these students were competing against each other because we had to come up with twenty, so it wasn't one for every high school as it is today. And we would be in different groups, and we would pass around the folders, and then we would have a big meeting and [] decide, as a group (there might be, you know, fifteen or twenty of us), who would get the scholarships.

The other thing I want to say is, there was one other criterion for the scholarship program in those days, and that is, no high school could get a second scholarship until every public high school [in Maine] had received one. So that meant that if, hypothetically, Portland High School had a graduate in the first year [who got a scholarship, then Portland High School would not get another scholarship for many more years. Because if you [gave out] twenty [scholarships] per year, it might be six or eight or ten years –

AL: Hmm-hmm.

EL: - before they got another one, with no guarantee as to which high schools would get it in any given year. So that with each of the four years, I think it was '95, -6, -7 and -8, we would eliminate high schools. And I think the foundation would only solicit [applications] from the remaining high schools that became eligible.

AL: Right.

EL: That was the way the Senator wanted it, and I remember him telling me distinctly, "Estelle, there are always needy students." And he did not want this to be a program for elite students going to Ivy League schools. He wanted to try to lift people out of poverty, he wanted to help people on the merits, and he has said publicly many times, "I don't think anyone should be guaranteed success, but everyone should be given a fair chance at success," or words very close to that []. If you want to better yourself, you should have the chance.

And of course one thing that characterizes the Senator is someone who rose from the most humble beginnings to greatness. But he always remembered [these] beginnings, and [believes]

there are [] many diamonds in the rough. And we hope to find them and give them a boost. That was his idea [of] the scholarship program.

So, getting back to the process in those first four years, when we had all read all of the applications, it would be all day Friday and half of Saturday, usually. We would have a big meeting and we would all go over the students' [applications] that we had read, and all of us would have a favorite as to who we wanted to win. They had a beautiful essay, or they had just a tearful misfortune in their life or – everyone liked someone, and we would come up with a group of twenty. And then there would be a brunch in Bangor for all of those students and their parents and the Senator, and we were all invited.

And also in those early years the Senator wanted the members of the advisory committee to go to [individual] high schools and present [the scholarship]. So I did go, I mean I went to, I think, Farmington and I went to Wiscasset and I went to a few far-flung places.

So the first two years [of the scholarship program] we had twenty recipients, and then – this got to be in the latter part of the '90s – the stock market was doing so well that the scholarship fund was producing more revenue. And so the Senator said, "Well, let's give the money out," because his feeling always was [that] there are lots of needy students. So in [] '97, '98, I believe we gave out thirty \$2,500 scholarships, so we increased the number of students who were getting it. Which was fine with us. This really made a difference.

Then, in the latter part of '98, an anonymous donor went to Senator Mitchell and said, "We will give you enough money to fund 160" – there are 130 public high schools – "Give you enough money to fund 160 scholarships at \$4,000 each, up from \$2,500, for five years, plus all the money for administration of a company that you can set up."

AL: And this was for how long?

EL: For five years.

AL: For five years.

EL: For five years, so we were given 160 x \$4,000 for five years, plus administrative money on top of that to hire staff to administer [a new entity]. So the Senator called me at the very end of 1998, I think, and asked me if I would set up a nonprofit corporation, which I did. I [asked], "What do you want to call it?" "Senator George J. Mitchell Institute," and then he [added], "Scholarship and Research Institute," because the [anonymous] donor wanted research done on the barriers to students in going on to higher education. One might think [the barriers] might be financial only, but there can be other barriers as well. For those coming from families without any college education, there can be an expectation that 'we did fine with a high school diploma, and we are sure you can, too.'

And in fact in Maine, the number of people who are college educated is very small, it's maybe

ten or fifteen percent – I mean it’s very small. I would not have thought that. But I think my generation may have been the first where it was commonly expected that you would go to college. But in my parents’ generation – my father was born in 1911, my mother in 1915 – even if you had the money you didn’t go to college. It was actively discouraged because people didn’t do that. You went to work and you brought in money for the family. So, times have changed very much over the course of the twentieth century.

And so the Mitchell Institute started off in 1999 with two staff persons: Colleen Quint, who is the executive director, and Patty Higgins, who is responsible for the scholarship program. And then they hired more people. They brought in Lisa Plimpton, who does the research, and then they expanded from there; they hired Bonnie Titcomb Lewis to do [] development, and [it’s now called] advancement.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

EL: I guess ‘fund-raising’ has taken on progressively different terms. And then [Colleen] hired Lisa Veleff, and together they do the most wonderful job imaginable. They are involved in all aspects of higher education. Colleen is on several boards – works with the Maine Department of Education, is on some boards nationally. All of them are very well known for their efforts, and so I feel blessed that the Mitchell Institute has so many talented and competent staff who have worked there continuously over time.

AL: I’m going to pause real quick and flip the tape.

*End of Side A
Side B*

AL: We are now on Side B.

EL: Okay.

AL: And who were some of those others in that very small group at the beginning? You mentioned Bill Hiss.

EL: Oh, yes; well, there was Mary Mitchell Friedman –

AL: Yes.

EL: - who has been the president – well, from the beginning and who are still there now?

AL: Not necessarily.

EL: Not necessarily. Actually, I even found a couple of files dating back – that shows you what kind of a pack rat I am; see, I even have the names of the recipients in 1995. [Others

involved at the beginning were] Barbara Atkins, Mary McAleney, [and] Bill Hiss.

AL: Was Harold Pachios involved at the beginning?

EL: He was a member of the advisory committee, but I don't recall him attending.

AL: Yeah.

EL: The Senator wanted several of his personal friends, and they didn't always come.

AL: Yeah.

EL: But former staff came.

AL: Yeah.

EL: We showed up. There were others, so those were – see, I even have the committee here.

AL: I've heard the name, and not sure what his connection is to Senator Mitchell.

EL: Hmm-hmm.

AL: His name is Woody Jones. Now, who is that?

EL: Well, Woody – I'm not the best person to ask – Woody, I know that he managed a hedge fund at some point.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

EL: And I think he may have made a lot of money in that capacity. And he is retired today. I would say he's about my age, he's retired today, and he's known the Senator for a long time, he and his wife Connie.

AL: As friends?

EL: As friends, yeah.

AL: Okay.

EL: I don't happen to know more, but someone like Larry Benoit would know.

AL: Larry would know.

EL: Yeah, Larry would know. You know, some of the Maine staff [] know many of these

people personally. I might not know the origin of the connection, but I would get to know them when I was in Washington.

AL: Right. Okay. Yeah, some names pop up and the more context I have helps me find them.

EL: Right, right. So Barbara Keefe and Bill Hiss and [] Mary Mitchell Friedman have consistently done this over the years. I don't know if Barbara Keefe – Barbara Keefe is on the board of the Mitchell Institute – I don't know if she reads [applications]. They made me the chairman of the Scholarship Committee, so I always read –

AL: Hmmm.

EL: - for, usually, at least a day. I think this year I read from nine until two, two thirty, I read applications from high schools in two counties.

AL: And who is Barbara Keefe?

EL: Barbara Keefe works for the University of Maine, and her office is on Mackworth Island, at the Baxter School for the Deaf, and she knows how to use sign language, and she was the treasurer of Senator Mitchell's reelection campaigns. So her association with Senator Mitchell goes back many years.

AL: Hmm-hmm.

EL: And I will say, as a complete aside, you may have seen in Portland, there are all these decorated lighthouses that are all over the place.

AL: Yes.

EL: That was her idea.

AL: Wow.

EL: And I said to her once (I remember, because there was an article about it), "Well, Barbara, have you found fame and fortune with this idea about the lighthouses?" And she said, "Neither." Because what they did was, they had artists and different people decorate the lighthouses, and then they auctioned them off – I think businesses [bought] them.

AL: Right.

EL: And the proceeds were divided among different charities, one of which was the Mitchell Institute. So it was a fairly unusual kind of thing.

AL: Yeah.

EL: And many of them remain in Portland, but I know there's one in Boothbay Harbor. But many of them remained around here.

AL: Oh, that's a neat story.

EL: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Barbara is a dear person, I always enjoy seeing her. Which only happens but twice a year, when the board meets.

AL: I guess I'd like to ask sort of this real broad –

EL: Yeah.

AL: - philosophical question, in a way.

EL: Yeah.

AL: In terms of the years that you've known Senator Mitchell, can you talk about what you've observed as some of his strengths, and some weaknesses?

EL: Oh yes, oh yes. Well, I thought about that this morning, because I wanted to come up with very concrete things, as much as I could, because I think he is the person I most admire of everyone I've ever met. And Senator Muskie is a close second.

And [Senator Mitchell] has just a combination of talents that make him different from everyone else. First is his intelligence – he has absolutely top flight intelligence. Second [are] his honesty and integrity. He is just as honest as the day is long. If he says he's going to do something, he'll do it. And I think that made him effective as [] majority leader, for example, because his word was good. And he had to work with Bob Dole, who was the minority leader at the time, and I've heard Bob Dole say, "I never had a problem in dealing with George." Even though the two men had political views that were very far apart, someone had to be able to communicate between the sides to know what the other was going to do and that sort of thing. But Senator Mitchell was always open to that.

And I remember when the Senator was being considered for a position on the Supreme Court, a news reporter called me from Washington, and I don't know how he got my name, but he asked me why I thought the Senator was effective as a majority leader. And I said, "Well, you know, these are very different times than in the late '50s or early '60s when Lyndon Johnson" – I suppose it was in the '50s – "when Lyndon Johnson was Senate majority leader because he used to browbeat people and threaten to take away their committee assignments or their leadership if they didn't do what he said." And I said, "Today, you can't operate that way, you can only achieve your goals by reason, by the use of reason and persuasion with your colleagues." And that's how he did it, and people understood that he had a great deal of integrity and [] he was so respectful toward others that people could see, people of any political stripe could see, that even

if [they] disagreed with him, he had arrived at his conclusion about a legislative position honestly, that he had legitimate reasons for believing as he did. All right? So that's why he got, I think, eighty-one percent of the vote one time []: he would speak honestly about why he believed certain things, and he would come out with all of the reasons, and you had to respect him for that – that he had thought about it, he had looked at [various] positions, and [] he knew what he wanted to do. But he always said it in such a respectful way that he would engender respect on the part of others.

He was, shall we say, the antithesis of Newt Gingrich, who operated by name calling, by trying to annihilate the opposition. I mean it was a totally different way. And I had said to that reporter who [asked], “Why do you think Senator Mitchell is effective as a majority leader?” [it] is because he operates by reason and persuasion, and he respects people, and he receives respect in return.

That didn't mean he couldn't be tough, because he made George Herbert Walker Bush go back on his promise of no new [] taxes, much to the ultimate chagrin of the elder Mr. Bush and the Republican Party. But he just combined his intellect with that kind of honesty and integrity that made a difference, [] made him outstanding as a leader.

Another quality of his is his compassion for people. I think because he came from humble beginnings and was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he understood that many people struggle. And I remember him talking about the stigma that people often attach to the unemployed. And he would often speak of his father, who was – he would openly speak about it, I don't think many politicians would – [p/o] who was a janitor at Colby College, and how his father lost his job at [one] point, and how his father was so humiliated by it. But he said, you know, “My father was as worthy of respect as anyone else, it wasn't his fault that he didn't have a job.”

[] Another way that he showed compassion, I thought, is that he never laughed at people, ever. He never joked about anyone, never made fun of anyone; he just refused to engage in that. And I remember once, when he ran for election in 1982, his opponent was David Emery, who we didn't think was quite the same caliber as Senator Mitchell and sometimes [the staff would] try to joke about him [a little]. [Well], we could not joke in the Senator's presence because he did not want that; he never condoned that kind of thing.

And I remember hearing him say in speeches, “No one likes to be laughed at.” So he knew many universal truths, and lived by them. Because how many people do things, and [] are laughed [at], [] are condemned, [] are looked down on [by] society. But he still had a compassion for people. And in keeping with that compassion is the desire to help people. [] He always looked out for the downtrodden as well as for the well-to-do, and I think that his scholarship program is a further extension of his desire to help people.

Because I remember in the early years of the scholarship program, when I would go out and [present] the award [at a high school] I would say, “This is the Senator's living legacy to Maine.

Aside from his family, he cares about this scholarship program more than anything else, more than anything else, and wants to be assured that the program will continue in perpetuity.” And I think it is a wonderful thing, especially when you consider that while only two-thirds of students who enter college graduate, [the] retention rate [among Mitchell Scholars] is ninety-five percent, and many of [the scholars] have leadership positions. Because we emphasize community service, many of them are in projects [while in college] to help out the community – people less fortunate – which is a very good thing.

Other qualities of his: his eternal gratitude to those who helped him. I have never seen [anyone] who refuses to forget someone [who] helped [him], whether it was a staff person, whether it’s a donor to his political campaigns, or a donor to the scholarship fund. I know that at the gala that we have in the fall for the Mitchell Institute, which is the large fund raiser we have annually, he always [recognizes] Leon Gorman and his wife []. They gave a hundred, or a hundred and twenty-five thousand [dollars], for what we call a Pioneer Scholarship. The two men were at Bowdoin together, they were one year apart, and so they’ve known each other since then. And [] he [publicly] thanks Leon Gorman every year [at the gala]. So, you know, I always think –

AL: Yeah.

EL: - it’s got to be great for Leon and his wife because they gave a long time ago [and] they’re still getting many accolades. I guess the other thing I want to say is Senator Mitchell’s modesty – his modesty suffuses everything he does. You can’t help but admire him and respect him and want to be associated with him. How could you possibly dislike someone like that? You might disagree with the political positions [] he had, but he’s just so genuine about his beliefs.

And I’ve often thought that the combination of his intellect and his modesty are what make him very rare, what made him very rare as a politician. And I think that when he did the peace accords in Northern Ireland – of course I had no part in that but you would hear about it periodically – he would always talk about the children, talk about the fact that he had a son and say, “If you care about your children – not you, your children – [you will do something].” Because it is universal that parents want their children to have a better life than they did – that is a universal sentiment. “If you care about your children, we need to stop this violence.” [p/o] “And I hope someday to return with my son and [] sit in the chamber of Parliament, and you will be passing legislation just when your children will have grown up.” It was a very interesting take on the way to get to people, because he was able to get at their heart, not at their passion for violence. He took them in a different way.

And let me see, another quality of his is his speaking ability. He has the ability to speak publicly in a way that distills complex matters into simple terms so everyone can understand. And within the last month or two my neighbor, who is a fifth grade teacher, came home and [p/o] just sort of exploded [about the Bush administration and] said to me, “I heard George Mitchell on – (wherever it was, NPR, someplace) – and I want to know why he isn’t president. I mean, he speaks so well...,” and just on and on, and it just ... you know?

Another quality is his tremendous hard work. I never saw anyone work harder. He would work to the end of his strength. I remember in 1982, he won his own first election to the Senate, defeating David Emery, and said to us right after the election, "Okay, I want to set up hearings all over the state on Social Security," because [Congress] needed to [pass] Social Security legislation [to rescue the program]. And [] the senator across the hall from us was Howard Metzenbaum of Ohio, who is a millionaire, and what did Howard do? Howard won his reelection and [] took a month off. [But] Senator Mitchell said [to the staff], "I want you to set up meetings all over the state." I think we set up forty-six hearings.

It was unbelievable. It was like, not just Biddeford-Saco, there was one in Biddeford, one in Saco, one in Lewiston, one in Auburn, one in Bangor, one in Brewer; it was like that: everywhere, all the major places in the state. And he wanted to talk about the need to reform the Social Security program. And what it was going to involve was a series of tax increases over the course of the next ten to twenty years in order to make the program solvent.

And I would say as an aside [to you, Andrea], the reason [the program is] going insolvent is that these tax increases [starting in 1983] were going to generate a surplus over and above [the] benefits [that] were going to be paid out every year, but that surplus over the years wasn't [] put into a bank account. For the sake of a simple explanation, [the annual surplus in tax revenues] was spent by Congress [annually] to lower the size of the deficit. So what the Treasury Department did was write bonds, or the equivalent of a promissory note, to the Social Security Trust Fund saying, "Okay, we took fifty billion dollars from your trust fund and we'll give it back to you some day." So there is one five-drawer file cabinet at the Social Security Administration in Parkersburg, West Virginia, that is full of these bonds.

But the point is, it's a debt instrument. You don't have the cash; the government would still have to come up with the money. So sadly, [the 1983 legislation] didn't work because Congress was not [fiscally] responsible. With deficit spending every year they'd say, "Well, we got a two hundred and fifty billion dollar deficit." It was probably [more] like three hundred billion, but they said two-fifty because the money they took from the extra Social Security revenues went to lower the size of the annual deficit.

AL: Right.

EL: That's why we're still in trouble today.

But anyway, tremendous hard work. And I remember, when he was about half way through the hearings he looked at us and said, "Too many hearings." And we thought, 'Well, whose fault is that?' You know, because he's the one [who] wanted Biddeford and Saco, Lewiston and Auburn, [et cetera]. You could have had just one in each place, [but] no, it had to be that way, and we gave him what he wanted.

AL: He wanted to be thorough.

EL: He wanted to talk to everyone about it. And when he was majority leader – I did not work for him then – friends of mine would tell me that they’d gone to Washington and they stopped in to see him, [usually in the Capitol]. [p/o] And they would go see him and they would tell me that his face was white, that he was so [exhausted], he was visibly exhausted all the time, that it was almost frightening that his countenance showed such fatigue. So when I say tremendous hard work, I mean it. *Tremendous* hard work.

And I guess the final quality, I would say, is just total dedication to the people of Maine – when he was in the Senate and as evinced by his scholarship program. You could not separate him from Maine when he was in the Senate. And I remember one time, just one small encounter when he was fairly new to the Senate, and David Johnson had said something to him about, “You’re going to need to do ...” – I don’t know if it was fund-raising in Washington or [some other thing – but] the Senator said, “Well, you’re not going to keep me from Maine, you’re not going to keep me from seeing people in Maine.” You know, that would have been anathema. He had a rule in the Senate, when he was in the Senate anybody from Maine who came down could see him. Anybody. [Didn’t] matter who [they] were, he [] always [had] an open door policy. He didn’t want to be unapproachable or unreachable, and that was part of his popular appeal. And part of his respect for people is that no one was too good for him, no one was unimportant, no one was small, everyone could see him. And they might not, with the years, get to see him for the amount of time that they wanted, but they would get to see him.

I looked at your question seven and – what I thought were his greatest weaknesses – and maybe I’ve been blinded by the light. I don’t really see many weaknesses in him. Maybe that he worked a little too hard for his own good health.

AL: Right

EL: But if ever there was a role model, he is it.

AL: And my last question, we talked a little bit before we started the tape about anecdotes.

EL: Yes.

AL: And whether you thought of any that, I mean you really did have a few anecdotes in some of the answers to my questions.

EL: Yeah, yeah.

AL: Is there anything else that you’d like to add?

EL: I can’t think of anything off the top of my head. But I’m sure if ever you got a few of us together, like Larry Benoit and Mary McAleney and Mike Hastings and me –

AL: Hmm-hmm.

EL: - we could probably come up with a large number of them. That was the one thing I looked at last night, put a question mark on and, as I said, in part, [in] general [I] did not accompany him on the campaign trail. I remember once he was having hearings that I accompanied him [on], on [the subject of] Medicare, and I had gone with him to Aroostook County. But it didn't happen very often because if he traveled in Maine, [he traveled with the Maine staff].

AL: Right.

EL: You know, he didn't really need me. I guess one small thing I would hearken back to is, you asked me when I first met him, and I met him at Joe Tydings' dacha in the fall of 1973. And at election time in 1974, the Muskie office said, "We want you to go to Lewiston, which is my hometown, and work on his campaign for two weeks."

Now, the independent candidate was Jim Longley, who was a millionaire insurance man from Lewiston. And so they said, "We want someone from Lewiston who will go work on the campaign and make phone calls," and I remember making a lot of calls to people in Lewiston and Auburn, and they were undecided, undecided. At any rate, I remember distinctly the Senator – George then, just an attorney like me – walked into the campaign headquarters with that beautiful smile of his, and of course I had met him a year before, and I just looked at him and I just thought [] he radiated goodness. He radiated goodness. I thought, "This is a decent man." I didn't know him the way Senator Muskie knew him, or that Gayle knew him, because I hadn't known him over that great a time []. I came to know him better [later], but I thought [then], "You know, there's just something special about him, there's something different about him."

And so I was just enormously saddened when he lost [the gubernatorial election], and within the year after that, maybe within six months, he actually sent me a thank you note –

AL: Hmm-hmm.

EL: - that I still have somewhere, thanking me for my help on his campaign. When really, all I had done was work those two weeks before the election. But that goes into his trait of enormous gratitude, and not forgetting to say thank you to anyone [].

AL: Hmm-hmm. Great, thank you so much.

EL: Okay.

End of Interview