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Recommended Citation

Horwitz, Kelly R., "Interview with Kelly Horwitz by Andrea L'Hommedieu" (2009). *George J. Mitchell Oral History Project*. 121.

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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Kelly Riordan Horwitz
(Interviewer: *Andrea L'Hommedieu*)

GMOH# 102
May 20, 2009

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College, the date is May 20, 2009, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu, I am conducting a telephone interview with Kelly Riordan Horwitz in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and I'm in Auburn, Maine. Kelly, could you just start by saying and spelling your full name?

Kelly Horwitz: Kelly Riordan Horwitz, K-E-L-L-Y, R-I-O-R-D-A-N, H-O-R-W-I-T-Z.

AL: And where and when were you born?

KH: I was born in Lewiston, Maine, August 28, 1967.

AL: And did you grow up in Lewiston or another community?

KH: I grew up in Livermore Falls.

AL: Livermore Falls, so that's not far, maybe twenty miles from the Lewiston area. Were you born in Lewiston because that's where the hospital was?

KH: Yes.

AL: So what was Livermore Falls like when you were growing up?

KH: Livermore Falls is and was very dependent on the paper mill, primarily International Paper in the neighboring community of Jay, but there was also the Otis Mill, which was on the border between Livermore Falls and Jay. It was a small community of about three thousand people; it was where my father's family was from, so my grandparents were there and a lot of my aunts and uncles. It was the kind of place where you knew virtually everyone who lived there.

AL: Right, and what were your parents' names?

KH: My father's name is John Peter Riordan, he always had gone by Peter, and my mother was Vicki Johnson Riordan.

AL: And what did they do for work in the community?

KH: My father was a truck driver, my mother stayed at home with us 'til we were in school. When I was about ten years old she first went back to work, first at, there was a shoe shop in town, and then later she began to work for a construction company at the paper mill.

AL: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

KH: I have twin brothers who are three-and-a-half years younger than me, and my parents divorced when I was thirteen, my father remarried, and then I have a half brother who's sixteen years younger than me.

AL: Oh wow, so a big spread in age there. Now, you said you went to Livermore High School?

KH: Livermore Falls High School, which served Livermore, Livermore Falls, and Fayette. I spent one year, my junior year of high school I went to Gould Academy in Bethel, Maine.

AL: And how did you get that opportunity?

KH: After my parents' divorce, I think my mother was a little concerned that I might be going down the wrong path, let's say, in high school, and so she started exploring options for me to spend the year away at boarding school, and it worked out that I got some financial aid at Gould and was able to go there for the year.

AL: And so you came back for your senior year and graduated from Livermore Falls High School?

KH: I did.

AL: And what did you do after that?

KH: After that I went to Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, and got my college degree, a Bachelor of Science degree in education and social policy.

AL: And so at what point did you connect with Senator Mitchell?

KH: After graduation. When I was in college I, I'd always had an interest in politics and I became very involved in local Democratic Party politics in Evanston, and along with a couple of other friends from college we actually became precinct captains and helped organize the college campus in 1988, that was a presidential election year, obviously, and once I'd been bitten by the political bug I really wanted to go down that road.

And it so happened that obviously 1988, that's when George Mitchell was elected majority leader, and being from Maine, I wanted to work for him. And it worked out well, because his

staff was vastly expanding as he took on his role as majority leader, so I guess probably starting in the beginning, probably January or February, somewhere in that time frame, I first started sending out resumes and saying to people, 'I want to move to Washington and work for you,' and Mitchell was one of the people I targeted. And Mary McAleney agreed to meet with me over my spring break, which must have been about March of that year, I did a trip to Washington to try to start making some connections, and Mary told me to keep in touch and I periodically would drop her a letter or call her, obviously, it was the days before e-mail.

And you know, the difficult thing I guess, being a college senior and wanting to work in Washington is, it wasn't like some of the paths that other people were following, going into investment banking or finance or something like that where there was very much a routine-ized way for applying for jobs and to know three or six months in advance, yes, this is where I'm going to work after graduation. So it was really coming down to the wire, and I'd made plans to move to Washington with some friends from college, and I'm trying to think, it was sometime I think after I graduated in June, I was still in Chicago, working, but ready to move, and Mary called me up and said, "How would you like to work in our mail room?"

And again, after of course going to college for four years, a lot of other people, your friends in college are like, "You're going to go to work in a mail room? You put all this time and energy and money into a college education." And that was one of the things I guess, after I'd been on Capitol Hill, that I emphasized with other people looking for those jobs is that, how you have to get your foot in the door.

AL: So what did you do in the mail room?

KH: Well, when he became majority leader he of course had a huge increase in the amount of mail he was getting, and so they had added a second mail room position, there were two of us working in the mail room at that time. And also, the Senator took the position that he wanted to respond to everyone who wrote in, which my understanding is that that was a policy that was different from a lot of senators, in that most senators will only respond to their home state mail, especially if you're in a high visibility position or large state.

So sometimes it was much to our frustration that he wanted to respond to every single letter, but that was the policy we followed. And so when I started it was just literally sorting the incoming mail, and then managing the outgoing mail, the legislative correspondents would draft responses, with oversight from the legislative aides, and we would run the autopen for individual letters that went out, the ones that were truly just massive responses, you know, everyone writing in about the same exact bill with pretty much the same positions would, there would already be a pre-printed name on it, but a lot of the correspondence needed an autopen signature as well, so we managed that. And it's hard to believe, thinking back on it, but truly that took two people all day, every day to sort incoming mail and deal with the outgoing mail.

AL: And so in that position, how did you get recognized as having more potential?

KH: It's hard to believe, isn't it? I don't know, I was extra good with the autopen and they wanted to give me a chance. Let's see, there were, the people in the mail room and the people that, we had two people on the front desk as receptionists, and this is in the personal office, and then he had I guess one person in a receptionist kind of position in the majority leader's office. The mail room people dealt with all mail for both the personal office and the majority leader's office.

But those entry level positions were always viewed as entry level with the potential to move up, you'd be essentially groomed and given opportunities to do other things in the Mitchell empire. And that had been true for a long time, you can go back to Anita Jensen when she started with Muskie, was kind of whatever lackey position was the entry level position at that time, and she became Mitchell's speech writer, and obviously for Muskie as well, and one of the top legislative aides. So there was just that tradition I think in the office that they looked to hire people that they thought had potential to do other things in the office.

And I'd say, it's really hard for someone to come to Capitol Hill and not do something that's a stepping stone, which is something that you would try to gently explain to some of the interns who would come through and think that on day one they were going to be the senator's right hand person, advising on policy. And these are people who didn't even know what the *Congressional Record* was, or how to find a speech he'd given, or research votes. So I think that that system worked pretty well overall to get people adjusted to Capitol Hill and how things worked before throwing them into some situation where they're expected to do something that required a little more insider knowledge.

So, let's see, I don't know that I've actually answered your question. So I started in the mail room, and then it seemed like generally there was turnover almost every summer because you'd get people who would decide to go back to grad school, so I came in August of '89 and the following summer, as people were getting ready to go off to college, there were positions opening up for legislative correspondents, and that's where I went next in the office.

AL: Okay, and so you were on his personal staff as a legislative correspondent.

KH: Right.

AL: And so how long did you stay in that position?

KH: I knew you were going to ask that.

AL: It wasn't all the way up til '92, was it?

KH: And you know what, after I sent you that, it was actually '93 when I went to the floor, so now I need to work backwards. So '90 I started as an LC, I would say I did legislative correspondent stuff for about a year-and-a-half, and I did, obviously did, the whole job was writing, and I worked closely with Anita and Grace, Anita Jensen, Grace Reef, in that position,

and Anita liked my writing style and started to give me work as, doing some of the minor secondary speeches, and so that's part of what I transitioned into.

From legislative correspondent I took on the title of, I think it was special assistant, and I did some speech writing and started to try to – how do I describe it – organize the Senator's record in anticipation of him running for reelection in '94. So -

AL: Right, so you'd have all that information there for them.

KH: it would come in handy, as we started to get press enquiries and whatnot. So I did this just strange mishmash of work from I'd say, I don't know what it was, roughly the end of '91 to the middle of '93, where it was some speech writing, they peeled off some legislative issues and so I did some legislative assistant work, and then compiled Mitchell's record in anticipation of the election. It was a strange position that no one else in the office ever held, I believe.

AL: And what was Anita like to work with? That was quite a compliment for her to give you some of the speech writing work.

KH: Let's see, I, you know, I think the world of Anita and we worked well together. I joke that my career has been one in which I've always worked with amazing, highly talented, demanding women that no one else can work with. And for some reason, I just always had a great relationship with people that other people have difficulty to work with and end up in tears working with, and I don't know why that is. But Anita and I had a great relationship and, I mean I admire her greatly, she's so incredibly brilliant. But she calls it the way she sees it, so -

AL: Right, straightforward.

KH: Yeah, exactly, and she doesn't suffer fools. So I just was glad that she didn't put me in the 'fool' category. And she was an incredible teacher, too. Not a teacher in the sense of, 'oh, let me sit down with you for three hours and painstakingly spoon feed you,' but a great teacher in terms of, she knew what she was talking about, and if you were willing to sit back and observe and soak it up, there was a lot to be learned from her.

AL: Right, and you said you also worked with Grace Reef, and on what things did you work with her?

KH: Children's issues, primarily. And I'm trying to think, I did some, let's see - So with Anita, when they started kind of peeling off some discrete issues, I know that she gave me some of the Americans With Disabilities Act compliance issues, and in particular made me the point person for, within the Capitol complex, how are we going to become ADA compliant. With Grace, I'm trying to think, it was, I did some Social Security disability work, juvenile justice issues, well I guess that was more Anita's bailiwick. Gosh, I'm trying to remember what else I did with Grace. Pretty much whatever Grace would ask on a given day, but it was just mostly children's related issues. When I was a legislative correspondent for her we were doing,

obviously Family and Medical Leave Act was, had just come into being. Yeah, so between the two of them there was a lot of liaison with various women's groups.

AL: Right, and you said you did some work peripherally on DFAS [Defense Finance and Accounting Service] with Sandy Brown, at what point was that?

KH: I'll start by saying Sandy is one of my best friends, and we ultimately ended up being roommates on several occasions. Sandy also is just an amazing person, but I've also told her straight out that she can be her own worst enemy – this is the long way of getting to your answer – and Sandy would just about kill herself doing her job. And when DFAS was in the works, I mean she was just living and breathing DFAS. And I shared a room at that point with Anita, Grace, and Sandy, so I always kind of knew what was going on with their issues as well, and so I just would kind of step in and try to help Sandy with, play backup I guess, on DFAS. If there were things that she needed written or proofread I did some of that work.

But the thing I remember most clearly is the day that the application was due, frantically driving around Crystal City with her, trying to help her find whatever generic office this application was supposed to be dropped off at. And the thing about Crystal City is, everything is named Crystal, it's like Crystal Drive, Crystal Lane, Crystal Street, and here we were with, you know, of course I'm sure it was right down to the wire, where we're driving around this big, anonymous, not even a suburb, just this government wasteland of buildings, with this project that she has poured her life into for about six months to a year, and also keenly aware of how much it would mean for northern Maine to be able to get something like this, and the two of us just, it was like something out of a comedy movie where we're not sure where we're going, not sure what we're doing, and driving and running from place to place trying to figure out where to drop this application.

So I don't, you know, I did not have a lot of involvement in the details of DFAS and how it came about. It's like I said, it was just very peripheral, trying to save Sandy from herself on numerous occasions.

AL: And so the next step is probably you going from the personal office to the floor staff, when Senator Mitchell was majority leader. How did that come about? You said you were the only personal staff member that went to the floor staff.

KH: Yes, and I, I honestly don't know exactly how it came about. I'd had crossed paths with the Senator over the years, I wasn't in his office on a daily basis, I wasn't his John Hilley or Martha Pope or his right hand person, so I'm not quite sure how we developed that connection. I guess there are a couple of little vignettes along the way that stand out for me.

AL: Can you talk about those?

KH: Well, I guess I'm thinking about, for some reason, let's see, I came there in August of '89, in the spring of 1990, I have no idea what possessed me to do this but I applied with the Maine State Society to be their Cherry Blossom princess, which every state has a state society

that is headquartered in Washington, D.C., and in April of every year there is the National Cherry Blossom Festival and each state society chooses someone to be their representative to the Cherry Blossom Festival as their princess. And this is about the furthest thing removed from what I normally would do. I don't know what possessed me, I guess it was being in a new city and thinking this would be an interesting thing to do.

But I got selected, and so there is a whole week-long celebration and series of events that all the princesses from every state would attend fashion shows and luncheons, and at the end of the week there was a ball, to be followed next day by the parade. And every - I have no idea exactly what the selection criteria were for people to become a princess for their state society. I strongly suspect that being on the majority leader's staff didn't hurt; there were a lot of people who had political connections who ended up being the princesses.

And at the end of the week, at the ball, they choose the queen, they spin a giant wheel, it's like *Wheel of Fortune*, there's no bathing suit competition, this is not a pageant by any stretch of the imagination, and I was standing up there with all the other princesses, kind of mocking it a little bit, I was standing there and saying to the woman in front of me, I was clapping like I was on *Wheel of Fortune* and saying, "Big money, big money." And then it stopped on Maine, and I was now chosen as the queen to represent the United States at the Cherry Blossom Festivals in Japan. So I ended up dancing with the ambassador and being crowned with this giant crown that Mikimoto had designed, and I got a miniature one that I was supposed to wear to all my appearances.

And the next day I was in the parade, and a few days after that, or maybe a week after that, I ran into the Senator in the Russell Senate Building, he was over at the personal office for something, and he stopped to congratulate me and he said, it must have been maybe, was it Kristin Amerling one of the press people, he said, "I was just saying, I think Kelly got more press than me this week," because of course there were some stories in the papers back home. But that certainly wouldn't have set the groundwork you'd think for becoming like some sort of serious position on the floor staff, but we just, whenever we crossed paths he, there was this warm connection.

There was another time when one of the - this is not too long before I went to the floor, when I was in my special assistant position - and one of the special projects that had fallen in my lap, I guess it must have been something that was peeled off from Anita's portfolio, there was a Russian immigrant woman in Maine who was getting all this press, she was terminally ill, her name was Olga, and I can't believe I don't remember her last name any longer, and she wanted to be, her dying wish was to become a citizen, and she had a private bill pending in Congress to grant her citizenship and circumvent all the usual requirements.

And under normal circumstances, a private bill is a somewhat dicey proposition, it's a piece of legislation that only helps or affects a very small number of people, usually one or two or three people, and it's not something that you lightly want to go into. So somehow this had become my assignment, to look into the private legislation and figure out, should we help this woman become a citizen, and what sort of precedent does that set. And I'm trying to think, I think

Senator Cohen was the other senator at the time, and I believe he had certainly been supportive of this idea.

And I remember I did a memo to the Senator ultimately saying I think we ought to do whatever we can, this isn't going to open the floodgates for other people, and frankly, it was probably in early 1993 and he was going to be up for election the following year, and you don't really want to be portrayed as here's the mean man who let this woman die without becoming a citizen. And it just kind of languished and didn't get addressed, and that was just another one of those moments that I remember where he, I guess, I don't know what prompted it, if he got asked about it, because she ended up dying and she hadn't yet received her citizenship, and I don't know if there was then a story in the newspaper, or if he got asked about it when he went home, but he did turn to one of his press people and say, "I should have listened to Kelly. She told me that if we didn't help the dying Russian woman we were, it wasn't going to be a good PR move."

So that was the other distinct memory I have where we kind of connected on a particular issue and I was on his radar screen. So I have no idea what it was specifically, but when Charles Kinney left the floor staff, I don't know who went to the Senator, it may have been Abby Saffold, that's probably who it was – she was the secretary for the majority and oversaw the floor staff. And she went to the Senator with some recommendations, and a lot of times those, the people on the floor staff would be cultivated through the Cloakroom, that tended to be where they came from because in the Cloakroom they'd gotten to know all of the Democratic senators, they knew something about floor procedures, so that was kind of their natural pool of talent for that position.

And whoever went to the Senator with the recommendations was rebuffed, and he said, "I want someone from my personal office. What about Kelly Riordan?" At least that's how it came to me, and I do know that other names had been brought to him from, not from the personal office, and those people were let's say disappointed and not necessarily, not especially warm and receptive when I got the job. So even though I heard it third hand, I think there was some truth to it, that there were other people who were passed over and he picked this unknown from his personal office to be on the floor staff, and people, my immediate bosses were certainly very respectful of that and welcoming to me and helped me in every way they could, but I know there was certainly this sense of surprise and what do we do with this person, and who is she and is she competent.

So that's the story I know about how I came to be on the floor staff, they came back to me and, must have been June or July, and said, do you want this job. And I had no idea what the floor staff was, and I think Anita was in particular very supportive of this move, and she was going to be losing me as her 'Anita junior' in the office, so I wasn't sure what her reaction would be and she almost did back flips and said, "You have to take that job, that's a huge honor for you to be selected for that job and there's no question about it, you need to take it." And so, again, not knowing what it entailed and only knowing that Anita thought it was a terrific career move for me, I agreed to take it.

AL: Right, and so then you were on the floor staff, you must have had a lot more contact with Senator Mitchell at that point.

KH: Yes, at that point, certainly I'd see him every single day. Some days with more in-depth transactions than others, but yeah, we saw each other every day then, that he was on the floor.

AL: And can you talk about what your role was as the floor staff?

KH: It's hard to describe. I guess the way that I've described it to people who have no understanding at all of the process is, you're almost like the traffic cop or information booth sitting there on the Senate floor, and literally my job entailed sitting at the, in the well of the Senate for hours and hours every day. There were four of us on the Democratic side who fell under the floor staff title. When I first started it was Abby Saffold who was the secretary for the majority, Marty Paone who was the assistant secretary, and then Lula Davis, and then myself. No, I'm sorry, and then Art Cameron was there as well, so Abby was the overseer, she didn't actually kind of sit on the floor with us on a regular basis, she was Mitchell's top person in terms of setting the floor agenda and doing negotiations.

So we would be the Senator's eyes and ears on the floor, I guess is the best way to describe it. He would often be just across the hall in the majority leader's office, obviously in meetings during the day, or tending to other business, and we knew what his expectations were in terms of how the legislative day was supposed to progress, and we made sure that those expectations were fulfilled. We would be the ones who kept tabs on what all the other Democratic senators wanted in terms of legislation on the floor, so for instance, if someone wanted to offer an amendment to a pending bill, we had to keep tabs on that and know that if we entered into any sort of agreement to limit debate, it had to take account of the fact that Senator Wellstone wanted to offer an amendment on National Bicycle Day or whatever random thing it was that was his priority. And we also kept tabs on what they didn't want to happen, so if there was a particular bill pending in a committee that a senator had a problem with, we had to know that, oh no, we can't just call that bill up under unanimous consent without checking with Senator Bradley, and he might have a hold on the bill indefinitely, or he might have a hold on it until his particular concern is addressed.

So we were responsible for conveying all that information to the Senator as he set out the agenda, the legislative agenda. We had to know what bills couldn't come up yet because of things that were being worked out, and we had to know the ones that could come up could only be called up under certain circumstances. And then our job was to negotiate with the Republicans, who of course were keeping tabs on their members in a similar manner, to try to come to terms with how legislation on the floor was going to proceed, whether there would be a filibuster, when we were able to have votes. We might set a vote for a particular time based on, okay, there's a meeting going on at the White House, it involves ten senators so we can't vote before three o'clock because there's going to be a big chunk members who are out-of-pocket. So there were lots of details that went into the job.

AL: Right. How was it, and what were some of the challenges in terms of negotiating with the Republican side, were there certain members that were much easier to negotiate with than others?

KH: Yes, I have to say that we had great relationships with our staff counterparts on the Republican floor staff. The Senate really can't operate without trust, which probably seems counterintuitive to people on the outside, it seems like there's always this partisan rancor and people don't get along and nothing ever gets done. But the Senate has this aura of, 'oh, we're a gentlemen's club,' and I certainly use the word gentlemen advisedly and thinking consciously of the background of it being largely a bastion of older white men. And it has that aura about it, it's very clubby, and people understand that the way the Senate operates, any one person can just bring it to a grinding halt at any given time, so there has to be, ultimately has to be a lot of cooperation. Because if a person wants to gum up the works, he or she can, but that person also knows that anyone else can do the same thing to him or her. So ultimately, if you want to get something done, you have to learn how to work with other people in the Senate.

That said, there certainly were members on both sides of the aisle that were easier to work with, and more difficult to work with. And I always felt like you could see, lots of people come to Washington as young twenty-somethings and they're gung ho, whether they're Democrats or Republicans, and very partisan. I think a lot of people that stay for any length of time become more mellow, and I found that there were Democratic senators who were like nails on the chalkboard for me, and difficult to work with, and people that you wanted to walk out the door when you saw them come on the floor because you knew it was not going to be a good day if you had to deal with that particular person all day.

And then sitting on the Senate floor there are also, I also came to appreciate there were Republicans who were just very lovely people who had good intentions, who may have had a different perspective on things than I did, but they weren't growing horns, you know. And I know that my Republican counterparts on the Republican floor staff felt the same way, that there were people in their caucus that they could not stand, they'd roll their eyes about when we were having discussions, and Democrats, Democratic senators that they came to really admire.

So yes, there were people on both sides of the aisle that were more difficult to work with and made the job more difficult when you're trying to negotiate how legislation is going to proceed, and there were some who understood that to get ahead and get things done you had to work together well, and they made it easier to get things done in the Senate.

AL: Can you talk about, a little bit about what you observed of Senator Mitchell as majority leader? What were some of the things that made him successful as majority leader, or just descriptions of his style as compared to others that you saw?

KH: I think one of the things that made him successful, perhaps the key thing that made him successful, is that he commanded respect. And he commanded respect not because of veiled threats or bullying, and I guess I'm thinking of that because I did not work on the floor under

Senator Byrd and this is really just kind of secondhand impressions, but there were kind of almost legendary stories about Senator Byrd wielding power very differently from Senator Mitchell.

There is a story about, and of course Senator Byrd was Appropriations chairman for years and years and years, and that entailed the wielding of great power as well, and I remember hearing stories about, there was a very close vote on, that affected the coal industry during debate on the Clean Air Act in the early 1990s, and legend has it that people would go into Senator Byrd's office, and supposedly the vote was sitting on the wall next to his office, so when someone came in and wanted to ask him for money, there's this vote that's important to him hanging on the office wall, and you could just kind of look over and see, 'Oh, let's see, oh, did you vote for me on coal or not?' An implied threat that went along with that, that you would never get money for your state again if you didn't.

And Mitchell did not operate that way. I think he was a collaborator, and he was, tried to include people, listen to them, accommodate them. My understanding was that one of the reasons he became majority leader, and again, this pre-dated me, was he'd done a great job as head of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee in 1986 and brought in a huge new class of Democratic senators, and so that certainly helped, and people were grateful that he'd helped change the political course in the Senate for the Democrats – but I don't think it was just about calling in those favors. It really was, he was a smart man, I think people saw that and appreciated that, and he wanted to do what he could to help people as best he could in his caucus.

That said, what was interesting to me once I went to the Senate floor was seeing a side of him that I hadn't seen in the other times that I'd crossed paths with him during constituent meetings or public events and whatnot, and that was, he certainly had a temper. That I hadn't expected and would sometimes surprise me, and I think sometimes surprised his colleagues. Because the danger in being accommodating as majority leader is there are ninety-nine huge egos there who all think that everything that's a priority for them should be accommodated at all times. And one of my distinct memories of Senator Mitchell facing that problem was right after the Senate had come back from an August recess, and one of the challenges of being a majority leader is setting the schedule in the Senate, figuring out where there are going to be votes, how are we going to get this legislation done, and particularly by the time September rolls around and you've had August recess, you're up against the end of the fiscal year and in theory you're supposed to have all your appropriations bills passed.

And so it was probably the first week of September, they had just come back from the recess, and he was trying to get an appropriations bill done and he was getting requests from every senator there – well, that might be an exaggeration, but a large number of senators wanted to know – this would start about two o'clock every day: "When are we going to go home? When's the last vote of the day?" They'd be coming to us on the Senate floor and asking us, "Do you think I can plan dinner with my wife?", or, "I have a fund raiser tonight, what's the window going to be like for me to get out of here without missing a vote?"

And I have to say, one of the most entertaining parts of my job was watching the various personalities in the Senate, and my friends and I became somewhat adept at imitating various characters in the Senate. And I remember this day distinctly, so people are coming up to Mitchell left and right and saying, ‘oh, I want to go have dinner with my kids, oh, I need to whatever, walk the dog’ or whatever, I mean it was every excuse under the sun. The one that I remember clear as day, though, is Senator Strom Thurmond, the movie *Gettysburg* was debuting, they were having a special film viewing for VIPs, and he’d been invited to see the movie *Gettysburg* that night. And that was like the final straw for Mitchell, and you can, I’m sure- A lot of this ended up in the *Congressional Record*, I mean this is a public response, where he just blew a gasket and said, “We just got back from three weeks of recess, and now I’m hearing every excuse under the sun: ‘I don’t want to be here to vote tonight,’ ‘when are we going home?’ ‘I need to go to dinner.’ ‘I want to go see the movie *Gettysburg*.’”

And he would get this, especially when the cameras were on and he’s trying to contain his anger a little bit, he would get this smile and you just knew that that was, I don’t know, Defcon 1 was imminent, when he got this smile on his face that was just this tense, I’m barely containing my anger smile, and I swear, no more than thirty seconds had passed from when he just went off on the Senate floor about how we need to vote, we need to be here, I’m tired of your excuses. And Senator Thurmond walked up to him and said, “Mr. Majority Leader, can I go see *Gettysburg*? When are we leaving?” I just said, we’re staying here, we’re voting, we’re not going anywhere -

End of Side A
Side B

AL: Now we’re on side B. Okay, keep going. Can you repeat that last bit about what Byrd (*sic*: Thurmond) said, because I don’t think it recorded on the tape.

KH: Yes, Senator Thurmond, Strom Thurmond.

AL: I mean Thurmond, yes.

KH: Yes, Mitchell had just finished delivering his barely-contained-anger lecture to the Senate about they needed to have better work ethics and they were going to stay there and they were going to vote and do their job, and Strom Thurmond walked up to him and asked once again, “Mr. Majority Leader, can I go see *Gettysburg*? When are we leaving, I need to see *Gettysburg*.” And my friends and I of course were joking about how he didn’t need to go to see *Gettysburg* because he had probably *been* at Gettysburg, or he needed to go home and get his uniform out of the closet from his own campaign at Gettysburg, because of course he was the oldest member and quite a legend in the Senate in his own right.

So yes, so Mitchell walked this line I’d say between being accommodating and including everyone in the caucus, and occasionally having these explosions of anger where he tried to rein

them in and browbeat them a little bit. But that really is the secret to the Senate, to running the Senate that very few people understand and appreciate. I think they see a majority leader as, 'oh well, he's going to whip them into shape.' Now maybe he's, and maybe Lyndon Johnson created some of that expectation and mystique, but the way the Senate Rules are, you can't lead these people if they don't want to follow, you know; they can go off in their own direction at any given time. So it very much has to be about convincing people to follow you, rather than browbeating them, because that's only going to get you so far. And Mitchell was very good at I think convincing people.

And the other I guess secret to his success was, he just had that very reasonable judicial demeanor about him. He wouldn't be mistaken for a rock star, you know, he didn't have kind of this big personality or persona that would draw everyone's attention when you walk into the room, with some sort of magnetic personality. But I think a lot of people found his demeanor very reassuring because he didn't come across as some crazy partisan, and that drove the Republicans crazy I think, sometimes, because he'd come out and he would just, in a dispassionate way, lay down his case and make it seem like, or – and there was every basis for what he had to say – 'well the Republicans are the ones who are the problem, and they're slowing things down and they're standing in the way.' But it wasn't crazy finger pointing and tearing his hair out, he would just make this case and make them look bad, and seem eminently reasonable while he was doing it. And that was I think another piece of his success as a leader, and obviously his background as a judge and as a lawyer served him well in that capacity.

AL: Did you have a chance to observe his relationship with Senator Dole?

KH: Oh, yes. They were obviously constantly talking and interacting on the floor as they tried to figure out the Senate schedule, and I think for the most part it was a very good, respectful working relationship. They couldn't - Again, that's where the trust issue comes into play, you know, if they couldn't take each other at their word, then the place wasn't going to function. And I, jumping ahead a little bit, after Mitchell left and I went to law school, my first summer after entering law school, I ended up working for the law firm that he was at, and that Senator Dole was at, and we had a, the summer associates at the law firm had a breakfast or lunch one day with Dole, and I walked in late and he was making fun of the fact, "O, leave it to a former Mitchell staffer to stand me up and walk in late." But even then, he was just talking very affectionately about Mitchell and his relationship, and this was several years after they'd left the Senate. I wouldn't expect him to bad mouth Senator Mitchell, he's a good enough politician, he wouldn't do that, but he also didn't have to go out of his way to make clear that he thought so highly of the Senator after they no longer had that daily working relationship in the Senate.

So I think there was genuine respect and appreciation for each other, [] and I think an honest understanding of the limits that each of them had in terms of sometimes corralling their own caucus. They didn't take it personally for the most part if Senator Dole came to Mitchell and said, "Well, we can't agree to go forward on this bill," you know, there might be some handful of semi-crazy right wing people in his party who had an agenda that was at odds with whatever

Mitchell was trying to do, and I think for the most part Mitchell would accept that and understand that and didn't see it as Dole trying to pull a fast one on him or stirring up people in his caucus to try to thwart Mitchell. There wasn't- I don't think there was a lot of kind of cloak-and-dagger and 'let me manipulate things to the detriment of George Mitchell.' So they, from what I saw on the daily basis, they by and large had a very good, respectful working relationship with each other.

AL: And do you have any recollections that stand out in terms of Senator Mitchell's relationship with his Republican Maine senatorial counterpart, Bill Cohen?

KH: Nothing comes to mind immediately.

AL: So it wasn't sort of the same high level doing things together like there was with Dole.

KH: No, I certainly didn't see anything there that suggested a bad relationship, but it wasn't entering – I guess, now I'm thinking about it – it's just an interesting, in some ways the disparity in their positions at that time, and not to knock Bill Cohen, but Mitchell's focus was on his own caucus and on interacting with Dole when he was on the floor. And certainly, I mean I'm confident, I know that they worked together on things for the interests of Maine, but I just didn't see that, or don't recall that immediately in their interactions on the floor. That was, those were things that went on kind of behind closed doors, or in constituent meetings that I then wasn't observing in my position on the floor staff.

AL: And you said to remind you about law school and Senator Mitchell's role in that.

KH: Yes, I wanted to make sure to include that, because I think it's very revealing of a very human side of the Senator, and I've always thought I want to make sure the man gets credit for doing things that, a) he didn't have to do, and b) that no one was ever going to necessarily know about and give him press for or credit for. I sometimes wonder if one of the reasons – well let me back up.

I don't pretend or harbor these visions that I had some particularly special unique relationship with the Senator; he was incredibly good to me, he gave me terrific opportunities. I don't know why he chose me out of people on his staff to move over to the floor, which was a terrific opportunity. But sometimes I wonder whether there was a little bit of an affinity there because we both had kind of the rags to riches background, that my parents were working class people in a mill town in Maine, and I'd worked hard to get to go to college and wanted to make the best of that opportunity once it had been presented to me. So I know that for me certainly, that's part of what drew me to George Mitchell was knowing that he had worked hard to get where he was and he appreciated that.

So anyway, after he decided to retire, which I have to say was just, for me just a devastating blow. I thought, I still - To this day, he's one of the people I probably admire most in the entire

world. I went to Washington to work for George Mitchell, I didn't go to Washington to just work for anyone who came along. And the day that he announced he was retiring, if you find the *Washington Post* stories about that, they talk about how the entire staff was called to this room in the Capitol and he told us there, and that was really the first inkling that we'd had of it, and it talks about how staffers came out, you know, in tears, and I always felt like, oh, they must have seen me walking out.

And my first reaction was just: one, I was angry. I thought, 'this man is so incredibly talented and has this unique opportunity, this unique position of power, and he's walking away from it, and how can he do that, how can he do that' – not just to me, you know, of course it was a personal disappointment for me to have my role model walk away – but how can he do that to the people of Maine, how can he do that to our country? He's just an incredible person who ought to be doing exactly what he's doing.

So, you know, so he pulled the rug out from under us and walked away and decided to have his own life, and then I had to reassess. What did I want to do with my life now that it wasn't about working for George Mitchell? And Senator Daschle was kind enough to keep on all the floor staff. Generally leaders did that, it was in their best interest to have some stability in those positions because those people had the relationships with the caucus, but he didn't have to. So I had a job, and there were certainly a lot of things I loved about that job I was, although I was an education major my focus was in American history, and for me it was literally having a front seat, watching history be made. And that was something I never could have imagined being able to do.

So I stayed on with the job and mulled what I was going to do. I had thought on and off over the years about going to law school, and eventually decided that's where I was going to cast my lot. And like I said, I didn't presume to have some special pipeline to George Mitchell, so I started with Anita, I said, you know, "I know that Mitchell calls you all the time still for help on writing books and this and that. Could you, next time he calls you, can you talk to him and see he'll do a recommendation for me?" And she said she would, and the time lagged on and it just, nothing came of that.

And I don't remember how it came to pass that I, I eventually decided, well I'm going to call, or talk to Mitchell directly, because I don't think Anita has passed this along and this is something that's very important to me. So I do distinctly remember getting the call one day, he called me when I was working on the floor, and I came into the Cloakroom and he said, you know, "What's going on, what do you need?" And I told him I was going to law school, and I said, "Has Anita talked to you about doing a recommendation for me?" And he said basically, "Don't worry about Anita, you write a recommendation letter." Which is one of the hardest things you can be asked to do is like write your own recommendation letter. He said, "Whatever you want to write, you send it to me directly at the law firm. I want to do whatever I can to help you."

And then and there he also made the offer. He said, "How are you going to afford law school?"

And I said I saved a little money, I'm going to apply for financial aid, I'll take out loans. And he said, "If you need money, you let me know, I'm happy to loan you the money for law school." And I have to say, I know he made the same offer to Sandy Brown at one point too, when she was thinking about law school, so I know that I am not unique. I don't know how many people are running around out there that he made that offer to, but -

And I did take out student loans, I did, obviously worked during the summers, but he did also loan me some money to get me through law school. And like I said, that was one of those things that no one is ever going to know about. And my parents were blown away by that, my dad in particular. It's the type of thing that certainly, if circumstances had been different I have no doubt that my, my father always thought I should go to law school and he wanted me to pursue that dream if it were feasible, and I think for a long time he never thought that was feasible. But I know it very much touched my father, and one time when I was home in Maine we were at an event in Rumford, they were dedicating a statue of Senator Muskie and Mitchell was there, and my dad specifically like pulled him aside and said, "I need to thank you for what you did for my daughter."

Those are the stories that don't get the headlines, but I'm sure, as you do these interviews, you're going to find more of those stories than certainly I imagine or know of. So that's the one thing I wanted to come out of this interview, was to make sure that someday people know that about him, that human side of him, and I think it's consistent with the Mitchell Foundation [*sic*: Institute], for instance, he truly believed that kids from Maine should have the opportunity to go to school, and that education was a key to social mobility. And in my case he certainly, he put his money where his mouth was.

AL: And I think, I hope that's what some of this oral history does, is sort of bring to life the person, rather than just the documented records. This is a way to add a dimension to who he was, who he is.

KH: Well I have to say, obviously that gesture meant a lot to me and it did help, it helped me to realize that dream. But I also, ultimately, in a strange turn of events, in 2000 I was part of the team vetting vice presidential candidates for Al Gore, I worked at a law firm with Ron Klain, and it was also Warren Christopher's law firm, and Warren Christopher was in charge of the vetting process, and Ron helped assemble a team and I was one of the people doing background research on various names that were being considered. And it was very compartmentalized, you really only knew the names of the people that were given to you, you didn't know who else other people on the team were working on.

But I had seen in public speculation that maybe Senator Mitchell's name was one that was being considered, and I worried about this particular story, that George Mitchell had given me, his younger female staffer, money to go to law school, and how that could be twisted and construed. So one day I went to Ron Klain and closed the door and I said, "I don't know if George Mitchell is on the list or not, but I've seen that in the paper, and I need to tell you this story." And Ron

just had this poker face the whole time, never let on as to whether or not Mitchell's name was in play, and thanked me at the end. He said, "I'm glad you told me that," he said, "ultimately people will say those things whether they're true or not, whether there's anything there, but it's good to know those things in advance." And he told me he had worked for Janet Reno and some of the speculation, I guess she had done something similar for a young child, or a high school student going into college. And he said, "Yeah, so people who wanted to, tried to spin that into something and say ugly things about her and her motivations." And I said, "Well, I just wanted you to know," because this was not too long after the whole Monica Lewinsky scandal and relationships between older politicians and younger women may not be viewed in the best light.

And now that I think about it, I think I'd actually had that conversation with George Mitchell, we had had dinner after I got out of law school, I'd kind of forgotten about this, and I was, I guess I must have been talking to him about, you know, 'I appreciate what you did for me senator, I am going to pay you back, and I want to,' and I said, "I'm concerned about what people would say about you, in light of Monica Lewinsky." And he kind of got this look on his face like it was the first time it had occurred to him, from a political standpoint that people could misinterpret what he'd done for me. So I did make a point of paying him back every penny, and some extra that I threw in as interest, even though he'd never asked for that or expected that. But I guess it's also kind of interesting and telling that this man, who had such great political instincts in so many ways, I think his motives were so pure that it never crossed his mind that other people could twist them into something that he never intended, and that could ultimately have been detrimental to him if people wanted to construe it that way.

AL: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think is important to add, that I missed in terms of your career, your working relationship with the Senator, or others that you worked with that's important to add?

KH: I guess -

AL: I know that's a big question.

KH: Yeah, and there's something I'd like to add, I'm trying to think how to phrase it that's not - Like I said, he is one of the people I admire most in my life and he's done so much for me, and I still, to this day, you know, follow his career, think the world of him. And it's a, it's hard to in some ways I guess live life after that, or it's hard to figure out how to maintain a relationship like that after that connection is gone.

And what I mean by that is, I think the world of him. A couple of times after law school, like I said, we got together and had dinner or would see each other, and I'm sad to have lost that connection and that friendship, but it's difficult to maintain something like that without being a hanger-on, without the people who now are his staff eyeing it suspiciously, and I don't mean it in the Monica Lewinsky sense, but there are lots of people who after Mitchell left office continued to look at him and say, 'what can you do for me?' When there was all the talk about would he

ever become baseball commissioner, there were lots and lots of people who had been on his staff who saw their next job as being the baseball commissioner's staff person.

And so, you know, I think it's, it saddens me from my perspective to feel like I haven't found a way to be able to continue, to just let him know that he's someone I respect and think the world of and wish well, without being perceived as someone who wants something from him. And I guess having worked with a lot of senators, there are ways in which I think that's kind of got to be a lonely existence, that a lot of the people who come to you ultimately want something from you.

So I don't know if along the way you might have interviews with people who have a little more insight into that, but I think that's an interesting question that someday I hope Senator Mitchell has a diary or something, reveals what it's like to live life like that, when you develop these intense relationships with the people who work for you, or people that you, are your colleagues along the way, and at some point some of those things wither on the vine because you move on and there's not a good way to maintain those things without potentially feeling like you're exploited at every turn.

AL: That's probably a good question for me to ask the Senator in an interview, to get his sense of how he sees that.

KH: And *are* you interviewing him for this project?

AL: Yes.

KH: Oh, that's great.

AL: Yes, although his current position makes it difficult to schedule, but yeah.

KH: Right.

AL: Let me stop the tape now.

End of Interview