

Bowdoin College

Bowdoin Digital Commons

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

Special Collections and Archives

8-26-2009

Interview with Barbara Keefe by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Barbara Keefe

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/mitchelloralhistory>



Part of the [Law and Politics Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Keefe, Barbara, "Interview with Barbara Keefe by Andrea L'Hommedieu" (2009). *George J. Mitchell Oral History Project*. 108.

<https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/mitchelloralhistory/108>

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections and Archives at Bowdoin Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in George J. Mitchell Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of Bowdoin Digital Commons. For more information, please contact mdoyle@bowdoin.edu.

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, 3000 College Sta., Brunswick, Maine 04011

© Bowdoin College

Barbara Keefe
(Interviewer: *Andrea L'Hommedieu*)

GMOH# 134
August 26, 2009

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. The date is August 26, 2009, and I'm at the home of Barbara Keefe in Falmouth, Maine, and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Barbara, could you start just by giving me your full name and spelling it.

Barbara Keefe: Yes, it's Barbara Keefe, K-E-E-F-E.

AL: And where and when were you born?

BK: I was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, in 1940.

AL: Did you grow up there?

BK: I didn't, my family moved to Trenton, New Jersey, and I grew up there.

AL: So, what was Trenton, New Jersey like in the '50s?

BK: It was very industrial. It was a town sandwiched between Philadelphia and New York, small town. My father was a railroader. I was one of five girls, so I was raised in a sorority. My oldest sister was the first generation to go on to college. My father was a railroader, as I said, and it was very important that all of his girls were educated, and that was a kind of novel thought in those growing up years, I think. We came from a very strong Irish Catholic background, where girls were really not necessarily expected to go on to college. We were kind of lower socioeconomic level, so that was a little different, that kind of expectation.

AL: Did you get a sense of where your father's desire to educate you came from?

BK: He was from the coal mines of Pennsylvania, and he saw too many young people stay in the area, and ultimately die of black lung disease, and had somewhat dark lives, and hoped by moving to a different place he could afford another opportunity for his own family.

AL: So when you were in school, you were thinking of college, it was expected of you.

BK: I think it was expected of me. I don't know that I was thinking of college, but I kind of fell into line. I went to a Catholic parochial school and ultimately a Catholic high school, all

girls, and actually graduated from a Catholic university. So I was very steeped in my Roman Catholic tradition, and [had] a father who was very active politically in the Democratic Party. We not only moved from Jersey City, but because he was politically active against a then, what he thought, a very corrupt political system, Mayor [Frank] Hague. I don't know if you know the Hague Machine, but my father was a notorious letter writer, and ultimately was sued for a hundred thousand dollars, I mean some outrageous amount of money, and we left Jersey City, literally, because of his political views. So he was very principled in that sense and continued to be active in his union. He was a member of the railroading union and had a position in that union. So I came from a politically aware family.

AL: Right. You talked politics at the dinner table?

BK: We did, we did, mostly Democratic politics. My mother was very quiet, a typical Irish wife who had not gone to school, didn't finish the sixth grade, and was very aware of her lack of education. And so she really kind of supported my father's idea that all of us would somehow, they'd find a way to get us a college education.

AL: Did your father ever run for an office, later?

BK: He was always kind of a ward leader. They had wards in those times, and he always got the vote for the Democrats. So he did not run politically, but within his union, he was the president of his union and that sort of thing.

AL: So, did that catch on to you or any of your sisters?

BK: Well, as I said, I'm one of five girls, and I was the middle of five girls, and my oldest sister was very academically focused. In Irish families, they frequently raise one child, it was the first, and that was the model and everyone had to follow the model. And indeed, my second sister was very social, and so she always was president of her class, she was president of her class in elementary school, in high school, in nurses training, and she was always president of her class. My father thought that was terrific; when we'd go down to the shore he would buy post cards so she could send them to all her classmates. He was running a little mini campaign for her, because she was so social and so engaged. So yes, they did. And then when I was in school, I too ran for office.

AL: And so what did you do after college, what sort of things did you do?

BK: Well after college, I married. My dad died when I was in school. I had a little scholarship to a small Catholic college, so you went where there was money. And I went out to a school called Mount Aloysius, it was in Pennsylvania, and when Dad died I came back home, and I was given a scholarship to finish at Seton Hall University. It was awarded by the Catholic Church. And I finished there, and I ended up in Michigan, because my husband had a graduate program out there, and we were in Michigan for a couple of years, and we returned to Maine.

My background, I studied education, and particularly interested in deaf education. I got a fellowship. When John Kennedy was president, he awarded a number of grants to have people study postgraduate in disabilities, and I got a fellowship to study in the area of deaf education. So I graduated from Trenton State College, went out to Michigan and worked in a mainstream setting out by Michigan State University where we were at the time.

AL: And then you said you came to Maine.

BK: My husband accepted a job here in Portland at a small educational publishing firm by the name of J. Weston Walch, and I accepted a position at the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf, here on Mackworth Island. And I worked there until my daughter came and I stayed home.

AL: And so, what year are we now, about?

BE: Well, Meredith came in '68, but I tutored some youngsters who were deaf, at the request of parents at the School for the Deaf, and I joined the League of Women Voters when I came to Maine so I was really more taken with some of the issues than one political party or another. But clearly, my tendencies were far more related to the Democratic Party.

AL: And was the majority of the membership Democratic, in the Maine League, or was it very nonpartisan?

BK: It is nonpartisan, the league is really nonpartisan, and sometimes you knew where people stood but more or less, that was not the case, people really talked about issues and you defined yourself in relation to the ideas versus the partisanship.

AL: Right. And did it focus on women's issues?

BK: Well, one of those falling outs that I had with the league is I felt that, this was the time when there was a rising consciousness of women and women's rights, and I felt the league was not doing as much as it should, and I resigned from the league over issues connected to women's rights. And I got more active politically in the Women's Political Caucus. I started the Women's Political Caucus in 1974, '73, I guess, I started working on it. I just felt that we needed more women in legislative government, and that we traditionally had not raised money. Women would support whoever their husband was supporting at the time, and women did not, although they might have had their own paychecks, they did not write checks to support candidates. It was very unusual.

And so, at a point where women's consciousness was being raised, mine was also, and I kind of rolled up my sleeves and really got involved and initiated Women's Political Caucus, which is one of the ways that I had known George Mitchell prior to this, at kind of social affairs. We had criteria for endorsing candidates, and in 1974 we wanted to have a sense of where people stood on the issues, and not only about women, but why they were running and what kind of things that they felt were important in relation to issues. This was a group of Republican and Democratic

women, who were mostly educated, and I think that's the way a lot of movements start, and we gathered, and there was always a Republican and a Democratic woman who interviewed each of the candidates for governor and the 1st and 2nd District races, as well as those running for the legislature. We had a fund raiser and raised a fair amount of money and endorsed candidates, as a result of these interviews, and then we polled the membership and the membership voted. So at that point, we endorsed George Mitchell in 1974, for his gubernatorial race, which as we know, he did not win.

AL: Yes. Now, the Women's, the Maine Women's Political Caucus, or just, it was a Maine-based organization?

BK: But it was a National Women's Caucus. There was a national initiative, and these groups were emerging in states and I just put it together in Maine.

AL: Yes, okay. And does it have any connection to what we now call the Maine Women's Lobby?

BK: It does, it really was the precursor to the Maine Women's Lobby.

AL: Because I know some of those early women, I think, Janet Mills -

BK: Actually, Patty Ryan, Patty Ryan was with me when we started the Maine Women's Political Caucus. Phyllis Austin, I don't know if she's still in Maine, but Phyllis was a writer and covered the legislature so she was a real, and we put out a monthly newsletter once we got it started. And I'm an initiator, I don't like to run things, I can start things. And my strength is that I can organize, get the ideas out there, and when people accept them, somebody else will take them, because I lose interest, I'm on to a next idea. But I was always involved in things that I considered equality and justice, those were always really important to me.

AL: So, in this day and age, do you still have any connections or interest in the Maine Women's Lobby, or it's just, you got things started and -?

BK: I don't run anything anymore at this point, I'm almost seventy years old, and I contribute financially to those things that I think are important. Certainly the Mitchell Institute is important to me, things related to the church and some other things that I give money to.

AL: Right. Now you were definitely a supporter in 1974, you endorsed George Mitchell in his run for governor. Do you have any recollections from that campaign; did you just organizationally support him, or were you out there, leaflet drops and all that?

BK: No, because we really were trying to establish our credibility, and I was more sensitive that I was identified as a strong Democratic person. And so I didn't want our Republican friends to abandon the whole issue related to the caucus and gathering people together. And I felt it

important to keep that core group together, which [we] did and ultimately, as you've indicated, it morphed into something beyond the caucus and into the Women's Lobby that's survives today.

AL: And did you observe, though, from a distance what happened in that campaign?

BK: I did. Clearly, I was rooting for George and I wanted him to win, and it looked like the campaign was not developing as much momentum as everyone had hoped. The feeling was that he might actually win, it was going to be a real good race, and was a good race. But George is, as everyone would say, somewhat shy, and entering the field was a little more difficult for him, I think, in that arena. He was always involved, but he was never the front man, in the sense that he ultimately had to be. And he really didn't have his stride at that point. So I was there when he spoke to the group, once the endorsement came to be, and I congratulated him and wished him well, but it was clear that Jim Longley was gaining strength, and that ultimately he became the governor and George did not.

AL: Now, I'm asking you to think way back, over thirty years ago, but do you remember what it was about George Mitchell that both Republican and Democratic women felt they wanted to endorse him?

BK: Yes, well now, that wasn't real hard because there was a structure in place and there was criteria in place, and George had a platform that resonated with the majority of the women who were in the caucus. Again, they were mostly educated women, they did study the issues, and they cared about certain things that, and George, from that point, when a larger group was introduced to him, was just always very reasoned in everything he looked at. He was, if he said something like he supported day care, if there were funds available and the priorities, everything was balanced. He didn't appeal to what he thought you wanted to hear, he had thought out his issues ahead of time, and that approach is always very attractive, regardless if you are partisan or not. That's why I think George has been so successful.

AL: Did you have any contact between, or after that '74 campaign, and when he takes over our Muskie's Senate seat and is running for reelection in '82?

BK: I'm trying to think. I think I had become somewhat involved in issues connected to the church, and I served on some of the diocesan boards and I always thought George would be great, so I met with him a couple of times, just to see if he might be, but I think we had lunch just to talk about, I was trying to drag him into some diocesan committees. And he was very sweet and he listened very carefully, as he always does, and responded, and he just said, "Barbara, I really have to think about this, my life is a little bit complicated at this point." And so - Although I remained active in a variety of issues, mostly women and the church. And I was an anomaly, in the fact that I supported, as a Roman Catholic, Romans were not out there fighting for equal rights for women. Remember, we have a very kind of hierarchy church and that was not a big deal. So from that perspective, I think George saw me a little bit as a, not as a rebel, but someone who might think outside the box.

AL: Yes, and as I sit here hearing about your growing up and connection with the church, but also very independent and able to speak up for yourself, which sort of seems at odds with what you learn in the Catholic Church.

BK: I know, a little bit weird, huh.

AL: What was it like for you, did you feel you were pushing against the tide?

BK: Yes, I did. When there were hearings on the Equal Rights Amendment up in Augusta, I was there, and I was photographed unfortunately, and people in our church community said, "I saw you at the legislative hearing on the Equal Rights Amendment, do you support that?" I said, absolutely, I support that. So there was a little bit of tension, just because sometimes the institutional church moves very slowly, and people are sometimes ahead of the church, the institutional church.

AL: Right.

BK: And ultimately, I think, equality was recognized, and some of the issues connected to women were recognized, not on abortion, necessarily, but certainly equal rights in the workplace.

AL: Now is it logical to next ask how you became treasurer of Senator Mitchell's reelection campaign in '82?

BK: You know, that was a big issue, as you probably have heard from others, that Ken Curtis was a front runner for that appointment. And in my household, I was married to a man, Jim McGough, I was Barbara McGough at the time, Jim was a big supporter of Ken Curtis's and I was big supporter of George Mitchell's. And it reminded me of my mom and dad who, my dad was run out of Jersey City because he protested Mayor Hague. My mother voted for Mayor Hague repeatedly, because she thought he was like a Robin Hood. He was a crook, but he stole from the rich and he gave it to the poor. And so, I could see that, only in the sense that we supported different people in our relationship.

But I felt very strongly that George was a better candidate, for a lot of different reasons. One, I think he was intellectually superior. I think they were both men of great integrity, but I just thought, very strongly, that George would make a better senator, and so we agreed that we would not talk about our selections at home and that we could verbalize that outside.

So, I think people knew that Jim and I had very different political leanings on this, and I don't know if anyone told George, I didn't, but I supported that completely. When the announcement came that Joe had appointed George, I thought: wonderful, brilliant appointment, and he will do a fantastic job. So, I don't know what made George select me, I have no idea. But he called one day and he said, "Barbara, I am going to run." And I said, "Great George, I'm really pleased

about that,” obviously. And he said, “I would like for you to be the treasurer and,” he said, “I have only one request from you: if you get mad at me in the middle of the campaign that you don’t resign.” I thought that was a very unusual request, he must have thought I was a bit radical, or I would snap at something I didn’t like, and I would resign. I said, “I promise I won’t resign.” And so I picked up the reins for signing all the checks, and initially there was no staff and so I, very few staff, and then so I just did all the bills. Najeeb Lotfey, I don’t know if you’ve interviewed Najeeb -

AL: I haven’t located him yet.

BK: Okay, okay. Well, Najeeb was a partner in a big firm in the city, and a CPA, and he handled a lot of the campaign finances, he oversaw that, to make sure that we did everything according to regulations, so I met with Najeeb to get a handle on what it was that I was going to be responsible for. And frequently, I mean I had no idea what a treasurer of a campaign did. I knew they signed checks, but I really had no idea of the drilling down to depth of whether or not they were responsible for this, that or the other thing. So I met with Najeeb, and he went over what it was that I had to do and said to me – and it scared the living bejeezus out of me – he said, “Barbara, I want you to know that as treasurer of this campaign, you have to take this very seriously.” And I said, “Of course, I take it very seriously,” to Najeeb. And he said, “I want you to know that if anything is wrong with these books, the Senator does not go to jail, the lawyers don’t go to jail, you go to jail.” I said, “You’ve got to be kidding.” So when he put it in that context, it made me really aware of responsibility. I was taking it seriously anyway, but when you put it in a context of, ‘I don’t go to jail, the Senator doesn’t, you go to jail,’ I thought, it’s important to know who goes to jail if anything is wrong with these books.

But clearly, George is so careful about money, and that nothing be taken that wasn’t according to federal regulations and that, I mean he just put that out there immediately, and all of the troops were very aware that everything had to be aboveboard. And that really pays in the long run, because after these campaigns are over, scandals unravel in other political campaigns, and George’s was always squeaky clean, and it’s like a stamp of approval of the way a campaign should be handled.

So I did the books until they brought on a full time staff, who was Sharon Sudbay, and Sharon took over. And I was really nervous, because again, no one goes to jail but me. I met with her, and I also knew that she had been a student at Portland High School and I covered Portland High School as one of my students was there, and so I talked with her teachers and I asked about her, just to get some feedback from their perspective about what kind of student she was. And they said that she was probably one of the best math students they’d ever had, and that she was a lovely human being and they thought she was fantastic. So that was an objective view from teachers who had had her in school. And I met with Sharon and she was just a wonderful human being to deal with. So his staff, the people he chose for his staff, were really very competent, very dedicated, and just lovely human beings. So, it was really nice to have those kinds of people to work with.

AL: Right. And so, you were taking care of the books in '82, you must have been aware of the polls, which initially put him behind an enormous amount from David Emery. Did you, were you enough involved in what was going on in the campaign to see the change?

BK: I think that George was getting just better at meeting people, and people, once they actually engaged him, there wasn't a lot of fluff, there's not a lot of fluff with George. He really isn't, he's very direct, and ultimately Maine people get it, they really do. And he just had to get around, and I think once he was okay with that, I think you could begin to see the polls change. The more people he could talk with individually, the small groups, and he's always proud of the fact that he managed to get all over the state, and he did that, he really did that. And ultimately, little by little, he was eroding that incredible deficit, that percentage deficit.

AL: Did you work at all with Larry Benoit?

BK: I did, I did. I love Larry. Larry was also someone who was very 'numbers' and very directed in everything that he has to do, and he had a great political sense. I mean just intuitively, he was a real political animal and just knew the buttons that needed to be addressed, that were hot buttons; never, never turned his back on that next step. So I think he was a good chess player in the sense of the political realities and landscape that was apparent.

AL: And who were some of the others that you remember from that campaign and their roles?

BK: Well, obviously Mary McAleney, I remember her well as a trusted ally and confidant. And Mary seemed to be everywhere as a staff person, she just had a handle on a lot of the issues around the Senate. And because George was so conscientious, and I also think that was part of it too, is that he, in the short time he was there, he really mastered the rules of the game and the Senate Rules. And I think he took Robert Byrd's advice, and Byrd had, I understated he was, he had a whole book, or a series of things that, video tapes, about the rules of the Senate, and his take on the Democratic system, historically. And George did his homework; he just always did his homework.

And so Mary was one. Larry I met regularly with, and during the campaign I think at one point or another, it must have been the second campaign, Larry called me with this urgency in his voice, "Call me, call me, call me, Barbara." I got back to him and he said, "I had this dream – don't take this personally – that something happened to you, and there's no other signer on the checks." I thought, "Oh my God, this man really has a life, doesn't he?" So I went in and I think Pat Angelone, a good, old friend of George and Sally's at the time, he asked if Pat would be the second signature, if I was out of town or traveling or whatever, that campaigns heat up and you really need to sign checks. So Pat was my kind of second person.

AL: Right. And is Pat, Pat was related to Joe?

BK: Pat Angelone was Joe's wife, and they were dear friends of George and Sally's at the time.

AL: And were they from Portland or Lewiston?

BK: Portland, he owned the Angelone Pizzas.

AL: Right. Can you talk, do you have and sense of their friendship? I know I can't talk to Joe Angelone, but I wondered if you might be able to describe him a little bit.

BK: Joe was someone who was one of the friendliest people you'd ever want to meet. He created an environment at his pizza shop that allowed people to come in, and he would always sit down, and then there was kind of this political group that formed at the Angelone's Pizza, where people would come in, and if they were running for office, it was a must attend kind of thing, people would drop in. And because so many people were in and out Angelone's Pizza, he would get a sense of how people were feeling on different issues. And Joe would share that with those candidates who were running and who would bother listening. He was a better barometer than any Gallup Poll in the sense of what people were thinking on the issues at the time.

So Joe created a little brain trust, although he himself was not cerebral in the sense that he was a people person, absolutely a people person. And he respected George, and George and he became good friends. And when he was running for political office I think he ended up, he and Pat would accompany George to a lot of these places, these Democratic fund raisers. And everyone knew Joe, so Joe became a kind of an advance man, inadvertently, for introducing George to perhaps some of these people. So he was a wonderful friend. Anyone who knew Joe felt very relaxed around him, and so he offered that other component to friendship, just someone you could talk to, who would listen, who you would relax with, who had a great sense of fun and a good sense of humor.

AL: And did you ever hear or know of Donny Peters?

BK: I did know, Donny Peters actually lived right near Joe Angelone. They were neighbors almost; Donny lived around the corner from him. And Donny was a really good friend of George's too, and he was lots of fun, a great sense of humor. Everyone adored Donny Peters, yes.

AL: So, 1982 campaign, you made it through, you didn't go to jail.

BK: I didn't go to jail, no, I didn't.

AL: And he won reelection. What was, can you give me a sense of what it was like to be involved with the campaign when it really looked like he was going to win?

BK: Well, I think people were hopeful towards the end, but in a campaign you never know, issues can emerge at the last minute, and someone that you think is really gaining momentum, one false step, or something emerges that [is] totally unexpected. It was such a jubilant feeling to open the paper and to know that he won, and it was like a sixty, sixty-one percent or something that. It wasn't the outstanding percentage that he had in '88, but it was a great election, because there was such anxiety and it really wasn't a done deal. So when he actually won, and he won with sixty percent of the vote, that was a real celebration, yes. And he worked very, very hard, and all of the people around him worked very, very hard. There was a lot of activity happening in that campaign that was very positive, very forward thinking, and a lot of people suddenly got to know who George Mitchell was.

AL: Right.

BK: And in the end, it was just pure joy.

AL: Did you happen to know Gayle Cory?

BK: I did, but not very well. I knew her as an efficient gatekeeper of the kingdom, so no one got to Ed Muskie, and ultimately she was a good friend of George's, too. I think Gayle was his receptionist for awhile too, until she got ill.

AL: Yes. So he wins reelection in '82, and then you're treasurer again in '88.

BK: They just kept me on. I hadn't gotten them into any trouble, and they didn't get me into any trouble, it was a perfect relationship.

AL: Did you do things at all, were you involved with, in any way on his staff between those two elections?

BK: No, I would certainly go in, obviously I had to go in on a regular basis to the office, so I knew what was happening. And I was always very proud of the, I mean, I would write letters, or if I would go to Washington I would stop in his office, I had meetings in Washington, and he was always very hospitable. When he got to be majority leader, if I would show up he'd say, just a minute, the president is coming. Just a minute, I'll get a picture and, he wouldn't say that, he would just say, "Can you stay here?" So obviously someone was on the phone, and the vice president showed up, President Clinton showed up, so he always was so gracious about making sure that if you were there and he could get someone of importance in the room and have your picture taken, that was very sweet. I mean, it really was.

I also followed a lot of the things at the time, the issues I was very concerned about, the [Robert] Bork nomination, and I wrote George with my concerns. And I have always believed that he would make up his own mind and I never tried to influence, but I wanted him to know, since he was my representative too, how I felt about Bork being admitted to the highest court in the land.

And although, as they examined those records, it was what he would never do, that concerned me. I mean, he would never take initiative, in his whole time in office Bork never gave one minute of service to the poor.

And in this state I served on a number of committees where it was a, some kind of a legal thing, it was in Augusta, and they were looking at lawyers who gave, and big firms, how many people contributed time to these kind of Pine Tree cases, ones where people could not afford an attorney. And they were paid very poorly, and he never gave any kind of public service to those sorts of things. So I was really delighted when, George always seemed to vote his conscience which is always very honorable and I supported. So I think he just did exactly what he should have been doing and was trained to do, and had a mind and a heart that looked at what we in a democracy really need to have to stay vibrant as a people.

AL: And what was the campaign like in 1988? He was running against Jasper Wyman.

BK: It was almost a non-campaign. I think at that point people knew George, and there was no way that he was *not* going to win that election. So the first election was a real election, the second with Jasper Wyman was, he had already been kind of given the nod of approval by Maine people, and clearly, I don't think anyone has broken that record in terms of percentage by which he won the state. I think George's sense of honor and fairness was at that point revealed, not just within the state of Maine, but nationally, and he was being recognized as a leader of great integrity. So that campaign did not have that same kind of oomph, because everyone was on board. It's easy to support someone you think is going to win, versus not sure and be there because it's the right thing to do.

AL: Right.

BK: So it's interesting that most of the people that were with him clearly in '82 were also with him in '88, but it was almost a done deal.

AL: Yes, and as treasurer, maybe you had a sense that fund-raising was a lot easier in '88?

BK: Oh my Lord, fund-raising was a lot easier. Everyone, I mean they couldn't write their checks fast enough.

AL: Yes.

BK: It was not like pulling teeth, which was indeed in the first go-around. I too had changed, just an aside, I had divorced after twenty-three years of marriage, and I had really played with the idea of changing my name back to my maiden name. My married name was McGough, and I guess I had spoken to the staff about it and I said, "Oh, I'd never do that, don't worry, I'm not going to change." I mean, it was in the middle of the campaign, I'm not going to change everything. And Sharon gave me, she said, "Barbara, we can do this within twenty-four hours, if

you want to change your name, you change your name.” And I said, “Will that be a problem for the campaign?” “That will not be a problem for the campaign, it is just printing; we’ll just print those checks differently, or change a couple of records.” So that’s what they did. I changed my name to Keefe, and I thought that was lovely. It was something that I just personally wanted to do for me, and one of the stumbling blocks was that my name was on everything as Barbara McGough. And that was not an issue, it was just changed, a blink of the eye.

AL: And so, since that ‘88 campaign, have you been involved with anything that Senator Mitchell has done? I believe later on you were on the Mitchell Institute board.

BK: You’ve done your homework, I can see that. That’s right, when George retired, or said he would not run in, what, ‘94, we had a war chest that was very significant and there was a question of what to do with it – not my decision, clearly. But he had made the decision, and what was also interesting, I think George came under the statute that allowed him to keep the money, personally. I think that’s true. Either way, he had to do something with the money. He chose – clearly he was not taking it, that’s not his style. And he had, I’m sure, thought about different things, but then determined that it was going to be given to the people of Maine, and given by way of a scholarship for every single high school in the state.

And this was something that was, again, his whole sense of fairness emerged, his good friend, Hal Pachios, did not want that to be, he wanted kind of a Rhodes Scholar, an elitist sort of scholarship that went to the best and the brightest, and George realized that the best and the brightest are all out there, and under different circumstances would never emerge without being recognized and supported in some way or another. And so his idea was that it would go to every high school, and shortly after he made that decision, it was set up and I was sent to the bank to write out my signature and hand over a million dollars – it was the biggest check I’ve ever made in my life – to the scholarship, and so it was formed. And he was very generous and asked if I would like to serve of the board, and I was honored to do so. And so I continued to serve.

AL: So, do you, are you still on the board or -?

BK: I am.

AL: You are.

BK: I’m still on.

AL: Still, so you’ve seen it grow over all those years.

BK: I have.

AL: Can you talk about, because I think it’s such a significant part of his legacy.

BK: It is, it is.

AL: Can you talk about how it's grown, and when you're in that room talking to other people and you're making decisions about where the Institute's going to go, what sort of sense do you have of the purpose and the reason for it?

BK: Again, I think when George does something, he's always so reflective and really wants to make sure that when he makes the decision, that he brings people on board, his staff was very carefully chosen. Colleen Quint was the young woman he chose to be the executive director and Colleen is brilliant, number one, and she has some very good instincts, is a superb writer, and just as tenacious as anyone you'd want to meet. So she came on board, and I think that was probably a decision that was not always understood, initially, because there were a lot of people who were involved in the campaign and they thought that maybe some of those people would be chosen to be the executive director. And in hindsight, it was the best selection he could have made.

Much like when Joe Brennan had to make a decision between Ken Curtis, who was really a lovely person and very well received in the state of Maine, or George Mitchell, who had a different personality, but who was also brilliant. He chose someone who, in the long run, was brilliant, and may not have had the same kind of personality as someone else who they thought might be chosen. So his initial selection of Colleen was not necessarily applauded across the state of those supporters, but it was the right one, and it ultimately proved, she proved her worth in many, many ways.

But it moved from a small group of friends and supporters of George, mostly political allies, who served on the board initially, into a far more sophisticated board over time. Initially, you could only give it to an X number of people, because we had only a million dollars and the rules of the game were being established, and the proponents of: give it to everyone, make it available to as many in the state as possible; versus: the Harold Pachios, who wanted only the elite, and to make sure that they would come back to Maine and run the government and the world and whatever, was very clear. And there was also some talk about not supporting community colleges, students who went to community colleges, it always had to be a four-year post-secondary program. Well, that morphed over time too, because as the economy changed we saw many youngsters not able to afford the private or the public university, and their access to college would be through a community college. So that kind of issue also was on the table for a number of years.

As the scholarship grew, because George would, there was a development campaign, and clearly the pot of money available was greater, and so the scholarships were larger. And the other component, which I really supported very enthusiastically, was the research component. And again, many people on the board felt that was unnecessary, this was clearly going to be just a scholarship awarding to needy students who are academically successful in high school. But there were some of us, and I was a big proponent of a research component, because I really felt

strongly, as did other members of the board, that that anchored you in the issues, educational issues at the time.

End of Side A
Side B

AL: We are now on Side B, and you were saying, and now the research component is funded?

BK: Much of it, many of the grants that are coming in for the Institute are independent of the kind of development money and of the scholarship money, and that Lisa Plimpton's work has been recognized in the state and nationally. Her 'barriers' study, which focused on the reasons students in Maine, many graduate from high school but do not go on to post-secondary programs, that research and all that she has been able to accomplish, has really allowed many of the very significant policy issues in the state around education to have changed dramatically, as a result of that research component of the Mitchell Institute.

And so, I do think the board has changed and has grown and has become more sophisticated; the membership, too. I am one of the few holdovers from the original team. And it might be that I still, I'm still at the university, I still have a deep interest in issues connected to post-secondary programs. My focus is on access and disabilities, because that's my background and I just want to make sure that those issues are also discussed at a broader table, which is the Mitchell Institute.

AL: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about, that you feel is important to add in terms of Senator Mitchell's career or interactions you've had with him or -?

BK: I have not had the kind of personal connections in the past that many of his colleagues and friends have had. I have had kind of a principled connection with George, I have always felt very strongly he was probably one of the most principled and honorable man in public life that I have ever known, or I have ever supported, and that from that perspective, I have honored him for a long time.

AL: Thank you so much.

BK: You're welcome, thank you.

End of Interview