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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Larry Benoit
(Interviewer: *Mike Hastings*)

GMOH# 021
July 29, 2008

Mike Hastings: The following is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project, the project director for which is Andrea L'Hommedieu. This interview is being conducted on July 29, 2008, at the law offices of Bernstein Shur at 100 Middle Street in Portland, Maine. I am Michael Hastings, the interviewer, the interviewee is Larry Benoit. Larry, could you please begin by stating your full name, spelling your surname, giving your date and place of birth, and your parents' full names.

Larry Benoit: I'm Robert Laurent Benoit, and my surname is B-E-N-O-I-T, and I was born in Portland, Maine, August 20, 1948. My father is Robert Barry Benoit, deceased, and my mother is Inez Frances Benoit, age ninety-one.

MH: Age ninety-one. I-N-E-S?

LB: I-N-E-Z.

MH: Okay, tell me about your mother and father, what were their stories, where did they come from? Were they from here, or they came from somewhere else?

LB: Well, my father was the son of Foster Barry, and he was born in Portland. Foster Barry died young, at age thirty-six, and my father was I think age ten at the time and my grandmother Frances married Oscar Benoit a couple years after Foster's death, and Oscar adopted my father and his sister, Joanne. So they grew up in Cape Elizabeth, and my father spent his career after WWII - He did serve during WWII as a pilot with the U.S. Army Air Corps and flew B-24 Liberators. And it was an interesting experience for him, he actually didn't see combat, they used him as a flight instructor. In any case, after the war he came and settled, married my mother during the war and settled in southern Maine and ultimately permanently in Cape Elizabeth, and was in the family clothing business, Oscar Benoit, Inc., and then took over that business and retired - my brother took it over - so that's his background.

My mother was from Colorado Springs, born in Texas, and met my father when she was working for the U.S. Department of War during his assignment to the air force base in Texas. And they returned, as I mentioned earlier, to Cape Elizabeth after the war and settled here. And she's still doing quite well in assisted living.

MH: Ninety-one, wow, it's an accomplishment. So you were raised in the Portland area.

LB: Yes, I went to Cape Elizabeth schools and attended the University of Southern Maine.

MH: Would it be the Portland, or was it Gorham then?

LB: At the Portland campus.

MH: At the Portland campus, I see. What did you study?

LB: My major was U.S. history, and I received a degree, bachelor of science in education, but I concluded probably in my sophomore year that I really wasn't going to go into teaching, although I did decide to complete the program and get the degree, but I got the bug for politics and government and decided that was a path I wanted to take.

MH: Did that come earlier, I mean did that come before you were in college or was it after college?

LB: Well, I had an interest in politics in any case, and I thought teaching would be something that I'd enjoy, but as I got into the program I realized that there just wasn't enough energy in the profession. I really wasn't thinking about money at the time, but I was looking for challenges and a faster, quicker moving profession than the day-to-day grind of teaching, so -

MH: Let's back up a little bit. When you were growing up, did you live in one house in Cape Elizabeth pretty much for the whole time?

LB: Pretty much, yeah. I was born in '48, so we lived in a couple of homes when I was very young, but we settled in Cape Elizabeth in 1954. And I just sold the family home this past week, so there fifty-four years and my parents were there for that entire period of course.

MH: So did you, I know you're a golfer, did your golfing interest begin when you were young, or was it something you did later on?

LB: Yeah, I had an interest in golf. I didn't play golf in high school on the golf team, but we did have one. It was kind of a rag-tag team, but we did play at some local public courses occasionally. We stowed ourselves onto the (*unintelligible*) Club back nine when no one was looking.

MH: And you say "we," who's the we?

LB: Oh, classmates in high school.

MH: What was it like growing up in Cape Elizabeth in the '50s and '60s?

LB: It was very nice. We were blessed in a wonderful community, Cape Elizabeth is a

community that's really committed to education and people are involved in so many aspects of life in Cape Elizabeth, and that tradition is as strong now as it was then in the sense of community. I had a fairly large class for a town of Cape's size, I think there were ninety in my high school class, and today it's not much more than a hundred. It did peak out like at 160 back, I think, in the '80s or so. But it was wonderful growing up; we'd spend a lot of time at the local beaches and enjoyed tennis and outdoors.

MH: Did you work during the summers?

LB: Yeah, I did, I worked as a camp counselor, I lined up mowing jobs and that sort of thing and kept busy. I also worked in an electronics shop my senior year.

MH: What did you do there?

LB: I had an interest in technology and electronics, sort of self taught in repairing electronic equipment, and that particular business was in FM two-way communications.

MH: Like for fishermen like?

LB: Well, we serviced VHF equipment for fishermen, but primarily the equipment we worked with was two-way FM communications mobile equipment and base stations for taxi companies, oil companies, other commercial companies that needed mobile communications.

MH: And you did that one summer?

LB: Did that, put up towers as well, worked on assembling towers. Some of them are still around, believe it or not. It was kind of interesting work, and it helped me work my way through college.

MH: So you graduated from University of Southern Maine when?

LB: 1970.

MH: And now, did your decision to go into politics as opposed to teaching, that was pretty much around that time?

LB: It was mid-way through college; I really had a strong interest in politics in any case.

MH: Did you run for office in college?

LB: Yeah, I did. It was kind of like they were begging for a candidate just to fill a vacancy in a seat for the House of Representatives in Cape Elizabeth against who was then the majority leader, Richard Hewes. And a few people said, "Geez, would you just fill this in? We need somebody."

MH: Why did they come to you?

LB: Well, they did because I was just sort of active on the local town committee, and they didn't have anybody. So I said, "Well okay, I'll do it," but I really didn't have a lot of time and ended up, I think, getting about forty-two percent of the vote or something like that.

MH: Not bad for somebody running and going to college at the same time.

LB: But it was kind of interesting, and I didn't have any money and just pounded on some doors and printed a few handouts and that was about it, but it was a good experience.

MH: So where did it go from there, in terms of politics?

LB: Well I took a position that was temporary with the Maine Democratic Party to register new voters, the age eighteen voting act had taken effect and the Democratic Party wanted to try to enroll and register as many young people as they could, feeling that they could benefit in the next election cycle. So I worked on that. And then I got a call, after a break of three or four months—I did some traveling, visited some relatives out west, I think I spent about three months doing that—and I got a call from Charlie Micoleau, who was with Ed Muskie at the time, asking if I'd be interested in going to work on Muskie's presidential campaign in New Hampshire.

MH: It would have been '71 or '72?

LB: Yeah, it would have been '71. And so I did that, I went to New Hampshire and landed first in Manchester and worked there for a couple of weeks, and then was assigned to operating in northern New Hampshire, in Coos County and was based in Berlin, New Hampshire.

MH: What did you do in Manchester and then Berlin, I mean what was your daily work?

LB: Well in Manchester was more just strategic planning and almost more just waiting for an assignment, and they were finally given after a couple weeks and I was dispatched to Berlin and got a room at the Costello Hotel up there, which is no longer. It was a bit of a dump and cheap, I think I paid something like a hundred dollars a month for the room. And I stayed there through the campaign, set up a campaign office and organized the field operations up there. Muskie actually did pretty well up there, he won that county I think with about 60-40 in Berlin itself, which was the most important and it was a very heavily Democratic city, has about two-to-one. But down state -

MH: Now is it the Brown Manufacturing?

LB: Brown Paper was the mill owner at the time. After that, that mill changed hands a few times, I believe, and has been downsized.

MH: But that was the primary employer in the town, was Brown.

LB: Yeah, absolutely, yeah, it was. It was basically a one-employer town.

MH: How many people did you have? Were you the only paid employee in Berlin?

LB: I was the only paid employee in northern New Hampshire. It was Coos County, and then there was another county where, I think Groveton, Milan, a couple of other towns to the west near the Connecticut border. I forget the name of that county; I spent very little time over there.

MH: Were they familiar with Muskie? What kind of reception did you get?

LB: Well Muskie was revered in the Berlin area, because there were a lot of connections between Franco-American families and other family connections between central western Maine and northern New Hampshire. So you know, he enjoyed a tremendous benefit of that at the beginning of the campaign, just a well of reserve, you know, of good will that helped I think us do much better there as a result.

MH: Who did you report to?

LB: I initially reported to Tony Podesta, and Tony Podesta came in from Chicago and he was not a good fit for New Hampshire. And later he left and Larry Kudlow was in there briefly, and he was a total disaster, he showed up in a three-piece suit and a swagger stick and was basically, literally almost thrown out of the campaign office, he was just unbelievable. And then later I reported to Ron Rosenblith, who came out of Massachusetts, and he I think it was connected to political leadership in Massachusetts, I can't recall the connection. Podesta has a successful lobbying practice, and his brother John was there in the campaign, in fact he was like me, he was assigned a fifty-dollar-a-week job and John later became Clinton's chief of staff at the end of his presidency.

MH: So how long a period did this work in New Hampshire go on?

LB: Well, it was just a few months; the primary was early February and I got there in the fall, I think in November.

MH: Did you have much contact with Muskie during that period?

LB: Very little. He did visit Berlin; we had an event there at a lodge. And I think we just had that one visit. We had a lot of Maine people come over to do some volunteer work, including a delegation from Lewiston led by Jim Longley, and he actually knocked on doors for Senator Muskie; yeah, he did.

MH: Did you ever bump into George Mitchell during that campaign?

LB: I did later. I didn't while I was in New Hampshire. I went from there to Massachusetts; the Massachusetts primary, I think, was in April. And at that point I visited their offices in Boston and I sat down with Mark Shields, and Mark was brought in to sort of try to take over the Massachusetts operation, which was flagging after Muskie won, but not by a sufficient margin, in New Hampshire. Everything started to just cascade and fall apart. But Mark Shields was there, so I went and met with him. And of course knowing what people know of him, I found through personal experience, was that he was a very humorous guy and it was like gallows humor going in and talking to him about, "Well, what's my role here and how much will I get paid?" "Zero, and maybe if you can go raise your own money you can get paid." From there I went out to Springfield and did some work out there while I could—I wasn't being paid—until money ran short and I had to head back.

MH: And you were a single man all during this period, I guess, yeah.

LB: Oh yeah, yeah, definitely, yeah.

MH: And then what followed that? Were you in Manchester when Muskie spoke in front of the *Union Leader*?

LB: No, I was based in Berlin, right. I read about that of course and, yeah, that was pretty devastating, what happened there. Well after that I went to work with Peter Kyros, congressman from the 1st Congressional District. He was in a difficult reelection campaign and he needed to really get some help in the primary.

MH: What year would that have been?

LB: Well, that would have been 1972. And he had a primary opponent, Jadine O'Brien, and he did take her fairly seriously and so he hired me to work on his campaign, not in his congressional office, and I did do that and he did defeat her and won the general election. And so from there I was hired onto his congressional staff as a case worker, and then two years later, in '74, he lost to David Emery.

MH: Where were you? Were you located in Washington?

LB: I was located in Portland, yeah, we had an office in the Federal Building, which is now the Post Office on 151 Forest Avenue, yeah, was based there.

MH: I worked, I knew Peter Kyros when he was, during the '72 to '74 period. One of my favorite people was Olga Grkovic, she was one of his legislative people in D.C., and she was wonderful.

LB: Yeah, and Alyce Canaday was his chief of staff, yeah. Well, Peter was being Peter. I love Peter, and I still see him in fact, we get together every summer, but he just lived on the edge

and he paid the price.

MH: Did he have many people working in Maine for him, or was it just -?

LB: He had just one full time, and he did have a part time office in Rockland, oh God, her name escapes me now, she worked just a couple days a week. But he had Helen Savage, who had been his personal secretary when he was practicing law. Lovely person, very nice person, and she was in that office. Bill Bell and Jerry Plante, and Bill is still in Maine and Jerry is retired.

MH: He was from Old Orchard [Beach].

LB: Old Orchard, right. Jerry had served in the Maine legislature and he was I think the youngest clerk in the House of Representatives for several years.

MH: So your work for Peter Kyros was restricted to case work then.

LB: That's right.

MH: Did you drive him around when he was in the state?

LB: Oh yeah, I did lots of things; I did a lot of field work for him. I wasn't in the office, but my title was case worker. And so I traveled a lot with him, in fact probably did half of the duties and got well acquainted with him.

MH: So in November of 1974, Kyros is defeated, you're out of a job.

LB: Right. And there was a recount – that was a very close election, it should have been won, but that's another long story – but in any case, that recount dragged on, and in January it was obvious that he wasn't going to reverse the outcome. And Charlie Micoleau called again (I had indicated to Charlie that I'd be interested in working for Senator Muskie) and he called me, wanted to expand Senator Muskie's field operations because he'd really been away from Maine far more than he would have liked running for vice president, for president, and they expected to have a tough race against Bob Monks. And so I was brought in and was hired, and we established an office in Portland. He only had an office in Waterville at that time. That was it, he had Janet Dennis and Sue Gurney in that office. I'm trying to think if there was anybody else there, but they were the principals, and I think there was another, I think there was another, God, what's her name, that escapes me now, who had been Muskie's personal assistant.

MH: Elsie Bowen? The lady from Morrill? [or possibly Marjorie Hutchinson?]

LB: That may have been it, yeah.

MH: Was his secretary when he was governor, I think.

LB: Yeah, there was someone there, God, it'll come back to me. And so we established Muskie's office in Portland and in Biddeford, and Clyde MacDonald was hired simultaneously and established his office in Bangor. And we later, after the election, opened an office in Lewiston.

MH: And did the nature of your work change much from what you did for Kyros?

LB: Yeah, it changed. Within, I think within a year after I had arrived there, I was given the title of field representative and so I had greater responsibilities. And John Delahanty at that time was the senior field representative and decided to go to law school so I was then promoted to that position of senior field representative for Senator Muskie. So in a kind of a big way, I was generally responsible for the state operations. Basically the way that worked, if anything went wrong, I heard about it.

MH: Good way to get people to take responsibility, blame them for things that, anything that went wrong. And in that capacity you were reporting to Charlie Micoleau, at that point?

LB: Yes, and Maynard Toll.

MH: Right, he was before Charlie.

LB: Yeah, Maynard was there initially, and then Charlie. At some point Charlie was going to law school at that time. I can't believe how he did that to this day. It's amazing how Charlie worked his way through law school while he was the executive assistant. I forget his title, deputy chief or whatever.

MH: He had the same title that George Mitchell did when he worked there, for Muskie.

LB: Yeah, right, and then Maynard moved on. Well of course Leon was chief there, too. I'd have to go back and reconstruct all those years, but there was Charlie, Maynard, and Leon Billings that were there. So that was just over a period of 1975 to 1980, or five years.

MH: Tell me about that 1975-76 campaign.

LB: Well, I wasn't involved in the campaign directly. I saw a lot of it because I traveled. When Muskie came to Maine, I probably did seventy five percent of the travel with him. It was a real grind and, because I worked a full week and then I worked nearly every weekend during that period, as he ramped up. And he worked incredibly hard, this was really a challenge for Muskie himself. And so, you know, I saw a lot of the campaign in the early part, we were doing official events, but clearly they had campaign implications later. They did assign a campaign driver, you know, the last few months of the campaign.

MH: Who were his opponents?

LB: Well, we had Bob Monks, and Phil Merrill ran that campaign, he was the campaign manager. And you know, Monks had tried to build a reputation and, I mean he took on Margaret Chase Smith in the previous election cycle and lost to her, and then he did the ballot initiative that abolished straight party voting in Maine, thinking that that would, you know, help Republican candidates by overcoming the straight ticket voting that was common in some of the mill towns in Maine, cities.

MH: In a campaign like that, was he doing, was Muskie having professional polls done?

LB: Yeah, as I recall, and God, I have to say this is a long time ago so my recollection is needless to say getting fuzzy, but Pat Caddell was the pollster at that time.

MH: Pat Caddell who later became President Carter's pollster.

LB: Yeah, and he and his partner Paul Maslin, I believe, [were] involved in that campaign as well. We used Caddell and Maslin in Mitchell's first campaign. Well, Paul was the lead on that. I think maybe Caddell was already moving out of that partnership, and he moved to California and decided he was going to land there and get involved in the enormous number of campaigns that are run out there on ballot questions and make a lot of money.

MH: So did Senator Muskie, was he really in charge of his campaign or was it Merrill, Phil Merrill, who was, did he have a group of people who advised the senator? How was it set up?

LB: Yeah, I think Charlie was very high on Phil Merrill, and I think Senator Muskie had a lot of confidence in Charlie. And so Phil put together the campaign, they worked out of Congress Street as I recall, and there were times when Muskie's personal friends and advisors, people like I think Senator Mitchell, Joe Angelone, Dick McMahan and others, didn't feel the campaign was going all that well. But they picked it up in the fall and they were determined to raise a ton of money at the end and just bury Monks, and they did in the end. But there were times when people were worried that maybe Monks was gaining ground, and that's natural of course for any campaign.

And so it all worked out in the end, but I know that just weeks before, there was concern and he got together with his friends and they decided to redouble their effort to raise money. Of course the person who was involved in every nuance of this was Charlie, but I just saw it from a perch outside of the campaign.

MH: Did you have more contact with George Mitchell during that campaign? Because you lived fairly close to him, didn't you? I mean if you're in Cape Elizabeth, he's in South Portland at that time.

LB: No, I had very little contact with him because, well first of all he had been appointed U.S. attorney and then later U.S. district judge, and so I would see him occasionally, but very

infrequently. Occasionally I'd see him around but he was preoccupied and he was out of politics, so -

MH: So did the Muskie selection to be secretary of state come as a big surprise to you?

LB: Well no, it didn't, because I recall visiting our offices in Washington – I did visit maybe twice a year – and I spent an evening with Leon Billings, who was the chief of staff at that time, and he said, “What do you think about Muskie being secretary of state?” And I said, geez, I was shocked at first to hear that. And I said, “I'd be surprised if it were offered, but –“

MH: So this must have been just right there at the end of April.

LB: Yeah, well it was a few months before. I have to say I'm not entirely clear on the exact timing of when Leon told me this, but I was very surprised by it when he raised it. And I said “Leon, how much experience does he bring to the table?” He had served on the Foreign Relations Committee, but he really had focused on domestic policy, in any case, and he served on that mainly just to give himself some credentials during his presidential campaign.

But when the rescue mission failed and Vance resigned and Muskie received the appointment, I wasn't, after reflecting back on that discussion, I wasn't surprised. So it was apparent that there had been some discussions months before that.

MH: Right, long before the rescue (*unintelligible*).

LB: Long before, long before that, right. As I recall the circumstances, Cyrus Vance was opposed to the rescue mission and told the president he would resign no matter the outcome, whether it was successful or not.

MH: But what that suggests, though, is that Vance had probably been thinking about leaving anyway.

LB: Yeah, more than likely he was going to leave.

MH: So what, was it a nerve wracking time between? Did you think you were going to have to find another line of work?

LB: I thought that was a real possibility at the time, and there was a lot of talk obviously about who Governor Brennan would choose to fill Muskie's, the balance of Muskie's term, which was a couple of years remaining, two-and-a-half years. Which was good fortune that he resigned when he did, because I think if it had been just about a month later, or a month earlier rather, that successor would have had to stand for election that fall. So as they had it, whoever was going to get that was going to have two-and-a-half years to get established as a U.S. senator, which is quite a luxury. I think that, historically, most appointees fail to get reelected, the numbers, I can't recall who they all were, but percentages were poor. But given the fact that

Mitchell received it with two-and-a-half years to really develop his image, his record and so forth, it really gave him a fighting chance.

But we had lots of discussions as to who Brennan would pick, there was speculation about Gerry Conley as -

MH: Gerry Conley, there's -

LB: Senior.

MH: And he was a state senator, right, from Westbrook?

LB: President of the Senate from Portland. John Martin was another that was thought to be a likely candidate. There was even talk about Ken Curtis, although that seemed extremely unlikely.

MH: Why would that have been unlikely?

LB: Well, because there had been some real hard feelings between Brennan and Curtis over a judgeship and a couple of other events that Curtis was involved with and criticized Governor Brennan for his decisions. It wasn't good, as I recall.

I was surprised when they selected George Mitchell, but I met, I had a pizza with George and Joe Angelone a few days before the decision was made, and George said to me, "What do you think about who will be selected?" I said, "I don't know," I said, "Conley, Martin." He said, well, "What would you think if I were offered it, what would you think of that?" I said, "Well first of all, I'd be very surprised that Brennan would offer you the appointment but," I said, "if he did, I'd take it." And then the reason I gave was that you'd have two-and-a-half years to get established, but I said, I don't think you need to worry about it.

Because it seemed implausible to me that Brennan, given all of his loyalties to people who had been involved in his political career for many years, would find a way to push them aside and [choose] someone purely on quality and merit. I knew quality and merit, I know Joe Brennan and I know that would be an important factor, but then you had to weigh relationships, friendships and so forth. And I didn't know much about his relationship with Mitchell but, so it was merely my limited perspective and my take on what was going on.

MH: Wouldn't it have been fun to be a fly on the wall in the Muskie conversation with Brennan at Brunswick Naval Air Station. Very interesting, whatever transpired. So Mitchell is appointed by the governor to take Muskie's seat, and I think he takes office in May?

LB: May of 1980.

MH: Yeah, May of 1980. And you do what?

LB: Well George was asked by Muskie to retain all of his professional staff, at least till the end of the year to give them an opportunity to make transitions into other careers and positions, which he agreed to do. So I continued as a senior field representative for Senator Mitchell, and was later given the title chief field representative. I worked very closely with him to map out a strategy to establish himself as a senator, and to establish his political base in the state, and we created a very rigorous program to expand and improve his constituent services operation.

MH: Tell me, what did that look like?

LB: Well at the time, it had been expanded substantially by Senator Muskie, so we did add an office in Aroostook County, but it wasn't until after the next election that we added the Lewiston office. It was quite a bit after that that we added Lewiston, quite a few years later. So we did town meetings and so the senator traveled all over the state, and we did newsletters, and we went to just scores of communities for town meetings to help get him established and connect to Maine voters.

MH: I have a recollection. This is about the time that I kind of entered the picture in the Mitchell office, and I have a recollection of you being very heavily involved in direct mail. Is that an accurate recollection on my part, or can you talk to that a bit?

LB: Yeah, that was a very critical part of the strategy, at the time. Senators of course have the franking privilege provided them by the Constitution to communicate with citizens, and they all pretty much use that to mail newsletters to keep people abreast of what they were doing in the Senate. But you had to have your own file. You could use Postal Patron, but it was very wasteful, because there were limits on what you could do for newsletters. In any case, what we did was we undertook a project to acquire all the Maine voter lists, but only those lists that had the so-called check list of voters who actually cast their ballots and were marked on the original list at that time, because nothing was kept electronically to speak of, to track that kind of information, so you had to go to each municipality. And we put a couple of crews out on the road with copiers and they would roll these machines in – at that time they were not lightweight, to say the least, a high speed copier would probably weigh a couple hundred pounds, so -

MH: Who was doing that?

LB: David Lemoine and Mark Stevens. David Lemoine is now the treasurer of the State of Maine, and Mark Stevens is in his father's computer business, a software services company. And they went to just an unbelievable number of Maine towns and acquired copies of the voter check list from the last presidential election, the 1980 election which, we had a huge turnout in that election. And then those lists were taken to a company called the Computer Center, which today is known as MUNIS, and they had data entry clerks enter that data into an electronic database. We really created the first electronic database in Maine or a statewide voter file of those who actually cast ballots in the previous presidential election.

MH: Was that an expensive process?

LB: Oh yeah, it was very expensive. I think even then it cost us nearly eighty thousand dollars to do that; that was a lot of money then, because it was labor intensive, and we had to not only acquire the list but then you had to manually enter the data. But it was an incredibly valuable list, and the Senate rules allowed us to supply to the Senate Post Office, well it wasn't the post office, it was the Senate Service Department, a computer tape of just the names and addresses. We couldn't include any partisan political information, but we still could share the list and use it for franking purposes for newsletters and so forth, and we did. And so that helped, we used it for meeting notices when the Senator had town meetings, and we used it for newsletters.

MH: Didn't the Democratic Party have a list?

LB: Democratic Party didn't have a list, no. What usually happened in that era was that you just relied on the local town committees to obtain the voter file, the voter list rather, hard copy. Under Maine law, each town shares, entitled to one, either an electronic or a hard copy. Back then it was virtually all hard copy, PCs were just, I think the PC was introduced like in 1981 or something by IBM.

MH: That must have been a fairly valuable piece of wealth, I guess, I don't know what I'm supposed to call it. But I mean it must have been, having that list must have been -

LB: Oh, it was huge. We used that list for the entire election cycle, and we set up a phone banking operation. I ended up managing that campaign, and we -

MH: When did that role change? When did you go from being a field representative to a campaign manager, roughly?

LB: Well, I think it might have been in the, let's see, we went through that election cycle so it would have been maybe in the summer or fall of '81, I think, and then I transitioned in that fall I believe, Mike. God, that's so long ago. Still, I think it was about then. And it was interesting; I didn't really want to be the campaign manager. I had encouraged Senator Mitchell to have Charlie Jacobs do it, and Charlie told the Senator to have me do it. So we -

MH: Was Charlie Jacobs -?

LB: Well Charlie at the time was Senator Mitchell's scheduler, but he had incredible experience in politics and government before that and he was, and Charlie's very capable, very competent, capable manager. But in any case, Senator Mitchell wanted me to do it so I did, and we utilized that electronic voter file heavily during the campaign. We canvassed somewhere between fifty- and sixty-thousand independent voters, and we were the first campaign to do such a thing. And when the calls were made, we recorded those and they went back out to our computer vendor and then we generated a personalized letter from the Senator to each one of

those independent voters who had been contacted, with inside address and formal salutation and hand signed. Those letters, for all intents and purposes were custom, original letters to people. And we included the literature; depending on what issues they had expressed interest in during the phone contact.

MH: In 2008—those kind of letters are so common now.

LB: They weren't then.

MH: Buy they were like, in 1981-82, they weren't.

LB: They weren't, no, and it required a lot of effort to get it done.

MH: So tell me how you set up the campaign staff, I mean the campaign. I mean, you had a finance committee? How many committees did you have?

LB: Well, we had a finance committee and we had a steering committee. Our fund-raising was critical, so the original days of the campaign was focused on fund-raising. And David Johnson was chief of staff and he took responsibility for all out-of-state fund-raising, I took responsibility for all in-state fund-raising. We put together a finance committee, and we had a really strong finance committee.

MH: Who was on it?

LB: Well, Scott Hutchinson was co-chair, Joe Angelone, Bob Dunfey came in later, we had a little hiccup there because Curtis began an ill-fated candidacy to take Mitchell on during the primary and then bailed out in the fall of 1981.

MH: Can we go on a tangent? Why did he bail?

LB: Well he had a mild heart attack, and that was the final straw. But his campaign, it was dead at the time anyway. It was just a failure. And in fact, it was in debt deeply, and after he withdrew I spoke with some of Ken's friends, including Scott Hutchinson, and they asked if Senator Mitchell would help get them out of debt. And the Senator agreed to do that, but he said after the election, "I can't afford to raise money in a race for my seat, and I need to spend every dime I can raise." So we did do that, we did have that fund raiser after the election.

And another thing that we focused on during that period is, Senator Mitchell, after the '80 election, with the restructuring of Congress, put in a bid to join the Finance Committee, which we all thought was really of critical importance because Social Security was a very dominant issue in terms of domestic policy at that time. And of course it was and still is one of the more powerful committees because it deals with tax law. And so he put in a bid and won that, thankfully the leadership recognized that that committee would have a material impact on his prospects for reelection, or for election, rather, in 1982.

We focused on fund-raising. David Johnson just did an incredible job working with senators, colleagues, and friends in Washington, and the DSCC was helpful. And then back here in Maine we dug in and started raising money.

MH: So many of these people that worked on the campaign and were volunteers on various campaign committees, like the finance committee, were they people who had previously supported him and helped him in his race for governor in '74, or were many of them new?

LB: Well first of all, all those people were part of that original group, and there were a lot of people from the legal profession who knew him and respected him, [had] seen him in his professional pursuits and [were] aware of his incredible intelligence and personal qualities. And there were people from the neighborhood; it was what most candidates would expect, but multiply it by maybe a magnitude.

MH: So after you become campaign manager, were you actually making the calls asking for money, or were you kind of lighting a fire under other people to make those calls?

LB: I made some, but our focus was to use the multiplier effect and bring in and get people really committed onto the finance committee to make those calls. Fund-raising is largely about personal relationships, and that's the key. And there are people who would be responsive to a call from a campaign manager or who are involved just because they love politics and they want to help, but a lot of other people need to have some nexus to a candidate, whether it's the candidate himself or members of the finance committee. George himself had to make a lot of those calls.

And we had a major direct mail campaign. One of the things we did was that, in addition to the voter file, we accumulated the records of all those who attended the Democratic caucuses in the previous presidential election cycles, and in the off years as well, and we had quite a good list. I think it was probably close to thirty-five thousand Democratic activists, and we pounded that list, we had thousands of small donors that contributed to the campaign in that cycle, and then later that expanded out to maybe over ten thousand in the subsequent reelection campaign.

So there was a lot of effort that went into raising money, and doing it among small donors to build up that base, build out a field organization, and we finished that campaign, if memory serves me, I think we had at least twenty-two or twenty-three campaign headquarters all over the state, and we had thousands of volunteers.

MH: Tell me about how the campaign, can you recall kind of high points and low points and low points during that year-and-a-half, or two years really, preceding the election?

LB: I never felt like I had a low point in that campaign. What I understood from the beginning was that a poll had been released by David Emery's camp in the summer of 1981 and – it was in that period, maybe in the spring or summer – and it showed him leading Mitchell by

thirty-six percentage points – Senator Mitchell refers to that number frequently – and -

MH: Did your numbers show the same thing?

LB: No, it didn't show quite that number but it showed us down more than twenty-something, as I recall. I think I actually still have those polls. But what was very revealing about that poll was that Senator Mitchell was only known by fifty percent of the respondents, and as a result it had a tremendously negative effect on his numbers in that survey. I just knew that that was going to be overcome, that his name recognition as he develops his image as a senator and becomes identified with issues and so forth, that that would be overcome, and I had a lot of confidence in him and his abilities and that people would recognize those qualities. So I never really thought there was a low point there.

He did, I think, feel really concerned about that number. And I remember talking to him about it, I said, "Look, half the people don't even know who the hell you are, so we're going to get more than a majority of those people and we're going to win over a lot of the undecideds and Emery's going to implode." I never expected him to implode and lose by twenty-one points, but he did. And so I always felt that we were just constantly making progress in that campaign.

We had some tense periods when the paid television advertising began but we began in the fall of 1981, a full year before the election, we did a program on Social Security. It was a half-hour paid broadcast, where we brought in some people to talk with the Senator about it and establish his position on that issue. Then we ran advertising in January of 1982.

MH: Would you say that Social Security was the big issue?

LB: It was a very important issue at the time, because there had been discussions about reform of Social Security and there was a large ongoing debate in Congress that led to an impasse and, as I recall, the formation of a Social Security bipartisan commission that came up with recommendations I believe in 1983 to try to resolve some of the problems with the system. But it was a big issue, it was on the mind of a lot of voters, and Senator Mitchell was on the Finance Committee and as a result, they had some jurisdiction over the issue, and we thought this was an issue we really needed to develop.

MH: What other issues were in that first campaign?

LB: The economy was significant, and the Senator wanted to follow in the tradition of Ed Muskie and develop his reputation in the area of environmental law, and did so, got involved in several pieces of legislation before the Environment and Public Works Committee that he served on. So he focused on that, and the economy was a significant issue, and it became an enormous issue in the fall. I think the unemployment rate nationally peaked out at somewhere in the double digits, maybe close to eleven percent in the summer or fall of 1982, so it had tremendous effect on the race too. It was high in Maine, but not that high, maybe it was nine percent or something like that.

MH: So you were driving him around still, in many of these events? You never seemed to, as I recall, you never got rid of that task.

LB: I did do some of that during all of that time. When he came in, I traveled with him again. I probably spent two-thirds of the time traveling with him every weekend.

MH: What was he like, campaigning?

LB: Oh, he was very good. He found that humor, especially self-deprecating humor was really a powerful way to embrace people, and it just worked very effectively for him. He came up with a handful of very funny jokes that people appreciated, mostly self-deprecating humor. And I think he was able to be himself when he met people. In contrast, I think the '74 campaign was just very different in the way that he and his campaign approached it, and certainly some lessons were learned from that. So I think he felt comfortable and at ease, and he met people easily, and he was just very effective campaigning one-on-one, and he was extremely effective in his remarks and speeches.

MH: People say that the balance was tipped toward Longley in the last two weeks of the '74 campaign. What were the last two weeks of the Senate campaign like?

LB: Well, it was over by then. Probably the third week out, and the fourth week before it, they tried to nuke us with some negative ads. They weren't that harsh – we thought they were at the time – compared to today's advertising they were pretty mild.

MH: How did Mitchell handle negative things said against him?

LB: Well we went on the offensive, too. We went after Emery for his mistakes they had – this was much earlier – but they had claimed that Senator Mitchell had a zero legislative rating from the VFW, and in fact he didn't have a zero rating, he had no rating because he'd only cast something like three out of the ten votes that they ranked. But their campaign manager made the mistake of saying, well, we can treat this as a zero, when in fact it wasn't and the VFW defended us so we nailed him on that.

I remember we ran a terrific ad where Emery had put his name on a bill that would give a tax break to small independent oil producers who owned small stripper wells throughout the South, well, East and Southwest. He was the only member of the New England congressional delegation with his name on that bill, and it was just a blatant tax break for these people receiving royalties on pumping residual oil out of fields that had been pretty depleted, the excuse being, we need more oil. We criticized him for that and then he quietly took his name off the bill. And we ran an ad that showed the bill, showed his name on it, then showed the name disappear from the face of the bill.

It was really neat. Lee Bobker of Vision Associates was our media consultant, and he had

dabbled in political campaigns but he was really a filmmaker. And we chose Lee because he worked in film, and we knew that the Senator had to be made a real person, to bring out the strength of his character and his personal qualities, and his warmth and his humor and so forth, and -

MH: How did you go about that? I mean did you just start asking around for who's an imaginative filmmaker or, I mean how do you begin that process of identifying something like Lee Bobker?

LB: Well it was easy, because he had done Muskie's stuff. So we interviewed with him and decided that was the route to go, and of course that was the Senator's decision. But I thought Lee did a great job. And we had a couple of ads that were as good as I've seen, they were really excellent, and they were humorous. So, but they told a good story. It was his biographical ad that was particularly strong, it was a one-minute ad that really introduced him to voters in a way they hadn't completely seen in that period leading up to the spring of 1982.

MH: Well, very good. Why don't we take a little break here.

*End of Disk One
Disk Two*

MH: Larry, talk to me about the kind of key players in the campaign in '82, who were the folks that, during the break you mentioned Sharon Sudbay, who were some of the other people that were really, that you recall?

LB: Well Sharon was very important, Mary McAleney worked on the campaign, John Diamond was our field coordinator and established our 2nd District presence and did a great job for us. Maggie Cox worked with John out of that office, and we just got a lot of young people involved in the campaign.

MH: You mentioned Sandy?

LB: Sandy Vigue-Martin, yeah, she was involved there. Charlie Jacobs came up from Washington later in the campaign. Mary was involved. Those were some of the key players.

MH: Do you keep in touch with many of them now?

LB: Yeah, I see them around. Not frequently, but I see Mary from time to time.

MH: Okay, well let's move on. The Senator's elected in his own right in November of 1982, and what happens to you?

LB: Well, I actually went off the payroll completely for maybe six to eight months of the campaign and I returned to my position as, I think at that time, that's when I was given the title

chief field representative, and we just continued to focus on constituent services. We, at that time, decided to take advantage of computers and get those into our offices. I did become involved in trying to develop, and actually did later develop, a computer software application to provide custom management of our constituent correspondence, something that was available only in Washington and very rudimentary; it was a very crude system. That didn't happen immediately, that came quite a few years later.

MH: So what was that about? I mean that was, so somebody wrote in to the Senator, you, it was kind of like a computer logging system?

LB: Yeah, it was a database. We could keep a record of a constituent, their name and address, phone number, contact information, and then you could record specific steps taken to assist them and you could generate correspondence and generally keep track of the work. It greatly facilitated the efficiency of handling constituent services, and gave us a better handle on what we had for workload. Because prior to that it was all done with paper and we were still working on typewriters there at the time.

MH: How big was the Portland office at this point? Who was working there?

LB: Let's see, well there was Sharon Sudbay, and we had different people come in there, there was Margaret Malia [Kneeland], later Margaret, she later married -

MH: Rancourt?

LB: Well, she was with Muskie. I think she had, had she left when Mitchell came in?

MH: That must have been before the election, because I was going into your office in Portland and I remember someone named Rancourt.

LB: Right, now that's right, Susie Rancourt, she was there. There was Paula Michaud, I think she stayed on. God, I'm trying to remember though, she does go back.

MH: So you're talking two or three of you there in the office.

LB: Yeah, typically is what we had. And it was pretty routine type of stuff between elections for me.

MH: Was it more or less assumed that you would be the campaign manager in the subsequent election six years later?

LB: It was, yeah, it was never discussed really, it was just assumed that we'd do it. So within four years we were right back into another election cycle, and thank God the senators had a six-year term so that was at least one nice aspect of continuing my career in congressional work.

MH: Give you some variety in four-to-six-year cycles.

LB: Right. But during that time we worked on a range of projects, fish piers and other economic development projects were our focus and that was important in terms of maintaining the Senator's connection to Maine citizens and Maine voters.

MH: Did he slow down somewhat after the '82 election? I mean was he coming up to Maine as often as he did during the election?

LB: If he slowed down, it wasn't much. And he really did come home almost every weekend. He really took little time off, and he was just very devoted to coming back and traveling on weekends. I found, again, I was still doing a fair amount of that after that election cycle, and we eventually brought in Jeff Porter. And we moved our office up to Congress Street from the Federal Building. We had to because the Post Office took over that floor for their own administrative operations. And so I was given some relief from that.

MH: As the chief field representative, were you the one that proposed where he would go, you know, over several months? In other words, when would he go to Aroostook, when he'd go to Bangor and then, who did you talk to to figure that out?

LB: Well, we worked with our scheduler and with the chief of staff and the field reps to basically consult and coordinate with the Senator on his schedule. And we did try to map out a strategic approach to the schedule so that we could have geographic balance, and especially balance in terms of population to make sure that we weren't overextending the Senator's time in areas where he was meeting few people and spending large amounts of time traveling. But we still had to make sure we got to rural areas and cover them effectively. And we tended to schedule the Senator in rural areas when we had long recesses and had an opportunity to travel and chain together a few days for that purpose. Weekend travel, which was two-thirds, three-quarters of the year, was mainly focused in population centers.

So that was sort of the general approach that we took to the schedule, but we'd also look at areas that he hadn't done all that well in the '82 election and make sure that we'd get him better known and established in those regions. And we did, we really did, because in the next election cycle we took on Jasper Wyman and just crushed him everywhere. I can't remember, some crazy number.

MH: Around something like eighty-eight percent I think, or was it around eighty-two percent?

LB: Well, I think it was around eight-one or -two percent, but the number of towns that Mitchell lost was almost counted on two hands, if I recall correctly. And I remember he made a joke about it, but it was unbelievable. And I can't recall these towns, one of them I think was Bowerbank, but someone could quickly look back at the election statistics. It was an incredibly small number of towns that he lost. I think he made a point, he'd know this, but I think he made a point to go to every one of those towns.

MH: That he lost.

LB: That he lost, and we had town meetings at them and he'd explain, well I'm here because obviously I didn't do something right. And, yeah, I think he did.

MH: Having worked for the Muskie presidential campaign, you must have had an opportunity to kind of watch Muskie in action and watch Mitchell in action. How did they differ? A lot is made of the fact that Mitchell kind of started in politics working as a staff person for Muskie, and so I imagine they were somewhat the same but they were also probably different in ways. Can you speak to that?

LB: Oh, they're very different in terms of personality. In terms of intellect, they're both towers of intellect, brilliant men, there's no question about that. Mitchell would say about Muskie, he was the smartest man I've ever met. Well, I think George is among the smartest that anyone's known who served in the Senate, including Muskie. So from that standpoint, both were exceptionally articulate, and could take complex ideas and express them in everyday language so that ordinary people could understand their points and their views. Both had a gift to take complex subject matter and provide meaning to those matters to ordinary people, without having to resort to erudite or sophisticated language that some people use just to snow their audiences with their intelligence. To the contrary, they could both express complex ideas using simple language, which I think was a real gift, really.

And from that standpoint, they shared that in common, but they were very different personalities. Ed Muskie was a scratchy, somewhat cantankerous man. I had a really nice relationship with him because I traveled with him extensively. I did all that travel leading up to the '76 campaign, got to know him and his family very well. So I saw that side of him and he was a very serious, committed senator. I mean he really was. But he was very traditional, and although he had a somewhat sarcastic, sometimes he could have a biting sense of humor, he just didn't have that warmth and the broader sense of humor that George Mitchell possessed, they were just very different in that respect. It has a lot to do with their upbringing, their families, the culture from which they come. And I know the Senator's, Senator Mitchell's family are just all wonderful, warm people and it probably has much to do with the Lebanese heritage. That I think is definitely a distinguishing difference between the two of them, very different.

MH: When they were out on the road there was a lot of down time, I mean not down time but travel time. Was one more talkative than the other?

LB: Well, Muskie was not particularly talkative, we'd talk a bit. Mainly when I traveled with him, we talked about family stuff, things he was interested in really outside of politics sometimes, but not a lot though. With George, we'd talk about everything, campaign stuff, issues before the Senate, politics a lot, much more conversation when traveling.

MH: Of course the age difference was less.

LB: Well there was a big age difference, there was really, Ed Muskie was from a different era, really different generation.

MH: Did you ever get to know Andrea, or the Senator's first wife Sally?

LB: Yeah, I got to know both of them. I liked Sally, she was a very nice person, and Andrea was fairly young at the time when I first joined the Senator, she grew up during those years. I saw a little bit of her. Neither one of them enjoyed politics, didn't like to go to events, which I respected. And so it was rare that Sally would attend a function, but she would, she did well. If it was important, she was there for him.

MH: Let's talk a little bit, if you could focus a little bit on the, I guess it's the 19- I was out of the out of the country at this point – but the 1988 campaign, who was your opponent?

LB: Well, it was Jasper Wyman.

MH: And what was his story?

LB: Well Wyman was a former Democrat who had turned Republican, and he had been the leader of the Maine Christian Civic League, a very conservative Christian fundamentalist group, that had a long history in Maine as anyone who's been in politics would know. And at that time the far right was building strength and winning elections, and negative campaigning had really begun to flourish and it was increasingly effective, and they employed those techniques. So we were girding for what we thought might be a really strongly negative kind of campaign that would be built on those social issues that were emerging: anti-abortion, secularism and all these complaints about American culture, society, and government, and we thought we'd be in a really tough, tough race with him. Although we knew he didn't inherently present a strong candidacy, what we were most concerned about was these national groups that had formed like Moral Majority and others, Jerry Falwell's organization, other conservative groups that had been so successful in those intervening years, and we were concerned they were going to come in and play in the race.

MH: Did they?

LB: As it turned out, they didn't. No. And we started early, we planned early. We actually decided to change our media consultant, even though Lee Bobker did an incredible job. We really thought we faced a different need at the time with these outside groups coming in and just smashing at us with negative campaigning, and we decided to switch to Bob Squier and his firm so that we could benefit from their experience in other races nationally where they've had to deal with these groups. Lee Bobker really had only done one or two campaigns, it wasn't his mainstream work, he was a filmmaker. In fact, he had done a documentary during those years, after the '82 election, for Public Television called *I, Leonardo*, won an Academy Award nomination for it and so forth. He was a filmmaker and a good one, but he wasn't in our view

going to understand how to counteract the negative attacks, so we switched.

MH: Who were you working with, I mean we already talked about the landslide victory that the Senator had, but before Election Day, who were you working with mostly in Washington? The chief of staff during that '88 campaign was who? David Johnson had gone on to work in the private sector.

LB: Yeah, David had gone on so, well let's see, Mary McAleney and Martha Pope, I'm trying to remember the order.

MH: That's all right. So it was basically Mary and Martha.

LB: Yeah, I think it was, I think David left -

MH: Was David still helping though, on the fund-raising end of things?

LB: He did, he was of some help. But I'm trying to remember when David left. God, that's where -

MH: I think he actually left fairly soon, I think it was in '84 actually. And there was, Rich Arenberg was in there for a while.

LB: That's right, we had Rich for a while.

MH: Before the Iran-Contra happened.

LB: Right, I think Rich might have, Rich was before Mary I think.

MH: I would think Rich was from late '84 till, I know that he went on, he became the staff person for the Iran-Contra investigation, so he kind of went off, I think off of the chief, well, administrative assistant as we called them back then, and I think he became the staff person that ran Contra, which would have been, I can't think what dates those were. I was out of the country so it's hard to, I have to go back and reconstruct. I should bring a time line with me to these interviews.

LB: Oh, I know it, yeah.

MH: It helps people.

LB: Oh yeah, you need that to really remember, yeah.

MH: So you were the chief field representative then, going back to the chief field representative position after the '88 election?

LB: Yeah, that's right.

MH: And then did your duties stay the same really until, until when?

LB: Well they stayed the same, and at some point, let's see, somewhere around, I think it must have been somewhere around 1990 Senator Mitchell asked if I'd be interested in coming down to Washington to become deputy sergeant-at-arms for a year, and then become sergeant-at-arms.

MH: Who was sergeant-at-arms at that time?

LB: At the time it was Henry Giugni.

MH: Now by that point the Senator is majority leader.

LB: Right.

MH: And does he pick, does majority leader pick the sergeant-at-arms?

LB: Yeah, basically. It actually is voted on by the Senate, but the majority leader controls that nomination. And it's varied over the years, sometimes it's collaborative. But in my case, when I later became sergeant-at-arms, he just put my name in, that was it, there was no discussion.

MH: Who was Henry Giugni?

LB: Well Henry Giugni had, he had been a staffer for Senator Inouye. He was a former Honolulu police officer, had come from Hawaii. And when Mitchell became majority leader, he was asked to allow Henry Giugni to remain in that position for two years, to finish out his retirement. And the Senator then was going to replace him – my recollection of time here is off just a little bit, I can't remember exactly when he discussed this with me, but at the time my kids were at a really important stage in their life and beginning high school and I didn't want to do it, I just, because of the family considerations. But I told the Senator I was extremely grateful and that should, in a few years, the opportunity reopen I would be interested, but I just didn't want to make that move. And so he then asked Martha Pope to do that, and she became the first woman sergeant-at-arms of the United States Senate.

MH: Well if Henry Giugni was an associate of Senator Inouye, Senator Inouye was never majority leader.

LB: No, but whomever was at the time, would have been Byrd, apparently decided –

MH: He was a whip I think (*unintelligible*).

LB: Yeah, it could have been, I'm sure he got it at the request of Inouye and many others. I know that one of my predecessors from years back who was affiliated with Senator Mitchell was Nordy Hoffmann, and that came about as kind of a consultation over some bourbon, is how he was selected. My selection was, Senator Mitchell just decided he was going to nominate me.

MH: So it was Henry Giugni, then Martha, and then you, is that correct?

LB: Right. And see, J. Walter Stewart, Joe Stewart, was secretary of the Senate and decided to retire, and Martha really wanted that position, that was where she had strongest interest, given her legislative background. And so when he left, she moved to that position and opened the sergeant-at-arms position. And at that point I was in a better place, and the pay was going to be the full pay rather than the deputy for a year and then, taking that position. So I decided to do it, and I went, and Senator Mitchell secured a commitment from Senator Daschle, because he was leaving the Senate at that time, that he would retain me for two years after Senator Mitchell departed the Senate so I could complete my number of years I needed for retirement.

MH: Well what was that job, what did that entail? That must have been very different from being the chief field representative.

LB: Oh, yeah. It was a job with enormous responsibility. It's a job that, because of the title it doesn't sound like a particularly serious job, sergeant-at-arms of the United States Senate. Well actually sergeant-at-arms and doorkeeper of the United States Senate. But I had about 880 employees on the payroll, these were civilians, we carried about half of the U.S. Capitol police force because the payroll was split between the House and Senate, and so we had half of that payroll in addition to the civilian workforce. And I served as just one of three members on the U.S. Capitol Police Board. And we basically were the CEO of the Senate because we managed all the telecommunication systems; we managed all of the IT systems.

MH: So some of your technical background from high school must have helped.

LB: Some of that helped, and my experience with computers and software, because I wrote a really large-scale software program to manage our constituent correspondence in later years when I was with Mitchell and brought that in. It was just much better and provided access to constituent correspondence and services in a way that you just couldn't get through what was offered by the Senate computing division. But in any case, that experience did help. And of course I was a consumer of the services provided by the Office of Sergeant-at-Arms, because they ran the print shop, they did all of the direct mail operations, they managed the leases for all of the Senate offices. We had over four hundred Senate offices in the states, in the fifty states, and that included the leases, telecom data, computers, everything.

MH: How many people did you have directly reporting to you when you were sergeant-at-arms?

LB: Well, I had all the department heads that directly reported, each of those divisions I just

mentioned, print, copy shop, telecommunications, computer. We also managed the barber shop, the beauty parlor. It was a far flung operation. It's been restructured since I was there, they've reorganized the administrative managerial operations in the Senate and the sergeant-at-arms has far fewer duties. One of our key responsibilities was security of the Senate wing of the Capitol, and the chamber itself.

MH: Did you have any incidents, security incidents while you were sergeant-at-arms, I mean were there any bomb scares or bombs go off or, I know at various times in the last forty years they've had some attempts.

LB: Right. No, I did not while I was there, Mike. But when I arrived I asked for a full security briefing by the U.S. Capitol police and, in fact I remember that meeting distinctly because I initiated an effort to enhance the security. And this of course was after the war on the Persian Gulf, and the increased risks of terrorism were becoming more apparent years before 9/11. And I sat down and went through the needs, and I made a request, which I couldn't fill because all of the equipment needs were actually taken and paid for out of the architect of the Capitol's budget, but we wanted new scanning equipment that could identify explosives better. We had scanning equipment that was mainly there to identify firearms, but new technology had become available to better identify potential explosives that would show the images in color when they scanned.

Another issue which I regret I didn't really pursue was, I typically asked, and I remember this, whether our Capitol police were excessively exposed at the entrances to the buildings. I was concerned that, they just simply had a flat work table and they were typically manned by two individuals on the busy entrances, for the public access. There was just a single officer at the staff entrances. But if someone came in and wanted to break through that or attack, they were both exposed. And I asked them whether or not they'd consider a bullet proof barrier so that one could be behind that and the other working and checking bags and stuff as people came in. And they said they had actually looked at that, and what they were most concerned about, and they had some discussions with the subcommittee that had oversight, they were concerned about just being too separated from the public and looking like they were too fearful and Big Brother-ish. But if that had been done at the time, we probably would have saved a life or two when that insane person broke into the front of the House and shot the two police officers there. And now they've got a different set up, so -

MH: I do recall, and I worked in the Capitol between '73 and 1984, and while I was working there, there were two bombs that went off in the Senate. One of them was actually in a bathroom that Senator Muskie shared with Senator Ervin, they had the hideaway offices that were in the, I guess it would be the west front of the Capitol. I was still working on the House side at that point, so it must have been prior to 1978, but somebody went in and left a small explosive device in this bathroom, and fortunately Ervin or Muskie weren't using their offices at the time. And I remember it was big problem, because the hideaway office was significantly damaged.

And then there was, while I was on the Senate side, and actually we had a late night session in, I

believe I was working for Senator Mitchell at the time, we had a late night session on either a DOD or a foreign aid bill, because I was there, and like a half an hour after the session was over, around eleven thirty at night, there was a bomb that had been left out in the, the kind of a lobby area before you enter the hallway that takes you down to the Rotunda, just to the left hand side. It was actually just around the corner from S-207, that somebody left in a paper bag and it blew up. That's when I remember the, after that second bomb they really tightened up on magnetic devices at the entrances.

It has been, I've found it to be sad that it went from being a wide open building to one that I guess now is virtually, you can't get into. It's very restricted at this point.

LB: It is unfortunate. And that was a concern at the time when I was sergeant-at-arms, but I was only there from April to the end of that year because we lost control of the Senate and I was replaced by a Republican appointee. Had I stayed, I would have taken a more aggressive step with respect to security, but I was clearly in an awkward position, I was coming in mid-way, in fact we were just presenting the budget literally the week that I arrived. So I had to work with Martha Pope to make a presentation before the subcommittee to review our budget. And a lot of that security apparatus and any structural changes were the responsibility of the architect of the Capitol. But he served on a Police Board with the Senate sergeant-at-arms and the House sergeant-at-arms, so we could have a discussion about that. But it's like everything, there wasn't the sense of urgency at the time, and there was a fear of overreacting and isolating the people's institution from the people. And that's a genuine concern.

MH: So how long did you actually spend then down in D.C. during this period?

LB: Well I moved down just prior to taking that position, and then after I left I went and became chief of staff to Congressman Baldacci, who had just been elected. And I had an apartment just down at 110 D Street Southeast, a couple blocks from -

MH: So you never actually worked for Daschle because he didn't -

LB: No, never did, no. Got to know his people and so forth, and I really, I enjoyed getting acquainted, he was a good guy, Tom Daschle. And Pete Rouse was chief of staff at the time.

MH: Okay, well we've gone an hour and thirty minutes and I think it's probably time to stop. I'd like you to consider anyway the possibility that I could come back and we could cover what you've been doing since the Mitchell Senate terms finished. We can talk about your John Baldacci days in the House, and what you've been doing after he returned back to Maine.

LB: Sure.

MH: So thank you very much. Is there anything you'd like to mention about the years we've covered that I haven't raised, something you'd like to get on the record. We give everybody this opportunity, but we can also take it up when we talk later.

LB: Well, I can just say that it was fourteen years with Senator Mitchell and he just had a remarkable career, and he became Senate majority leader just six years after getting elected, which is incredible. And I think there are probably only a handful of people that serve in the Senate presently, or have served really in the last generation that had the kind of intelligence and just overall intellectual energy that Mitchell brought to that job. When he left they really lost in that institution a remarkably talented individual.

MH: Did it surprise you when he decided to step down?

LB: No, no.

MH: You sensed that he was -

LB: I think it was just a job that had become all-consuming, and it wasn't sustainable for him. That's what happens to really talented people, they just get more and more work piled on them. I know his colleagues called upon him for lots of advice that had nothing to do with legislative issues; personal stuff and so forth. He'd tell me that he'd leave the Senate at ten o'clock at night, and at eleven his phone was ringing at home, at his apartment, at his home there. So it was a grind, and the Senator always felt that that was what he had to do, was just continue to do that job, and no matter what came his way pretty much take it on.

MH: Well thank you, Larry.

LB: You're welcome, Mike.

MH: Just for the record here, this has been a recorded interview with Larry Benoit. It is July 29, [2008], and I'm in Portland, this is Mike Hastings, and we'll stop here.

End of Interview.