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Mary Mitchell Friedman

Harold J. Friedman

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## ***George J. Mitchell Oral History Project***

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**Mary Mitchell Friedman and Harold J. Friedman**

*(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)*

**GMOH# 034**

September 8, 2008

**Andrea L'Hommedieu:** This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. The date is September 8, 2008, and today we're at the Mitchell Institute in Portland, Maine, with Mary Mitchell Friedman. Could you start just by giving me your name and spelling the last name, and where and when you were born?

**Mary Mitchell Friedman:** Sure, Mary Mitchell Friedman, and it's F-R-I-E-D-M-A-N, and I was born in Waterville, Maine, September 30, 1957.

**AL:** And did you grow up in the Waterville area?

**MF:** I did, I attended St. Joseph's school, first through sixth grades, which was the local Lebanese Maronite Catholic school affiliated with the church. I then went to Waterville Junior High School, followed by Waterville High School, and then on to Colby College, so stayed in Waterville right until I was twenty-one, and then moved to Portland for law school at the University of Maine.

**AL:** And George Mitchell is your uncle.

**MF:** He is my dad's younger brother.

**AL:** And that was Robbie, your dad.

**MF:** Correct.

**AL:** And what was your mom's name?

**MF:** My mom's name is Janet Mitchell.

**AL:** And can you talk about what they did for work when you were growing up?

**MF:** Sure. My dad, from about the time I was born, worked for the FDIC, which is the federal branch of government which inspects banking institutions. So he pretty much traveled. He was on the road from Monday morning until Friday afternoon; he would usually get home Friday evenings. My mom, there were seven of us in my family, seven kids, so she was very often pregnant, and when she wasn't out with a baby she was a school teacher for many, many

years. She worked in the Waterville public school systems as an elementary school teacher, and I think she probably put in a total of about thirty-five years as a third and fourth grade teacher primarily.

**AL:** So you wanted to go to Colby and stay near home?

**MF:** I did, I did. My uncle Johnny, the Senator's older brother 'Swisher' - (*telephone interruption*) – I was saying that my uncle Johnny, his nickname was Swisher, he was quite a basketball player, and he was the assistant basketball coach at Colby College for the men's team, and actually still is. He's probably been there about forty years now. But I was very close to Swisher and the coach of the men's basketball team at Colby, Dick Whitmore, and I was used to going to Colby and watching all the games, I knew a lot of people up there. My mom was a Colby graduate, her mother and father, both Colby graduates, my grandfather Paul Fraser was an All-American football player, graduated from Colby in 19-, I think about '15, and my grandmother, Mary Phyllis Fraser, was a valedictorian of her class in 1913 at Colby College.

**AL:** Oh, wow, so you had a very long history at Colby.

**MF:** Long history of Colby connections, so I was very excited to go there. And actually, Colby is about a mile up the road from my house, but my parents very graciously allowed me to live on campus, so that was nice.

**AL:** Yeah. Did you ever ask your uncle George why he didn't think of Colby?

**MF:** He actually, there's a great story, and I don't know if you've heard this one yet. But my grandfather, George's father, who was George Mitchell, Sr., he worked at Colby for many, many years as a janitor and a maintenance worker on the grounds crew. And the summer before my uncle George went off to go to Bowdoin, he got a job with my grandfather working as a maintenance man at Colby. And he said, he tells the story that on his first day of going to work that summer at Colby, my grandfather looked at him and said, "Well George, look around you, this is the only way you'll ever step foot on the Colby campus." So I think, I think what happened with Bowdoin was that they were very interested in him on a number of levels. He obviously was an incredibly smart guy, he graduated from high school when he was only sixteen, and he went to school on scholarships and everything, so I think it was probably a case of leaving town a little bit but not going too far, and taking the scholarships that were offered to him. So –

**AL:** So how, over the years, you went to law school.

**MF:** I did.

**AL:** And did you practice law?

**MF:** I did, I practiced law for, oh, a total of about fifteen years, right out of law school I got a

job with Harold Pachios's firm – Harold is a great friend of my uncle's – it was called Preti, Flaherty and Beliveau back in those days. And then I went to Washington D.C. and worked at the Department of Justice for three years as a trial attorney for the Constitution Torts division. And after that I moved back to Portland and took a job with a firm, at the time it was known as Petruccelli, Cohen, Ehrler and Cox; Jerry Petruccelli was the founder of that firm, and he was a law school professor of mine. And I worked there and became a partner at that firm, and I stopped working in law in about 1996, when my daughter was approximately five years old.

**AL:** And when did you get involved with what is now called the Mitchell Institute?

**MF:** From the very beginning. When my uncle left the Senate in 1995, he called me and said he was going to use his extra campaign funds to create a scholarship foundation and asked me if I would be willing to serve on the board of that scholarship program. So I've been with the program since its inception, and I served the last I think it's eight years as president of the, what's now known as the Mitchell Institute. And the growth of the organization is really kind of fascinating.

**AL:** I'd like to talk about that, if you can.

**MF:** I will, and it's near and dear to my heart because it's really a wonderful story. When my uncle left the Senate he had about a million dollars left over in campaign funds, and he said to a group of us, including my aunt Barbara Atkins, Lisa Gorman, Harold Pachios, and others, that he wanted to make sure that money went directly to Maine kids. And his primary focus was on kids from Maine who would go onto college in Maine; he really wanted to encourage a group of kids to pursue a college education that maybe hadn't thought about doing that before. Like him, when he was young.

So initially, we didn't have that much money we could hand out in scholarships, so we would pick about fifteen or twenty scholars a year, and that went on for, oh, I'd say four or five years in that form, where we could only pick fifteen to twenty scholars and give a modest amount of money. Then in 1999, and I hope that's the correct date but I think it is, he secured a funding to hugely expand the mission of the Mitchell Institute, and hugely expand the scope of the scholarships that we could hand out. So on his initiative, we decided to hand out scholarships, one for every single public high school in the state of Maine, and we are the only scholarship program like that in the country. We give a scholarship between, right now it's between four and six thousand dollars, to one student from every high school in the state. We don't limit it to kids going on to Maine colleges, although we skew heavily towards having primarily Maine colleges in the mix. And we are currently raising an additional amount of money to be able to raise that scholarship amount to eight thousand dollars, which we hope to be at within the next couple of years, and of course then to keep pace with inflation as it occurs.

So the other part to the scholarship program that has grown so dramatically, when we first began, we only gave out a check to the students. We would select them, and of course it was a great honor to be chosen as a Mitchell Scholar, but what we've done since the Mitchell Institute was

founded is we give them a check, but then we offer them a huge array of programming options. We offer mentoring, we offer leadership weekends, we are in constant touch with them so that they'll do organized community service events, just a huge amount of contacts, and we have a ninety-five percent retention rate with our scholars, which is extraordinary. The average retention rate, and that basically means, "Do kids stay in school once they get there?" and ninety-five percent of our scholars stay in school. The average rate statewide is about sixty percent.

**AL:** Yes.

**MF:** So you can see that we have an incredible retention rate, or persistence rate as some call it, and it's really a source of great pride for us that our programming, I think, makes a significant difference to the kids that we choose to be Mitchell Scholars.

And then we have a research arm, and we've done several research studies, including a longitudinal study on our scholars. Our research department has made a huge difference in the overall public policy of statewide education in the state of Maine. Colleen Quint, our executive director, is an extremely important voice in almost all education initiatives in the state of Maine, and she's just done a tremendous job in that regard.

So we've gone from a small sort of operation, to a huge statewide operation. We've given over six million dollars in direct financial aid to well over fifteen hundred Mitchell Scholars in the last twelve years.

**AL:** Now, do you have a sense from either conversations with your uncle George, or things that he's said, where the Mitchell Institute is placed –

**MF:** Sure.

**AL:** - in terms of his overall legacy, given that he's done so much in his life?

**MF:** He has done an amazing amount in his life, and I will tell you what he says. He always says, next to his family, the Mitchell Institute is the most important thing he has ever done. And that's quite a statement coming from the man who was majority leader of the Senate and negotiated the peace accord in [Northern] Ireland. But he believes that, he believes it firmly, my uncle believes, and I echo his feelings in that regard, that education is the key for our citizens, our students. Without it, we can't compete globally. We need to be educated; we need to have an educated workforce, our leaders have to come from an educated pool of people if we're going to be able to grasp the global issues and the local issues equally well. So I think he, it's safe to say he put his money where his mouth was, he's been an unbelievably generous personal donor to the Mitchell Institute as well as its founder.

**AL:** And what is it like being chair of the board? What are –?

**MF:** It's been incredible. I will say that I've done a number of things in my lifetime,

including practicing law and working on a number of organizations – at the current time I’m teaching at the University of Southern Maine, an ethics class – and that’s all been wonderful, but being chair of the board of this organization is by far and away the best thing I’ve ever done. I feel every day that I make a difference to the young people of our state, and that is incredibly rewarding. And when I see them moving on, and meet them in different arenas and places, and somebody will come up to me and say, “I’m the Mitchell Scholar from -” you know, a small town in Aroostook County. It’s just wonderful; it’s incredible.

**AL:** Can you talk about growing up in the Mitchell family and some of your recollections –

**MF:** Sure, yes.

**AL:** - of your uncle and others?

**MF:** So what can I say about the Mitchell family. It was a large, loving, chaotic group. My dad grew up in a family of five; George was really the only one that moved away from Waterville. So in my hometown of Waterville I had, oh, probably fifteen cousins. We were all in school together; we were all about the same age. We would go every single Sunday to my grandparents’ house on Front Street in Waterville and have Sunday dinner with everybody. And on holidays, everybody would gather, including Uncle George and Aunt Sally and their daughter Andrea. And we would spend just the most wonderful times with the cousins all running around outside and being adventurous, and the dining room table with the adults was always filled with politics, as you can imagine, everybody shouting and yelling about their political passions or beliefs.

And after the meal, there were incredibly intense cribbage games between my dad and uncles. So they would gather and they would play cribbage for hours, and they were all incredibly competitive because they were all fantastic athletes and came by their competitive natures naturally. And George, as the youngest of the brothers, they would always, of course, he’ll tell you they would pick on him always because he was young and not as athletically inclined as his older brothers, and so he got his vengeance at the cribbage table with all of them. And it would always be very funny, because they would just erupt over a cribbage hand like it was scoring the winning touchdown or something. So that was really fun.

I went to school at the local Maronite Catholic school, so I had the great fortune of being in a very small private school, probably half the class was Mitchells and the other half were Jabars, which was another big Lebanese family in town. And in the formative years of just going to school, to my grandmother’s house, her house was about, oh, less than a block away from the school so we would go to her house for lunch, you know.

**AL:** Oh.

**MF:** Very often. And my grandmother was an amazing woman, absolutely amazing. She of course raised her five children while she worked the night shift at the Wyandotte Mills.

**AL:** Hmm-hmm.

**MF:** So she worked all night and she would be up for them in the morning when they would walk to school. I don't know that she ever slept, because she would cook and clean and do everything else during the day, and be up and have meals ready for them at night and go to all their games, and then she went off to work again at ten or eleven o'clock at night. So she was absolutely amazing.

And my grandfather, he was the most inquisitive man I think that I've ever met, and a completely self-taught man. He left school in about the sixth grade to go to work, and yet he had more knowledge than anybody else. He was an avid reader of *National Geographic*, he had every *National Geographic*, he kept them for forty years. He always had maps and globes, and with the grandkids, I think when we got too loud he'd say to us, "One of you go in and find Tanzania, the first one to find it gets a prize." So we'd all charge into his little study and pull out the globe and search frantically to try to find it. So he was always asking us questions about geography and politics and history, and he was just a wonderful quiet man who just knew a lot.

And with my uncles and my dad, it was always a very opinionated mix of people. My Aunt Barbara was exactly the same, so there was a lot of, for us, for the kids, there were a lot of role models in our lives, not just our own parents but our aunts and uncles who, and our grandparents, who showed us how to be a concerned, involved citizen. And we were doing it from a very young age, I mean even politically. I vividly remember when my uncle worked for Ed Muskie in 1968, when Hubert Humphrey was running for president, so I was eleven. We were out on the streets in force, the cousins, with probably my older siblings and cousins leading everybody, to hand out leaflets and bumper stickers and pins and we would get on a bus and go to Rumford and canvass neighborhoods, handing out leaflets and literature.

And one of the greatest things that ever happened to my grandmother was that Hubert Humphrey came to her house when he was campaigning in Maine, and she was just overwhelmed by that, she loved him. And she had a plastic pillow that she would, she kept on her sofa for years, it was a Hubert Humphrey poster, pillow rather, just HHH all over it, clear plastic vinyl pillow. And she was so funny, she named her cats, she had two cats, and one of them was named – and she spoke with a heavy accent, heavy Arabic accent – one of her cats was named Spiro Agnew, and she would call him, "Aganew," and the other one was named Martha Mitchell, so you can tell we were a very politically –

**AL:** Right.

**MF:** - intent family. And then when Ed Muskie ran for president in 1972, again, the younger generation was so mobilized to work on his behalf. We spent countless days and nights at Atkins print shop stuffing envelopes and addressing envelopes and just doing the whole campaign. So by the time my uncle started running for office, we were a force to be reckoned with, so it was a lot of fun.

**AL:** And in '74 you would have been seventeen.

**MF:** I was a senior in high school when he was running for governor, and that came as a huge blow to us when he lost to Jim Longley in the final days of that election. And we couldn't believe it, but my uncle, two days before the date, said he was going to lose to Jim Longley, because there was a big groundswell of people in Maine, always a very independent minded state, who decided they didn't want to go with the Republican or the Democratic candidate, they wanted to put an Independent in office. So that was his first, I think, taste of politics running on his own, and of course it was a defeat. So the fact that he ever got where he was, or ended up in life politically, was really kind of astonishing because he had, after that gubernatorial election, I think he almost was ready to hang it up.

**AL:** Yeah. Did you have a sense of how it affected him, that loss?

**MF:** Yeah, he really thought that perhaps he didn't have the personality or whatever that intangible is that makes somebody a winning politician. And when he then went back to public office and then took a judgeship, a federal judgeship, he was in that position for less than a year when he was tapped by Joe Brennan to take over the Senate seat for Ed Muskie, and nobody, nobody thought he could win against – who was it? It was Dave Emery.

**AL:** Yes.

**MF:** Who was an incredibly popular congressman. And that Senate seat was all but written off. And I think what happened was that George just decided, you know, he would do what it took to make sure the people of Maine just met him, understood who he was, and he traveled to every single town. And one of the things he always said was that he traveled to every single high school, so he has visited every single high school in the state of Maine at least twice. And I think people just responded to that, that hard work. And he also let his personality come through, whereas he had been in the past maybe a little too cerebral, he just let his personality come through and people really responded to him.

**AL:** Now is there anything I haven't asked you that you feel is important to add before you go today?

**MF:** Only this, that I have met in the course of my lifetime a great number of political figures, so-called celebrities in our culture, professors, a lot of people both here in the United States and abroad, my husband and I travel quite a bit, and I have never met a man who has a deeper sense of what it means to serve the people of his state and his country. I think that has defined his life, and I find that to be a hugely important quality.

**AL:** Hmm-hmm.

**MF:** And he is the type of person who will not shy away from controversy if it means he can

serve a greater good, as we obviously have seen him do in Ireland and in other instances. So I admire him, he is obviously one of the great role models of my life. I can admire him and also love him as an uncle, because he's also been a wonderful, wonderful uncle to me, and to my whole family.

**AL:** Thank you so much.

**MF:** So, that's it. Thank you.

**AL:** I'm going to pause for just a moment. And I'd now like to welcome Harold Friedman. Could you start just by giving me your full name and your date of birth?

**Harold Friedman:** Harold J. Friedman, F-R-I-E-D-M-A-N, December 4, 1942.

**AL:** And where were you born?

**HF:** Scranton, Pennsylvania.

**AL:** Is that where you grew up?

**HF:** I grew up in Detroit most of my young life.

**AL:** Oh. What was Detroit like back then?

**HF:** Detroit was a great city to grow up in because it prepared me for life, with all the experiences that I had there. The automobile industry was booming, I worked my way through college there, and had a wide range of jobs from working in an automobile factory – and when they found out I was going back to college they fired me – to working as a waiter and as a busboy and just daily experiences in life really. They did a superb job of preparing me for my adult life, my later adult life.

**AL:** Where did you go to college?

**HF:** I went to Wayne [State] University in Detroit, a city university, and then I went to law school at Boston University.

**AL:** And is that the first contact you had with New England, is coming to Boston?

**HF:** Well, I did that actually when I was in college, I got a job on Martha's Vineyard as a waiter and I worked there for three summers. So, and that was an exciting time because President Kennedy and his brothers would come to the harbor and come into the restaurant, so I got to get a taste of the very popular political family at the time.

**AL:** Yeah. What sort of impressions did you have of them?

**HF:** The impressions were that they were cool, that John Kennedy at the time was my role model and really inspired me, so it was so exciting to be there and maybe take out box lunches to their boat; I think it was called the Honey Fitz. And so it was exciting, they were celebrities; they were heroes, especially John Kennedy, to many of us at the time.

**AL:** And so how did you meet your wife?

**HF:** Well, that is a fairly convoluted story, but it has to do with George Mitchell.

**AL:** Okay, good, go ahead and tell it.

**HF:** Okay.

**AL:** Then I'll see where you connect with Senator Mitchell as well.

**HF:** In 1975 I was living in Brooklyn, New York, and I was in public service; I was an assistant United States attorney for the Eastern District of New York – that's Brooklyn and Long Island and Queens – and I was a federal prosecutor in that position. In 1975, it was time to leave and go into private practice and the question was, did I go across the East River to Manhattan, or go on to somewhere else. So on a salmon fishing trip to New Brunswick, one of my fishing friends in New York said, "Stop in Portland, Maine, it's a great place," and he had a good friend. So I went to Portland, met his friend, Howard Dana, who turned out to be a justice of the Maine law court, Supreme Court, and they had no vacancies and he gave me a few names. So I went to visit a few people, and then there was this law firm Jensen Baird, which is still in existence, and I was supposed to see Mert Henry. And when Mert Henry heard that I was a trial lawyer, he had me meet their trial lawyer who was George Mitchell. And George told me they were not looking for anyone but he would call a friend of his, Harold Pachios, whose law firm Preti Flaherty might be looking for somebody, and I got the job.

So I was grateful to George Mitchell, and I was very impressed that here I was in Maine, and I got to see someone who ran for governor, and I didn't have to bring a bag of money or have to know all kinds of political connections. So I was impressed with him at the start.

The next thing that happened was, he became United States attorney, I had a few cases against him, then he became a federal judge. And when he became a federal judge, I argued the first case before him and I lost. And I went up to the Court of Appeals in Boston, the First Circuit Court of Appeals, and they affirmed Judge George Mitchell's decision. I was then at a loss, I had to try to figure out a way to get even with him. Here was this wonderful person who got me my first job, and then he ruled against me. So what could I do to get even? I married his niece. So that's how I got to –

**AL:** Right.

**HF:** - know Mary, who actually worked at the firm that I was at at the time, Preti Flaherty. I have since gone on and started my own firm called Friedman, Gaythwaite, Wolf & Leavitt in Portland, and the friendship that I developed with George Mitchell all the way back has lasted, and I am also now considered a family member, a member of this very interesting, dynamic, what I call clan, the Mitchell clan.

They all seem to, certainly my wife, among others, seems to argue like George, and uses the same sort of logic in arguing. And my daughter, Sarah Mintaha Friedman, Mintaha was George's mother's first name, that's our daughter's middle name, she also argues like her mother and like Uncle George. So in order for me to get any personal gratification, I have to go to court where I at least have a fifty-fifty chance of winning, because I can't win an argument at home.

**AL:** No.

**HF:** Over the years, having contact from time to time with George Mitchell, I really have been moved; not because of his politics, that is his political views, and not because of his incredible success, being a major player in our country and on the world stage, but in large part because of his humility. None of this stuff, none of this incredible success and glory has in any manner, shape or form gone to his head. I remember at a Mitchell Institute event having my brother and his wife from Detroit come out, and they met George, and my brother is a huge baseball fan and he said he had one question for, to him, Senator Mitchell, and that was, "What about the strike zone, isn't that really deteriorating in baseball in terms of the way they're interpreting it?" And there was George Mitchell, and it was at the cocktail party before the big gala, spending fifteen minutes talking to my brother about the strike zone. And it just amazed me, and my brother walked away, he was on cloud nine. And there are so many people that have experienced that with George, because he really does care about people, and he likes to talk on an equal one-on-one basis with people.

So his humility, and I think in large part it's connected to his background. His mother being an immigrant, an immigrant with an accent who didn't necessarily, right off the bat, blend into the homogenized Maine society. And we hear all kinds of stories about his mother and her working in the mill and then, and on the night shift and coming home and making sure the kids were off to school and doing the baking. And his father, the contributions he made to the family. So it's really wonderful to see that what made him, and also made other members of the family with that experience, into successes, that no one has lost their roots, and no one takes for granted, particularly George, where he came from and what he has. So it's been a great pleasure for me to not only fall in love with my wife and be married to her, but also to get Uncle George as part of the package, so to speak.

**AL:** Yeah. And over the years, what have been some of the things that have brought you close, the two of you, you and Senator Mitchell?

**HF:** Well I think that, in part, it has been my being a lawyer, his having been a judge. In part, large part, it's been family and the connections there, and contact, and then the Mitchell Institute.

And the Mitchell Institute strikes a really vital phenomenal chord in the fabric of the Mitchell family, led by George Mitchell. Both parents had minimal educations, I believe both of the parents, George's parents, my wife Mary's grandparents, did not finish high school – I stand corrected if they did.

**AL:** No, I think you're correct.

**HF:** And then what happened was, 'Education, education, education' was the mantra of that family, and, 'Hard work, hard work, hard work;' and also identifying with people who are less privileged. And the Mitchell Institute, the work, the effort that he has put into that, Mary has been on the board for many, many years and has been president I think for eight years, and she'll share with Sarah and me, who's sixteen now, an application – won't tell us the name of the person – and it will be the first person in the family that's going to be going to college, and the parent, or parents, can't make ends meet and the kids don't feel sorry for themselves, they don't feel privileged, they don't feel entitled, and these applicants, they work their way through high school, and they're involved in all kinds of extracurricular activities, and they have this burning desire to get that education and to succeed in life, and I think that's the story of the Mitchell family, led by George Mitchell.

So he hasn't forgotten his roots, and while in the political arena both parties bandy about family values and all that crap in the context, excuse me, of the way they're doing it is, here is somebody who has lived it, and those values have resulted in his strong desire to serve, to be one who serves with humility, and one who gives from a charitable sense, although he would never use that word.

**AL:** Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you feel is important to add, any anecdotes, any recollections of your time.

**HF:** I've left out his great sense of humor. He has a great sense of humor, and sometimes I have been the subject of it and I have laughed actually harder than he has. So it's, my experience, moving to Maine, and my life being fulfilled, a part of it is, a large part of it is clearly my wife, and by extension her family, including, as I affectionately refer to him, Uncle George.

**AL:** Great, thank you so much.

End of Interview