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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Gerard D. Goldstein
(Interviewer: *Michael Hastings*)

GMOH# 064
February 20, 2009

Michael Hastings: The following is an interview of the Senator George J. Mitchell Oral History Project, an activity of Bowdoin College. It is February 20, [2009], a Friday, I'm at 2 Seaport Lane in Boston, it's 9:30 in the morning. My name is Michael Hastings, I am the interviewer; the interviewee is Gerard Goldstein. Mr. Goldstein, would you state your full name, and spell your surname for me?

Gerard Goldstein: Gerard D. Goldstein, G-O-L-D-S-T-E-I-N.

MH: And could you state your place of birth, and your date of birth?

GG: I was born on August 30, 1932, in Boston, Massachusetts.

MH: And your - what is your father's full name and your mother's full name?

GG: My father's name was Bernard, B-E-R-N-A-R-D Goldstein, and my mother's maiden name was Tilly Jepsky, J-E-P-S-K-Y.

MH: Let's begin with them. Tell me about your father's family and your mother's family.

GG: My father's family came to this country at the turn of the nineteenth century, landing in east Boston and settled in the Boston area. My mother's family came from Romania, somewhat later than my father's family. My father came over with one of his little sisters, he was six and she was three, and they traveled from Kiev, Russia, to the United States, and I'm not quite sure how they did it.

My mother's family was also, landed in east Boston and settled in the environs of Revere, Chelsea, and ultimately they both moved to a community in the western suburbs where there were farms and they met and married in that time.

MH: What did your father do for work?

GG: Dad owned a small shoe factory, ultimately moving to Lynn, Massachusetts, in about 1928 or '29, where he had a shoe company called Bernard Shoe, which he kept until shortly before his death.

MH: What kind of shoes did they make?

GG: Very inexpensive shoes that, most of which were sold to the large discounters of the time, Montgomery Ward, et cetera, and some were shipped overseas to Puerto Rico.

MH: Had he been in the shoe business, I mean had the family been involved in shoes or anything in Europe?

GG: I don't think so. They were farmers.

MH: I see. And your mother's family?

GG: They also were farmers in the old country. When they came here, they engaged in a number of businesses and ended up in the retail paint and wallpaper business.

MH: I see. Do you have any cousins or relatives in Romania that you know of, or have you ever visited there?

GG: No, and I don't think I have any family left in either Russia or Romania.

MH: I see. So now, so they're in Lynn, and do you have brothers and sisters, siblings, as well?

GG: I have two sisters.

MH: Right.

GG: One lives in Salem and one lives in Beverly, Massachusetts.

MH: I see. Tell me about growing up in Lynn.

GG: Well, we, I grew up 'til about, I was four when we moved from Lynn to Swampscott, which is the next northerly community, and we stayed in Swampscott until 1940, '41, when my folks bought a house in Lynn, and we stayed then in Lynn and I went through Lynn school system and graduated from Lynn English High School in 1950.

MH: Now they have two high schools, Lynn English and Lynn Classical?

GG: Well, there's several high schools, there's Lynn English, Lynn Classical, St. Mary's, Lynn Vocational, I think that's it.

MH: So how do you make a decision as to whether you're going to Lynn English or - ?

GG: Geographically.

MH: It's straight geographic, it's not -

GG: In those days there was no -

MH: Okay, no, I mean I wondered if, if you were college bound you went to one or the other.

GG: No, it was just geographic.

MH: I see. What was going to high school like in Lynn when you were there? That would have been, I assume, in the very early '50s, right?

GG: No the late '40s.

MH: Late '40s, okay.

GG: Going to high school was a very pleasant experience, I enjoyed it, I enjoyed athletics at Lynn English High School, I enjoyed the classes and the faculty, and had a great many friends who, we were active together.

MH: How did you happen to pick what college you were going to?

GG: Well, in my last year at high school I talked with my football coach, Carl Polumbo, and he suggested that I should go to Bowdoin, Tufts, or Harvard. I went first to visit Tufts and thought it was a great place, and I told my dad that that's where I wanted to go but that I would visit the other schools. I next visited Harvard, decided that that was where I'd rather go than Tufts, and then finally went to Bowdoin, spent a weekend up there, and became convinced that that was the place that I should go and did go.

MH: What made Bowdoin stand out compared to the other schools?

GG: The camaraderie of the students. We played basketball; it was just a very warm feeling. It's still there, as far as I can tell. And I liked the area that it was and size of the school, it was an incredible experience.

MH: Now, you say you, you must have, you played football in high school.

GG: Yes.

MH: What position did you play?

GG: Offensive guard.

MH: Okay, and did you think you were going to play football at Bowdoin?

GG: I hoped so, yes.

MH: Did you?

GG: I did indeed.

MH: All four years?

GG: Yes.

MH: I see. And who was your coach at Bowdoin?

GG: Adam Walsh.

MH: Tell me about him.

GG: Adam was a wonderful person, he was the, had been the center of the Notre Dame Four Horsemen-Seven Mules team, and Adam was a, I think an incredibly inspiring person; he was able to get most of his players to really perform well. And I was, I played on the freshman team, and then as a sophomore I made the 1st team and played throughout those years and was selected for the All Maine team as a sophomore and junior. Really enjoyed the football activities.

MH: Now tell me, All Maine, so you're playing Colby and Bates.

GG: Colby, Bates, Maine, yes.

MH: And you played at Orono as well? Okay.

GG: Yes, I spent three Saturday afternoons tussling with a guy name Cianchette. Cianchette weighed about two hundred and thirty-five pounds, and he was a defensive tackle, playing over my shoulder, and I weighed about a hundred and seventy-five pounds at the time. But I got even with him, because one of the first cases I handled as a lawyer was his father's bankruptcy.

MH: I see. So he was of the Cianchette family from Pittsfield, Maine.

GG: Yes.

MH: And which brother was it? I know one of them.

GG: Oh, I've forgotten first name.

MH: There was Ival (sounds like) and Bud and Chuck, great group of people. Tell me, did the, the league you played in, in addition to the Maine teams, what other teams were you -?

GG: Williams, Amherst, Wesleyan, Tufts, that was it.

MH: Successful seasons while you were at Bowdoin?

GG: Yes, yes, both.

MH: When you get to Bowdoin, what were your first impressions of the place as a student?

GG: Very favorable. There's an anecdotal expression, as a freshman I was walking along one of the paths, and this elderly gentleman, or at least he appeared elderly to me at the time, right now he would be very young, looked up and said, "Hello Gerry, how are you?" And I had no idea who that gentleman was, but I then learned that it was K.C. Sills, the president of Bowdoin, who each summer learned about each freshman that was coming in. An incredible man, and was a big factor in making people feel that Bowdoin was the place to be. I often say that it was the best four years of my life, and my wife is very upset about that.

MH: I know that, from having looked at the class of 1954 *Bowdoin Bugle*, that many of the faculty that were there when you were there were actually there when I went there. I would say there must be sixty percent of the faculty was, they must have been younger men in your time, and then they were just getting toward retirement when I was going there between '68 and '72.

GG: Hmm-hmm.

MH: Did you have particular ones that you were fond of, in terms of teaching?

GG: Yes, [Alton H.] Gustafson, who was the biology, also was the person who announced the football games.

MH: Oh really?

GG: And I was not really a scientist and never have been, and I got towards my senior year and I knew that I had to take a science or math course. I went to see Gussie, and I asked him whether I could take two semester biology courses, because I'd taken biology in high school, and he said, "Well what would you like to study?" I said, "Why don't I take genetics in the fall semester?" And he said, "Well, that sounds like a reasonable choice. What about the spring semester?" I said, "I don't know yet, I'll have to figure that out as it goes along." And he gave me permission to take the two semester courses, and I ended up taking ornithology in the spring, which was not a very good experience.

MH: Was that Professor Huntington?

GG: Huntington, yeah. I never thought that I'd have to dissect a bird. It was not my style.

MH: Other professors that are memorable?

GG: Yes, an economics professor, Gusta-, not Gustafson -

MH: [Albert] Abrahamson.

GG: Abrahamson, and a government professor, Daggett.

MH: Athern Park Daggett.

GG: Yeah, Athern Daggett, they were my two favorite professors.

MH: Athern Daggett, when I first entered Bowdoin, was the acting president actually.

GG: Oh really, I didn't -

MH: Yeah, he, for about a year-and-a-half he was the acting president of Bowdoin, before Roger Howell became president. Now Bowdoin was an all male institution at that point, and fairly small, it was at least, it was under a thousand students.

GG: There were eight hundred students when I was there.

MH: What did you do when you weren't studying?

GG: Hmm?

MH: What did you do when you weren't studying or playing football?

GG: Drinking. Just hanging out with people. There was a lot of social activities on the weekend, we would import females from other colleges, there was a lot to do.

MH: Were you in a fraternity?

GG: Yes, ARU, which was a local fraternity as opposed to a national fraternity.

MH: I see. Did it have a house?

GG: It did, it had a house on Maine Street, which we acquired shortly after I got there, shortly before I got there. The fraternity was formed in the late forties by a group of veterans who returned to the college.

MH: Really?

GG: And they wanted to have a fraternity that was open to all – ARU stood for All Races

United. There was still at that time some reluctance or refusal on the part of some of the fraternities to accept black students, to accept Jewish students, and the ARU was formed with the view to breaking that position. And I was a steward of the fraternity for a couple of years, and all of my fraternity brothers urged me to have my wife, she was then my girlfriend, come up for the weekend because they would get fed better.

MH: So you actually did the cooking?

GG: No, I just did the buying and paying.

MH: Oh, I see, I see, very good. I think the ARU, they call it Burnett House or something, or, Burnett? Burnett House, I think.

GG: Now, you mean?

MH: Yes, you know, after they changed them over [from the fraternity system to the 'house' system] they -

GG: Changed them over to -

MH: Right, right. You ended up majoring in what?

GG: Political science.

MH: And did you determine in - we're sitting in a law office now - and did you determine at Bowdoin that you wanted to become a lawyer?

GG: Well, when I went to Bowdoin I wanted to be an architect. And then I discovered that architecture required mathematics and physics, among other things, and I was much more attuned to Latin and English, and changed. Then I began to think about it and decided that law would be a pleasant experience.

MH: What about military service, did you, were you in ROTC at Bowdoin?

GG: I was in for a while and then I dropped out and did not, when I graduated from Bowdoin I missed the Korean conflict.

MH: I see.

GG: And then by the time the Vietnam conflict came I was out of the service. When I was at law school, President- , I guess it was Eisenhower, declared that they would no longer draft fathers, and I said to my wife, "Let's go make a baby," which we did.

MH: Very good. Is your wife from North Shore as well?

GG: She was originally from Chelsea, and went to Colby Junior College in New Hampshire.

MH: Right, okay. And so you married right out of college.

GG: I married at Christmas time in my first year of law school.

MH: And where did you go to law school?

GG: I went to Harvard.

MH: I see. And so you're married and you're going to Harvard and you have a new child. Is that your only child, or did you have others?

GG: That's my oldest child. I have three daughters.

MH: Three daughters.

GG: They're wonderful, wonderful girls.

MH: And they live nearby?

GG: I'm very fortunate, I have one daughter who is around the corner, one daughter who lives a couple of miles away, and the third one lives in Brookline, which is like twenty miles from here.

MH: That's great.

GG: So many people have children who disperse around the country, but fortunately mine didn't and we have regular Sunday gatherings, either at the pool or watching TV, watching football on TV.

MH: And have you been able to stay in contact with Bowdoin over the years?

GG: Yes, I was on the Alumni Council for a couple of years, and gone back to reunions regularly. And as a matter of fact, I was at, Bowdoin had a function at, across the street at the Museum of Modern Art, and I spent some time talking with [President] Barry Mills and Karen. One of my nephews is applying for a position in the Obama administration, because he was the Obama director of the campaign in Oa-, in Honolulu, and the agency which he's looking at is the agency which Karen Mills is going to -

MH: Small Business Administration.

GG: Small Business, right.

MH: She's now the, I guess she's the -

GG: I don't think she's been appointed yet, has she?

MH: Well I know that she's had her confirmation hearings, but I have not heard that she's actually, I know that their, one of her children's been ill and I -

GG: Very sick.

MH: That may have slowed down the process a bit. She's a very capable lady.

GG: And I took one of my granddaughters, took up to Bowdoin a couple of months ago. She's graduating from high school this year.

MH: I see.

GG: And she has strong interest in going to Bowdoin.

MH: That's great. Let me, before we leave Bowdoin and your education, when did you first run into George Mitchell from Waterville?

GG: In my freshman year.

MH: Do you remember the circumstances?

GG: I really don't. I mean I was meeting so many people. But George pledged with Sigma Nu, which was known as the athletes' fraternity house, and I had a lot of friends at Sigma Nu and I got to meet George and we were friendly.

MH: And that friendship has continued over the years?

GG: To some degree. When George was practicing law at Jensen Baird, I was practicing law in Boston and had several transactions in Maine and used George's firm as local counsel.

MH: Tell me about your practice, are you a specialty lawyer? That may be not the correct term, and I apologize if -

GG: That's okay. The area in which I'm most involved deals with commercial real estate, although I do a lot of corporate work and business counseling as well. But I do condominiums, construction financing, buying and selling of real estate, leasing of real estate. There's not, I don't think there's any kind of a transaction that I haven't been involved in.

MH: These instances in which you connected with Senator Mitchell when he was at Jensen

Baird, were they real estate transactions?

GG: Yes, they were housing development basically.

MH: Are these programs that are facilitated by the United States government?

GG: Yes, they were subsidized housing projects.

MH: I see, I see.

GG: And Maine had a very active housing finance agency at the time. We still own projects in Biddeford and Saco, Bangor.

MH: Now you say, "We own," you mean you personally, or a company that you're involved with?

GG: A company that I'm involved with.

MH: I see, I see, a company separate from the law firm?

GG: Yes.

MH: I see, so your real estate dealings are, extend beyond Massachusetts, then.

GG: Nationally.

MH: Really, what other states -

GG: Actually, if you include the Bahamas, it's international.

MH: Really, oh wow. How many states do you have properties -?

GG: I probably dealt in fifteen or twenty states in the United States, Canada, Bahamas.

MH: Have you been generally happy with the career that you've made for yourself?

GG: People ask me why I haven't retired yet, and I've told them uniformly that when I find something I prefer doing, then I'll retire. I've enjoyed the practice of law immensely. It's been good to me and I've enjoyed it.

MH: Tell me about some of your other classmates in the class of 1954, are there people that really stand out, that you've kept in touch with or followed the careers of?

GG: Al Farrington, who played the other guard, has remained a close friend, some of my

fraternity brothers. I was talking with one of the, Al Werxman, who is now retired and lives in Florida, and he told me the other day that a year-and-a-half ago, when he retired, he had enough money to live out the rest of his life, and recently he looked at it and he still had enough money to live out the rest of his life *if he died next week*. The market has been not good to a lot of us.

MH: Does, based on what you knew of George Mitchell when he was at Bowdoin, does the career that he has developed over the years surprise you, or would you have ever imagined that he would be doing the things he's doing?

GG: I was not surprised when he was a successful practitioner, I was not surprised when he was a judge, I was not surprised when he became involved with Senator Muskie. I'm not surprised at where he has accom-, where he has come to, but very few people do have a similar experience that George has had, particularly in his political career. He was very well thought of as a senator, did a masterful job in [Northern] Ireland, very, I'm not surprised at all at his capabilities.

MH: And even as a businessman, he's been, he seems to have done, been very effective in ways, with corporations, corporate boards and things of that sort.

GG: Yes. Right.

MH: This newest endeavor of the Senator's must interest you.

GG: I'm hopeful that he'll be successful. It's a terribly difficult, complex, unrecognizable conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

MH: Have you ever visited that part of the world?

GG: Yes, several times.

MH: Where have you visited?

GG: I've visited Israel several times. I've not visited, I've not been in Gaza, I've been near to it, in Jaffa. I've been in the West Bank, but not in Jordan or Syria. I've been on the Golan Heights.

MH: Have you?

GG: Funny story – I was going to Israel, and one of my clients asked me if I would take something to his son who was in the Israeli army, and I said, “Of course.” They were battery operated socks, because his son was on the Golan Heights, which is quite cold. And we got to the Golan Heights, and I saw this young man standing there, very good looking young, blonde youngster, and I said to him, “Do you know so-and-so?” and he said, “I *am* so-and-so.”

MH: Just, you walked -

GG: And we had our own personal guard from, guide, from that point on during our visit, and he's still in Israel. But it was coincidental to the nth degree.

MH: I read the biography, or the biographical notes that are on your law firm's website, and there were a couple of mentions of some Jewish philanthropies here in the New England area.

GG: Hmm-hmm.

MH: Could you tell me about those, and tell me if you, have you done any philanthropic or work with Israel?

GG: I was very active in the North Shore Jewish Federation, which was the overall planning and philanthropic organization in the Lynn-Swampscott-Marblehead area for a number of years. I was one of the founding members of a corporation called North Shore Housing for the Elderly, which was a sponsored subsidized housing project. We acquired the land and I did all the legal work and much of the non-legal work in getting that project, which I think it had a hundred apartments for elderly people. I've been active in my temple religious affiliation.

MH: And which temple is that?

GG: Temple Emmanuel in Marblehead, I served on the board for a number of years. I'm now very active in an institution called the Schepens Eye Research Institute, which is probably the most, one of the premier ophthalmological research entities in the world.

MH: Really? Tell me about that, is it focused on a specific disease, or diseases, all sorts of diseases of the eye?

GG: All sorts of diseases of the eye, particularly ADM and diabetic retinopathy.

MH: How did you get interested in that?

GG: Everything has a story.

MH: Oh, well that's what these are for, these -

GG: When I was a young lawyer, the senior partner of the firm was the chairman of the board of an organization which was then called the Retina Foundation. And he asked me if I would be willing to do the work, the legal work, for the Retina Foundation, and I said, "Yes," and I went, became the secretary of the board and did all of the work for the foundation. And about three or four years after that, I left the firm that I had been with, and the senior partner said, "You will of course resign." And I said, "Yes, I will." So I did resign. That was about 1976. And the senior partner passed away in the late nineties and I got a call from the chairman of the board of the

institution saying, "I've been waiting to make this call, will you come back and help us?" And so I rejoined the institute, and I'm now secretary on the executive committee and it's been a great experience.

The founder of the institution was a gentleman named Schepens, he was a Belgian and he was the leader of the Belgian underground during the Second World War, and he escaped from Europe, and his wife did as well. He came to the United States and founded an ophthalmological practice in Boston, and founded the Retina Foundation.

He was an extraordinary man. He went to India to see what they were doing in – cataracts are a very substantial problem in India, and he went and they were, he saw doctors operating and people lying on mats, because they couldn't move their heads. Then the doctors stopped operating, and he said, "Why are you stopping?" "We don't have any more mats, so there's no place for these people to lie down." He came back to the United States and developed a system whereby they could just, instead of the old operation, they were able to expedite and just use one or two sutures in connection with the cataract. And he was also the inventor of the ophthalmoscope, you know, the light that they put on their head, that was one of his inventions. He was a great man, and unfortunately passed, well, he passed away.

MH: Where exactly is it located?

GG: Now it's located at 20 Staniford Street in Boston. That's -

MH: So it has its own building.

GG: Has its own building.

MH: And does it have its own researchers, or does it draw on the local universities?

GG: No, it has a faculty of about sixty, and they do marvelous research.

MH: I see. Is their work used around the globe, or is it just, is it local?

GG: Yes, there are literally hundreds of people who have trained at Schepen's Eye Research and now have gone back to their countries, and they are, they've been very successful.

MH: So in terms of getting back to the Israeli, you know, have any of your business dealings involved Israel, any housing in Israel or any of the, these outside interests?

GG: Well, one of the trips that I took to Israel was as a member of the North Shore Federation, and I have been involved in some corporate transactions in Israel.

MH: Do you think that it was wise for the new president to pick a gentleman who's in his seventies to run the, to be the chief representative on Middle East negotiations?

GG: Well, I'll answer that this way: George and I are substantially the same age, and I don't find any task I can't undertake as well as I could years ago, except very heavy physical activities. But many of my clients, current clients, are the second generation. I represented their fathers and mothers, and now represent them in their business activities. So I don't know this, but I suspect that George's health is good, and his energy level is as it was, and so I don't think that was a mistake at all.

MH: You are obviously very interested in sports.

GG: Yes.

MH: You must have followed the whole steroids in baseball issue closely, and what do you think about the Mitchell Report and the way that it was all handled?

GG: Well, I think that if someone breaches their responsibility, they ought to be punished for it, and I think that anyone like a Barry Bonds, if he's convicted, or even if he's not convicted of perjury, he's had, used drugs, that's a terrible thing. And I think it's not a good example to set for young people, that they take an easy way out. It's not good.

MH: Are there any questions or any thoughts about George Mitchell or about Bowdoin that you'd like to share with us that I haven't asked any questions about? I always ask that question toward the end of the interviews, to give people an opportunity to -

GG: Well, Bowdoin has always been a very important facet of my life. I don't know anyone who went to Bowdoin who didn't feel warmly towards it, did not have fond memories of it. At reunions, we take up as if it was not five years ago but five minutes ago that we were talking with our friends. We, I find that it's, the alumni are generally very favorable towards Bowdoin and towards the life that they led at Bowdoin and the activities that they were involved in, so I think that the value of a small liberal arts college has not decreased but increased.

And I think that Bowdoin's policy of seeking not a well rounded person, but a well rounded class, which means you have a tuba player and a football player, and they all meld together to create a society which is a place where you can exert your own skills and achieve a lot.

MH: Thank you very much.

GG: You're very welcome.

End of Interview