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Interview with Harold Pachios by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Harold 'Hal' Pachios

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Recommended Citation

Pachios, Harold 'Hal', "Interview with Harold Pachios by Andrea L'Hommedieu" (2008). *George J. Mitchell Oral History Project*. 51.

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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Harold “Hal” Pachios
(Interviewer: *Andrea L’Hommedieu*)

GMOH# 012
May 12, 2008

Andrea L’Hommedieu: This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. The date is May 12, 2008, and I am at the offices of Preti, Flaherty, Beliveau and Pachios in Portland, Maine. Today I’m interviewing Harold Pachios, and this is Andrea L’Hommedieu. Harold, could you start just by giving me your full name?

Harold Pachios: Yeah, I’m Harold Pachios, and I’m a lawyer here at Preti, Flaherty. I’m seventy-one years old, and I live in Cape Elizabeth.

AL: And we were talking before we turned the tape on, thinking about when you first met Senator Mitchell and had a connection with him was around 1962?

HP: Yes, it was forty-six years ago, I think, again, it was 1962. It might have been ‘63, but I think it was ‘62. I had gone to Washington to be a student at Georgetown University School of Law, and I went at night and I worked during the day, and my job during the day was as the deputy congressional liaison for the newly formed agency called the Peace Corps. And I used to go to Capitol Hill most every day. And I had been born in Maine but I had left Maine to go away to school as a young man. I didn’t know that many, I didn’t know any politicians in Maine, but because I was from Maine and I needed a place to hang out [while I was working on the Hill], I hung out at Senator Mitchell’s [*sic*: Muskie’s] office.

I got to know George, who was the legislative assistant in Senator Mitchell’s [*sic*: Muskie’s] office, and we hit it off and we became friends. And we would see each other frequently, and then we became social friends, we knew each other pretty well. And then in 1968, I was still in Washington, I had been working in the White House for Lyndon Johnson, and at the convention in, Democratic Convention in 1968, when Muskie was selected as the vice presidential candidate, George got hold of me and said he was going to run the campaign and he wanted me to run one aspect of the campaign, which was to be in charge of the advance operations for all of the advance men that we’d be sending out.

My office was right around the corner from his at the headquarters of the Democratic campaign, Humphrey-Muskie campaign, which was at 17th and L Street in Washington, and so we saw a lot of each other every day, many times a day and we socialized together and so forth.

AL: Now when you say socialized, what sort of social activities did you do at that time and that age, and that stage of your careers?

HP: Well we mostly--- just going out to dinner, things of that sort.

AL: Did you play tennis?

HP: Neither one of us started playing, neither one of us played tennis at that time. Actually, it's an interesting story. Then, after that campaign, George came back to Portland to rejoin his law firm, which was Jensen & Baird, and I want to get into that in a minute because George had a rather, you know, regular, he was a regular lawyer just like the rest of the lawyers around here, helping clients do a variety of things.

But in 1970, Muskie was running for president, and the election was to be in 1972, and George was going to run that campaign so he moved, he and his wife actually moved to Washington, and they were there until the spring of '72 when it became apparent that Muskie was not going to win, and they might have stayed a little longer, till June. In any event, the Muskie bid failed and George came back to Maine. That was the year we started playing tennis.

He took most of the summer off and he and his wife rented a house down near Wells, between Wells and Ogunquit. I've forgotten the name, something Island. It's a well known place anyway. And they had a house down there, and George had a pool table in the basement and I'd go down and we'd play pool, and there were also some batting cages, baseball batting cages where you could practice batting, over in Wells, and we would go over there occasionally and hit. George was a pretty good hitter.

Then we decided we'd take up golf, and we played golf a few times that summer. George didn't like it very much, and he switched to tennis, and so I switched to tennis. And now it's 1972, and in the fall, and we've switched to tennis, and we started playing every Monday night, we would play with a group, there were eight of us, two courts, doubles. And I must say George [p/o] got a lot better than I was. And I always tried to figure that out, because we started exactly at the same time. And it's because of his ability to concentrate and focus, and tennis really was a good game for George because he is a focused guy, and he's a very steady and consistent guy, and his tennis game reflected that and he got better and better, much too good for me. That took a few years. We probably played doubles for three or four years beginning in '72, until George in '77, probably five years, no, even longer, later than that, George was the U.S. attorney, he was still here, but it was probably in '79 that George went to the court, then he had to move up to Bangor. He took an apartment in Bangor; his family stayed here. And so that's how we got into tennis. But those were great days.

I came back – George actually got me my job. I wanted to come, after the '68 campaign I wanted to come back home to Maine to practice law. I had not practiced law at that time, but of course I was a graduate of law school. I couldn't get a job. And one day George called me up and he said, "I was having lunch with Sid Wernick, and they may have a spot and I've asked Sid if you could come up and talk with him." So I did, and basically that's it, George got me a job up here.

And we were obviously both, George was a Democratic state chairman at first, and then Democratic National Committeeman, and I was in politics, we were Washington friends and we had become good friends, and we did political things together. And I went up to Waterville with George two or three times and had dinner at his house, his mother cooked. I knew his parents.

AL: Oh, what were they like?

HP: Oh, they were terrific. His mother was a focused person like George, and of course she did not speak English real well, but charming woman. And I think his parents had a lot to do with George's success. As you probably know, his mother came to this country when she was, I don't know, eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old, and she worked in a mill, and George's father, among his jobs, was janitor at Colby College. But they had five children, all five children [were] college educated, and all five successful. They motivated their children, and they had great pride in their family. They had no money, but enormous family pride, and very motivated to be, to have their children be successful and well educated. And it really is, it's the American dream, it's the American story of immigration and education.

He had good parents who really do deserve some of the credit for his great success. They lived down on Front Street, which is along the river, the Kennebec River, in a, you know, lower income area, but in an area where I think a lot of the Lebanese immigrants first lived when they came to the United States. And the Mitchells lived there I think always, you know, since their kids were born. That's one of the reasons why a hallmark of George's life has been his closeness to his sister and his brothers.

I think that takes us up to around '72. Then we, you know, we saw each other on vacation. There was another guy, who is now deceased, who was a very good friend of ours, Joe Angelone, and he ran the pizza place here in town, Angelone's Pizza, and he was a very, very good friend of ours and we had some good times. And Joe Angelone, I got married in '74, Joe Angelone of course was quite a bit older than me and George, he was a veteran of WWII, and his wife and Sally Mitchell were good friends; Joe and George and their wives went on vacation several times.

Anyway, we would just go down with..... George, first, when I first came back to town, George was living in Falmouth, and he and his wife and daughter then moved to a bigger house in Loveitt's Field in South Portland. They moved there probably after I'd been back in town a couple of years, and [he] continued to practice law at Jensen & Baird.

He did an interesting thing, he had a variety of clients, he was a very good lawyer, a very good advocate for his clients. He even got me a couple of cases. I remember a bankruptcy case that he couldn't handle he sent over to me. He sent me a lot of cases in those days. He wanted to be a good trial lawyer, and at Jensen & Baird they didn't have much of a trial practice. He wanted to develop as a trial lawyer, so Joe Brennan was the district attorney, and when Joe got elected district attorney George asked him if he could come aboard as assistant district attorney. It was

then a part time job, where you'd go to the district court in the morning and prosecute cases, and then you could go back to your law firm in the afternoon. George continued at Jensen & Baird but was a part-time prosecutor in the state court and the district court. And he learned, he did that to learn to be a good trial lawyer.

And then when Jimmy Carter got elected and Democrats took over in January of '77, of course George got appointed U.S. attorney. As everybody knows, in essence George was Ed Muskie's protégé. A lot of people had worked for Ed Muskie over the years, as George did back in the early '60s, but Muskie recognized in George a unique talent. George was very smart, very reliable, thorough, always prepared, always did his homework, and Muskie was that way himself. He saw in George many of the same traits that he, Muskie, had. And George was in fact his protégé, so George's appointment as U.S. attorney was obviously Muskie pushing for this. George's appointment as a U.S. judge, as a federal judge, was Muskie pushing George to do these things. And when Muskie retired, well not retired but was made secretary of state and had to, in 1980, and had to resign his Senate seat, he flew up to Maine, actually to Brunswick Naval Air Station, and met with Joe Brennan, the then sitting governor, to urge Joe to appoint George, who was then a federal judge, to the U.S. Senate vacancy. Muskie was very much a promoter of George's, and one who recognized George's extraordinary talents.

AL: And also because Governor Brennan had had that experience with George Mitchell in the district attorney's office, he had a sense of -

HP: Yes, he knew George was good, yeah, he knew it would be a high quality appointment. And he didn't, he probably didn't know initially that George, a federal judge, would be interested in this, but Muskie I think made that clear to Brennan at the Brunswick Naval Air Station.

George says that Muskie's the greatest man he's known and so forth. I think Muskie was a very, very talented guy, but I think George has had a career that surpasses, in my judgment easily surpasses, Muskie's career. Muskie obviously was an important guy and a talented guy, but George has done so many things. And what makes George unique as compared with Muskie is all the things that George has done outside of politics.

A guy who voluntarily decided to leave political power, and go and do other things. And I think that's also a thread in George's life. I remember back in 1972, I'm pretty sure it was '72, George was on the Democratic National Committee, he was National Committeeman from Maine. Not a, Maine was not really a powerful influence on the Democratic National Committee. And George told me, he said, "I'm going to run for chairman of the Democratic National Committee." And I said, "You're going to run for chairman of the Democratic National Committee, a guy from Maine, you won't get anywhere." And he said, "Well you never know, Harold, until you put your hat in the ring." And he ran, and he almost won. He ran against Chuck Manatt, who later became chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and Robert Strauss, who became famous. Strauss beat him in a runoff. And I thought, here's George who just said something that's interesting, "You'll never know unless you put your hat in the ring."

What George has always been willing to do, and it's a pattern in his life, is dare to put his hat in the ring. Nothing has ever scared him at all, ever. He's never been intimidated, never. He's always said to himself, 'I can do that,' and then he does it. Same with running for – he had only been elected once, you know, he'd been appointed U.S. senator, first election was in '82, second election was in '88, and he runs for leader, majority leader of the U.S. Senate, and wins. He is a guy who has confidence, and is willing to risk losing, by putting his hat in the ring, you know, he did it, he ran for governor and lost in '74. It distinguishes him from a lot of people that I know.

AL: Now, talking about the 1974 Maine gubernatorial campaign, I'm sure you must have had some involvement with that. Do you have recollections of that campaign?

HP: Well, the only recollection I have, because I was practicing law too, I couldn't hang around in the campaign all the time, but the only recollection I have is, is George telling me right, like the day after the election, "I knew, by last weekend I knew I was going to lose, I knew Jim Longley was going to win, just the sense I got traveling around the state." He had a sense that that was going to happen.

AL: The momentum.

HP: Yeah, he just sensed that Longley was coming out of nowhere and would win this three person race, himself, George, Erwin, from, the Republican from York, and Jim Longley. But he learned some lessons there. George's public persona was a very serious guy. He had black, horn-rimmed glasses, and he looked very serious with those black horn-rimmed glasses. And he was a serious, thoughtful guy, but there was this other side of him which was very playful and funny and humorous. That didn't come out in that campaign so much. When he ran again in '82 as an incumbent senator, having a little more confidence in his ability to not be serious and to lighten up some, it was a much different campaign.

AL: So his style of campaigning changed.

HP: His style changed from '74 to '82. But anyway, he is, I don't, there's nobody in Maine history that I know of who has distinguished himself in so many different ways. I mean, he really is looked upon as one of the wise men of the world now. And I think about Front Street, up in Waterville, and a very modest house and his mother and father, and this kid who, you know, gets out of Waterville High School and sets on a course that makes him one of the hundred most influential people in the world. It's a great story.

AL: Yes, it is.

(Taping paused.)

AL: Okay.

HP: One of my favorite stories is one that I like to tell because it teases George a little bit,

and George is a great teaser himself.

AL: He is?

HP: Yeah. At least he likes to tease me. And one time, I had a small boat, a 23-foot motor boat, and George was early on in his Senate career, might have been, you know, '83 or something like that. And it was summertime, George and Joe Angelone and I were going to take a trip in my boat, we were going to go up to Penobscot Bay and stay in Camden for a day, and then go up the coast a little more, just the three of us on my boat.

I had no radar on the boat, and we set out from Portland, it was a nice, hot summer day, and it was relatively clear, a little hazy. And we got off of Boothbay, heading toward Port Clyde, and thick fog came in. And we're out there, and I'd navigate via dead reckoning, and I plotted out a course which I hoped would take us to a buoy. We couldn't see fifty yards, couldn't see fifty feet. And so I said to George and Joe, "Now you guys be listening for this bell buoy, we should be near it in about nineteen minutes or something like that." And George said, "I hear the buoy." And we followed the sound and we came to this buoy, which was the buoy I was looking for off Port Clyde, because at that point you make a left turn to go up toward Rockland.

I said to George, "I got to plot a new course, I got to put the chart down on the floor. You just take the helm here and kind of keep us aimed at that buoy." I got down on the floor, and within a minute, bang, big collision, we collided with the buoy. Geez, I thought maybe the boat was going to sink, I checked it and everything. And I said, "George, what are you doing?" He said, "Well you told me, steer toward the buoy." "Not to hit it, George." I tell that story now, because he's the biggest teaser of all, he always follows with a, "Yes, that's true, and it's also true then, and then we got in real trouble because the captain, Mr. Pachios, started throwing up over the side." He always wins that one.

But when he became a senator, I used to go to Washington periodically and we would go out and have dinner. And I've been having dinner with George for forty-five years, and a dinner with George is not, you know, a real relaxed, pleasant, lengthy thing, it's not all about the food. What it is, is you sit down, you order, you eat and you leave. And I've never been at a dinner with George that takes more than an hour and ten or fifteen minutes, at most.

I remember one time, when he was majority leader, and his brother and I were -

(Outside interruption - taping paused)

HP: Yeah, the best example of George and meals is, when he was majority leader, one time his brother Robbie, his late brother, and I were down there so the three of us were going to have dinner at the Palm Restaurant. And George had, we got there and we waited around, and he said to Robbie and me, "Listen, I got one more appointment. You guys go down to the Palm, order me a steak and french fries and a tossed salad, and I'll be there about fifteen minutes after you get there. Order after you've been there five minutes and then I'll come there." And that's what

we did. And George came, the food arrived maybe a minute or two after he arrived, he ate the food and left, that was it. That whole thing took twenty-five minutes, at the Palm Restaurant, one of the fanciest restaurants in Washington. George and food, food's no big deal with him.

AL: He's focused.

HP: He's focused. But food is not, you know, going out to eat is not something that intrigues him a lot. And he either has a coffee or a Coke.

AL: Now you mentioned Robbie, and unfortunately I won't be able to interview him, but did you spend time with him over the years, did you have a sense -

HP: Oh, Robbie was a, Robbie was a good friend. Robbie – of course George has great stories about Robbie. Robbie was an entrepreneur, and George's stories about Robbie are hilarious, because they were close in age, see, Robbie was a couple years older than George. And Robbie was a great basketball player, George was an adequate basketball player, and sometimes Robbie would get a little, they'd play basketball out in the yard there on Front Street and Robbie would kind of beat on George a little bit. But he was a big hero, Robbie was.

And George likes to tell stories of how he, George, was misused by Robbie, manipulated by him. Two of them are, Robbie got the job to sweep the floors at the Waterville Boys Club when he was in high school; Robbie started the job and after a week he sub-contracted with George. And George was sweeping the floor, and he found out that Robbie was getting like forty cents an hour, and he was paying George only twenty-five cents an hour. And he said, Robbie would be there, but he'd be on the, in the office there in the Boys Club with his feet up, on the phone, talking to his girlfriend, Janet. So, he said, I spoke to Robbie about it, and Robbie said, "Yeah, what's the problem?" He [George] said, "Well that's unfair," he said, "I'm doing all the work and you're sitting here in this office talking to your girlfriend." And Robbie says, "George, you don't understand, you're labor, and I'm management."

So another time, Robbie was in the Marines and he was stationed down at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, and he was going to ship out on a ship for the Sixth Fleet, and he'd be over in the Mediterranean for six months. Robbie was a, one of the things he was in charge of with his company was supplies, and he had his car down there and he told George, "You come down and pick up the car and drive it back to Waterville, because I'm going to the Mediterranean." George hitchhiked to North Carolina and met Robbie down there, and Robbie took him to the car, and George said it was stuffed with coffee, there were all these coffee boxes and stuff, and he said there was only room for the driver to squeeze in. And he said, "I had to drive that car non-stop from North Carolina to Waterville, Maine."

Always being used business-wise by Robbie, the businessman, but Robbie was quite a guy; I considered Robbie a very good friend. And Robbie was a very competitive guy, tennis player too. See, George and his, George and Robbie played tennis a lot, and all of the, he and his other three brothers all played cribbage against each other with a fierce competitive spirit.

AL: Did you ever venture into the cribbage games?

HP: I played cribbage with them once. I wasn't much of a cribbage player, I had played while I was in the navy on a ship, and I played cribbage just once or twice maybe with George and a couple of his brothers, and I didn't fare well. And they said that I was stupid, so that was it.

AL: And so you kept in contact with George during the Senate years.

HP: Oh yeah, all the time.

AL: Were you one of the people he would maybe call and say, 'oh, I've got this legislation going on,' or did he keep that to himself?

HP: No, no-no, we'd talk sometimes, and I think for a lot of the time, you know, we'd talk once a week on the phone. And George, I've known a lot of politicians, and George is the most unusual that I've known. One of the things that happens to people in Washington who get elected to the Congress is, over a period of time, you know, people are opening the car door for him, 'right here, Senator, let me get that door Senator, let me show you this, let me do this, let me do that.' And it's been my observation that they believe that, after a period of time, they hear that so much, they believe that they're different, that they're special, that they're somehow extraordinary people, you know, who shouldn't open a car door. George Mitchell never fell for that stuff, never, ever got taken in by it. He was the exact same person after being Senate majority leader that he was when he was a lawyer in Portland, or even working for Muskie when I first met him in the early sixties. No different. Zero difference. That is highly unusual. He never fell for that.

Secondly, politicians are, there's one thing consistent about them, they'll always take all the credit for themselves. And George wrote a book one time called *Men of Zeal*, in which he talked about the Iran-Contra hearings. Actually, he wrote it with Bill Cohen. And he credited me with giving him the idea for what became, what became an episode that made him famous in Washington, which was his cross examination of Oliver North. And in the book he credited, he said he talked to me on the phone the night before and we talked about this. Well, that is unbelievable, that is so unique. I've never known that to happen. Here's a guy, a politician, he's crediting me with giving him this idea. And in that respect he's different than any other politician I ever met in all my years.

AL: Now, I think over the years we could say he's had a love for the Red Sox.

HP: Well, George likes sports, and you know, he played basketball at Bowdoin. I've played basketball with George, I have a basketball backboard at my house and we've played there and other places. But George only likes to play, he doesn't want to play one-on-one, he likes to play, you know, horse, where you go to a position on the court and then you shoot, if you make it then

the guy, the other guy has to make the same shot. Now George has about three spots on the court where he's a dead eye, okay, he can't miss from those three spots. If you play horse with George, every shot he takes is one of those three spots, that's it. That's it, totally.

And baseball, we've gone to the batting cages. He loves sports, he knows a lot about sports, he knows a lot about statistics. And yeah, he knows a lot about baseball, and baseball got to know him when he was in the Senate, and they got to know him as a guy who liked sports and liked baseball, that's how he kind of got into that.

But like in basketball, the Mitchells have always been big basketball players. And Red Auerbach, who was then the president of the Boston Celtics when George was in the Senate, loved to go by, lived in Washington, commuted to work in Boston, and he became a big pal of George's. And, of course, Bill Bradley was a good friend of George's in the Senate. George's, one of George's best friends in the Senate was a guy like him, very thoughtful and deliberate and rational guy, Paul Sarbanes. In fact, there's a picture over there somewhere of Paul Sarbanes and George and me. Big into sports, and he's a guy who reads the sports pages.

AL: I want to not forget to talk about your involvement with the Mitchell Institute. I mean, you sort of were part of that early group of people that talked about how it was -

HP: Yes, I had a different view than George's view. My view, which I expressed to George is, if you're going to raise all this money, make it like the Rhodes Scholarship of Maine. You pick ten kids, or even five kids, every year, and they get full tuition for four years, and it becomes the most competitive scholarship in Maine, probably the most competitive scholarship given in any state. I mean, five kids a year, full four-year scholarships, you're going to get the best, the very best.

And his view was different. "I don't want to help just five kids, I want to reach out to kids everywhere in Maine, I want one from every high school. When I was in the Senate I spoke at every high school in Maine, gave a commencement address or other kind of address, and I want one from each school."

I still think I was right, but he thinks he was right, and guess what? They did it his way.

AL: What things haven't I asked you about in terms of your span of time, friendship with Senator Mitchell or his career, that you think we should add?

HP: I don't know.

AL: Do you think he still wants to be baseball commissioner some day?

HP: No, no, I think George is beyond that. I think, I think maybe there's still a lot of things that George wants to do and I'm sure will do, but his life has been very hectic for the past ten or twelve years, and I'm sure that he wants a little bit more order to his life. He travels all the time,

he's on the road constantly. And because he's a very good speaker, people want him to come and speak all the time. He spends a lot of time in Europe, he's chairman of his law firm, which is the largest law firm in the world, and they have offices all over the world and he's required to go all over the world to those offices. He's on a plane a lot.

He's got two young kids at home that he really relates to very, very well, and it's like a second life for George, you know, it's a second life. In Maine he has a daughter and a very interesting grandson; when he's up here he goes to his grandson's Little League games. And he has these two children who are about the same age as the grandson, who have all their activities where they live, in New York City, and also in the summer up in Maine, in Northeast Harbor, Seal Harbor.

He travels a lot, but he still likes to spend time with these kids, watching the things that they do. I think he'd probably like it a little less busy, but he hasn't expressed that to me, that's my guess.

AL: I think that's all the questions I had. Certainly we can come back, I can zip up to Portland again if you have further recollections. Thank you.

HP: Pleasure.

End of Interview