

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Beverly M. Sherman

(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)

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Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. The date is April 20, 2010, I am Andrea L'Hommedieu, and today I'm in Cape Elizabeth with Beverly Sherman. Beverly, could you just start by giving me your full name.

Beverly Sherman: Surely, it's Beverly Marshall Sherman.

AL: And is Marshall your maiden name?

BS: Marshall's my maiden name, yes.

AL: And where and when were you born?

BS: I was born in Biddeford, Maine, grew up in Old Orchard, and I was born in 1937, so the Senator is still a couple years older than I.

AL: And tell me about Old Orchard and your family, what were your parents' names?

BS: My mother's name was Ruth, and my father's name was Norris, and I come from a large family, we all went to school in Old Orchard, graduated from Old Orchard Beach High School, I went on to college, I went to college at the University of Michigan, and then I graduated from the University of Southern Maine. I got married, and then I graduated from Maine.

AL: So transferred.

BS: Transferred, well, I finished after I was married, and then I went back and finished. Have three sons.

AL: So tell me about Old Orchard Beach, when you were growing up in the '40s and the '50s.

BS: Old Orchard then was a very quiet little town in the winter time, just a few thousand, maybe three or four thousand people, and you knew everybody. My father was a very strong Democrat. I think one of my earliest memories was when Eisenhower and Stevenson were, that election, and my dad was so upset when Stevenson lost. So I've always been interested in

politics, and I think I really am a lifetime Democrat, although whether I'm going to be that way this year, I don't think so although I love Barack Obama.

AL: You said you came from a large family, how many brothers and sisters?

BS: I have six brothers, and four sisters, and one sister has passed away.

AL: So there were eleven.

BS: Still a large family, there were eleven, and most of my siblings still live in Saco, Ocean Park, and Old Orchard. And I never lived - After I was married we lived in different places, and we moved back to Maine. Actually my husband, we retired here really, but David was still working in Connecticut when we bought our place in Maine, and we bought it in 1980.

AL: So that Old Orchard-Saco-Biddeford area, what sorts of things could you do for fun as a kid growing up?

BS: Well, we went to the beach. In the summer time, we lived right near the beach and went to the beach every day. And in the winter time we'd go skating and sliding, and the movies on Saturday. We did a lot at school, church, I was raised Catholic, which you probably could figure, from eleven children. And I had a lot of aunts and uncles, my aunt was the principal of the grade school, and one of my uncles was a judge, and my dad worked in the post office. We had several cousins in town, and there just were a lot of Marshalls.

AL: And were you part of the Franco American community?

BS: No, no, we weren't, we weren't, my background is mostly Scottish, the Marshalls were from Scotland.

AL: Now tell me, so you moved away for quite a few years and came back to Maine.

BS: We were married in Maine and then we, we never worked here; he worked for UPS his whole life. As soon as he graduated from college he started working for United Parcel Service, and we lived in different areas. And then we came back, Dave was still working out of Greenwich, Connecticut, but we could really live anywhere because he traveled so much. And we always knew one day we'd move back to Maine, and so we moved back and bought this great property and we built this house.

AL: So that was 1980.

BS: Nineteen eighty, yes, came back, maybe '79, or '80.

AL: And so not too long after that, in was it '81-'82 time period, you met Senator Mitchell for the first time.

BS: I met Senator Mitchell over at my friend and neighbor, Harold Pachios' house, and that's when the Senator was running for the first time, he had already been appointed by Muskie, and he was running. And Harold asked me to come and meet him, and I did. And so I didn't do much, I think I attended some functions and did a little volunteering, but I didn't do much.

AL: What were your first impressions of him?

BS: Of George? I remember my very first impression when I met him, because when you meet him face-to-face he's very charming and very nice, but then I went, he spoke at the town hall in Cape Elizabeth, and I thought, my God, he's much too serious, doesn't this man ever smile? And he didn't seem, you know, he just got better all the time. I'm sure the more you're out there speaking, but he just seemed very serious, he seemed very much like a judge, what you would expect a judge to be. I think his intelligence, and he seemed so sincere that I was very impressed with him. He didn't seem like a good ol' boy politician type.

AL: And so, that was about the extent of your -

BS: Yeah, at the beginning, that was the extent, yes.

AL: And so tell me the next time, as things progressed and you got to know him.

BS: Well, I'd see the Senator from time to time. We had a tennis court, and every so often Harold would come with George and with Shep Lee and Juris Ubans, who was just a great guy, great personality, and they would play tennis here. Not often, but they'd come over and play tennis so I got to know him a little, I mean we were never close friends. Acquaintances, you know, but never close friends. I just volunteered and did work for him because I wanted to keep a Democrat in the Senate, and he certainly represented Maine very well.

AL: And then we get closer to 1988 and he's running for reelection, and then you take on more of a role.

BS: Then he's running, yes, I took on a bigger role, I did a lot actually, I spent a lot of time. And it was much easier in '88 to raise money for the Senator than it was in '82, because everybody wanted to give money to George Mitchell.

AL: And he had become majority leader.

BS: And he was majority leader, and that was a big thing and so everybody wanted access to him, and people wanted to give him money, so it was always easy. The Senator was very, I remember, Larry Benoit I know very well, the Senator had a great staff here in Maine, and I knew a lot of the people in Washington, but Larry Benoit ran a wonderful office. And they were so frugal. I remember one instance when I said, "Larry, for gosh sakes, can't we even have a water fountain here?" And he said, "I don't think it's in our budget." I said, "Come on, Larry."

So I remember the Senator coming in and I said, “George really, we don’t have coffee, we don’t do anything, can’t we at least have water?” And he laughed, and I think we did get a little water cooler, which was fun. But anyway, they had a great staff, and so I worked in the campaign office a lot.

AL: And so you mentioned Larry Benoit, who else was in that office that you recall?

BS: Oh, Sharon Sudbay, have you interviewed Sharon? I met Sharon when she had just graduated from the University of Maine – see, I have to think back now – in the Senator’s first campaign, I did work for him, now that I recall, and Sharon had just graduated, and that’s when she first started. And of course there was Mary McAleney, who went on to Washington, and Margaret, and who else...? But those were the, we had some other young guys, I can’t -

AL: And what’s Margaret’s last name? There’s a Margaret Malia [or] Margaret [Malia] Kneeland?

BS: Yes, Sharon would know, then she married so I don’t remember her married name. Margaret and Sharon, Margaret worked right along with Sharon. So that’s when I really started, in ‘88, it was easy to raise money, and we had a lot of events.

AL: Talk about some of those events, do you remember any of them?

BS: Oh sure, I remember when President Clinton came, and that was a great event.

AL: Where was that?

BS: He came to Portland and it was, we had a dinner at the Eastland Hotel, but before that we had a reception at the Holiday Inn. We had the reception at the Holiday Inn, and the dinner at the Eastland, and we raised a lot of money. And President Clinton came, and it was, and actually I organized it, and the reception was great, it was just sold out, there were piles of requests, of course Bill Clinton has great charisma, I mean he really does, he’s really great, and it was just a wonderful, wonderful evening. And then we had the dinner at the [Eastland] and I remember meeting with the Secret Service men and they said – they were so serious and stern – and they said: no one in the dining room, people had to stay right at their seats, and the president would come in and he would just walk around and go right to the podium and say hello, and then he was going to leave, but no one was to approach him.

So Bill Clinton comes in. The Senator had said to me, “Beverly, I want you to announce him.” And I said, “I don’t want to do it.” So anyway, it was kind of fun, I got up on the – what do they call, the president travels with his own like a podium, he always has his own. But the Secret Service said, he does not want to be, he didn’t want *Hail to the Chief* and he just wanted Bill Clinton, Bill Clinton the president of the United States, not anything formal, so I introduced President Bill Clinton and Senator George Mitchell, and of course everybody was cheering. And by gosh, Bill Clinton comes in, and do you think he did what the Secret Service told him? No

way. He goes right into the room, shakes hands with everyone in the room, and had his picture taken with every table. And people, of course, it was just wonderful. But he was very, very, I was very impressed with him. And he's quite handsome.

I know, it's funny, because when George was introducing the president to me and to my husband Dave, David happens to be a Republican, and so Senator Mitchell says to the president, "Mr. President, I want you to know that everyone in this room voted for you, I can promise you that, except probably one person." And he kind of smiled. And that was the last time David ever voted for a Bush, but he had up till then.

AL: So this was an event when Clinton was -

BS: It was a fund-raising event really.

AL: And Clinton was president at that time, so it was in the early '90s, it was fund-raising for the Mitchell Institute?

BS: No, no, it was before that, it was when he, okay, your history should be better than mine, Andrea.

AL: He, '92, he was elected president.

BS: Okay, so it was -

AL: And he went out in 2000.

BS: Clinton went out in 2000.

AL: Yes.

BS: Okay, so he came obviously while he was president, and it had to be between '88 and '94, it had to be after George was majority leader. And so he probably came for the next election, because we had a lot of money in '94, that's where all that scholarship money came from, so it was before then. You'd have to ask the staff, I don't know if you get into that, but they did raise a lot of money. There was also another fund raiser I organized for the Senator, and this was the '88 election, when Governor Cuomo came, of New York, and that was a great event. That was held at the Eastland too, and he was an incredibly dynamic speaker.

AL: What it is like to have to set up an event like that, what all goes into that?

BS: Well, the staff did a great job. My part would be raising the money, and the unpleasant tasks sometimes. When you're a powerful person, like George became, everybody's his best friend. I said to him one time, "Hell, you have more best friends than anybody I've ever known," because everybody wanted to be at his table. And I'd get the call from - I won't

mention any names –he really wants to sit with so-and-so and so-and-so, and finally said to him, at the Cuomo event, which was a big one, and President Clinton’s, I said, “George, you tell me who you want to sit with you at your table, because everybody wants to sit with you, and everybody says you want them to sit with you too.” And so we would just kind of joke about it, because people can be pretty obnoxious. And sometimes you tried very hard to, of course a lot of them think they’re so important that they have to be right next to him or right next to the president, and it’s impossible.

AL: Right, not everybody can be there.

BS: Well, it’s impossible, and so you try to get a few important people at each table so that people feel important.

AL: And recognized.

BS: And recognized, yes. But other than that, most people, you know, he does have a lot of friends, but there are a lot of people that did a lot of work for the Senator that never asked to be put at the most important table; never felt the need to be acknowledged.

AL: And then we also go to the ‘thank you’ event.

BS: Oh, after he -

AL: After he announced he wouldn’t be running.

BS: Yes, and actually the Senator did ask me if I would, they had a big event for him in D.C. to thank him, because George was a very influential person at that time, and majority leader and so well respected and liked. And he asked if I would do it in Maine, which I did with the help of his great staff. You can’t say enough good things about Larry, Sharon, and Margaret, and Mary McAleney, the group in Washington, they were wonderful. So we had a ‘thank you’ at the Holiday Inn, and Lisa Gorman and I did it together, and it was very successful.

AL: Did people come and speak about Senator Mitchell at that time, do you remember if there were particular speakers invited, or was it just the group?

BS: I don’t recall, Andrea, exactly who was the main speaker. Staff should know that, I’m sure they could dig that up for you. All I know is we raised a lot of money, and it was very, very successful.

AL: And did that money got towards the Mitchell [Institute]?

BS: Every bit of the money that – which I admire about the Senator, I don’t know what the legalities were at that time – but every bit of that money went to the scholarship fund. And that’s when his sister Barbara Atkins and myself, and there were Sharon Sudbay and Margaret, Estelle

Lavoie, there were a group of us that formed a scholarship committee and we worked on it, and that's when we could start out just giving I believe twenty scholarships, that was our first year, and it evolved so that every high school in the state, one child would receive a George Mitchell scholarship. And of course you know where that went, I'm sure.

We had a committee, Barbara was the head of the committee, and we kept that committee and then they formed a board, the Mitchell Board, and I went on that board and I served on it for a few years. And you know, it's time to move on, and someone else did it. Now Mary, his niece, oh, Mary Friedman was on it, Mary Mitchell Friedman was one of the beginners, too. There were a few men on it, but the women, we did all the work.

AL: Well, it's become quite successful.

BS: It's become very successful, it's -

AL: Not just scholarship but research as well, it seems.

BS: It's wonderful, yes. It just grew and grew, it's just great. And George has been very nice. I'm very active in the Boys and Girls Club, and he was recognized nationally by the Boys and Girls Club of America, and we had a big fund-raising capital campaign in Maine. I was president of the board of directors of the Boys and Girls Club at the time, and so I wrote him a letter and I said, I'd never asked George for anything, but I just said, "If it's at all possible, could you possibly come to the Boys and Girls Club for the opening of our community section of our campaign?" And fortunately he was going up to Bowdoin, he was coming to Maine for something, and he came for that evening and he spoke, and it was a great event in Portland, we had it right at the Boys and Girls Club. And some gentleman, George is I guess a great cribbage player, and somebody, one of the alumni made a cribbage board, and they had it so George played cribbage with some of the kids in the Club. That made a big impression.

AL: Well, growing up in Waterville, the Boys and Girls Club was a big part of -

BS: Big part of, it was just Boys' Club then of course, when he grew up it was just Boys' Club, and that was a big part of his life. He said he and his brothers used to go there. I was in Washington for a Boys and Girls Club meeting, national meeting, and George was honored at that and he came and spoke, which was nice.

AL: Have you seen him under other circumstances in his later -

BS: No, if I see him, he's always pleasant, but we aren't personal friends. I worked, I did it because I believed he was the best man for the job, and that's it. But no, we're not personal friends. We're friends, but he has a lot of friends, I have a lot of friends.

AL: If you look at his career over the years, what stands out in your mind as sort of the lasting things that he'll be remembered for?

BS: Well, of course he's going to be remembered as being one of the best majority leaders we've ever had, one of the strongest. And I think he's going to be remembered for just being a very decent, fair person. I've never heard anybody ever attack his character, ever. They may not have voted for him or they may not agree with him, but I think Maine is very proud to have George Mitchell as a citizen of Maine. Like they have been with Bill Cohen, too, I think Senator Cohen has, and Ed Muskie, I think Maine, I think we're very moralistic, we don't have any scandals.

And I think what he has done with his scholarship money, that's probably something that has impressed me the most because it's reached so many kids, it's incredible. Just that little bit, you know, and into the future it will [grow], so I think probably the scholarship is what I'm most impressed with.

AL: Great. Is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you think is important to add?

BS: No, I don't think so.

AL: Thank you so much.

BS: Well you're so welcome.

End of Interview