

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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James F. “Jim” Mitchell
(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 December 7, 2009, this is Andrea L’Hommedieu, and today I’m in Augusta, Maine, at 106 Soule Street, interviewing Jim F. Mitchell. And Jim, could you start just by giving me your full name. I know there are a couple well known Jim Mitchells in Maine.

Jim Mitchell: My name is James F. Mitchell.

AL: And where and when were you born?

JM: I was born January 4, 1961, in Waterville, Maine. My parents are Robert and Janet Mitchell; I’m the sixth of seven children.

AL: Oh, there are seven children in the family.

JM: Seven for Robbie and Janet, that’s right. My oldest brother is Robert Edward Mitchell, Jr., and Bobby and his family still live in Waterville; and then my sister Ann, who works with me, and she also still lives in Waterville; then Carol and Mary, Peter, myself, and then our youngest brother Joe, who lives in Belfast, Maine.

AL: Oh, wow. And talk about Waterville, Maine, when you were growing up.

JM: Well, when I was growing up, back in the, really the ‘60s and the ‘70s, Waterville was a tremendous community to be in. There was a, for Maine, a great diversity of people there, because you had a very vibrant mill economy, with the Keyes Fibre facility, the Wyandotte woolen mill, Scott over in Winslow, so there was a very strong manufacturing economy in Waterville. And of course there’d been a lot of woolen mills in the area that had brought many of the Lebanese immigrants to that area, to work in those woolen mills.

But in addition of course, you had Colby and Thomas [Colleges], so there was an intellectual community that was quite strong in the area. You had a very strong downtown when I was kid growing up, with Levine’s and Stern’s and Dunham’s and all these stores, and it was a major, major shopping area for the region. And so it was a busy place but it was also in many ways an idyllic, wonderful place to grow up. A lot of great friends I made when I was growing up there, good schools, a lot of good people.

AL: What did you do for social activities outside of school?

JM: Well, I was always very active in athletics, as a boy growing up, and the Boys' Club was a big part of the sports scene in Waterville, with soccer in the fall and then later on Pop Warner football as I got older, and then basketball in the winter. My brothers all played baseball, I wasn't too interested in it myself, but sports was a big part of my life growing up, and my family life. And then in addition there were a lot of people in the area with whom my family socialized both in the Lebanese community and outside, so there was a great big network of friends, but of course we also had many, many family members that were still in Waterville. And so our family life revolved around not only our brothers and sisters, but our cousins and our aunts and uncles, and of course our grandparents.

AL: Can you talk about your grandparents a little bit? You were the youngest of the seven, or no, you were the sixth.

JM: Second youngest, I'm the sixth. Well our grandparents on my father's side, George and Mintaha [Mary] Mitchell lived at the same house at 94 Front Street for many, many years, from the time my father was a boy growing up there until really my grandmother finally, in ill health, had to move out, and first lived with her sister Barbara and then later on in a nursing home, so they were there for several decades. But that home was really a central part of our growing up, because it was a very close knit family. Their son Paul ran an insurance agency in Waterville and had settled there after having lived in New York for a while, and then Massachusetts, he moved back and was involved in an insurance company My Uncle John was a well known teacher and coach in Waterville, his spouse Prin, and they had three daughters. Paul and Yvette had a daughter and three sons. And then my family, Robbie and Janet, we lived, my mother's still in our family home at 13 Lord Road in Waterville, they had seven children. And then George and Sally of course had a daughter, Andrea, and they lived of course outside Waterville – they were in South Portland – and so we didn't see them very much.

But Paul's family, Johnnie's family, our family, we spent a lot of time with one another, principally because the cousins were relatively close in age. You had my oldest cousin, Paul, Jr., who's essentially, let's see, Paul would be eight years older than I am, and my youngest cousin Andrea would be, let's see, Andrea is seven years younger than I am, actually no, five years younger than I am, so the age range is quite close, my brother Joe being the youngest of the original set of cousins really. So in age range it was quite close, we spent a lot of time with our cousins. Many of us went to the local parochial school; St. Joseph's was affiliated with the Maronite Church in Waterville. I only went a couple years, by my older brothers and sisters all graduated from there, through my sister Mary, who's the sister closest to me in age.

AL: So you said even when you were growing up, another generation later than your parents, the Lebanese community was still close?

JM: Oh yes, oh, it was a big part of our growing up. Because there is a fairly substantial

Lebanese community in Waterville, as you're aware. It was larger I think at that time than it is today, because many people in my generation of course moved out of Waterville. But at the time, we had our own church, there was a school that was associated with the church, many of the children of the Lebanese Maronites attended that school. There's also another whole sort of branch of Lebanese immigrants who are not Maronites, but had settled in Waterville. So, for example, the Nawfels are a good example, a large, well known family in Waterville of dentists and lawyers and doctors. They're not part of the Maronite community but they were Lebanese immigrants who had settled in the area, they're actually Greek Orthodox, and there was a big connection.

And I think much of it did revolve around the church, but it was also just I think people who had been connected through family relations in that neighborhood, their children and their children's children knew one another, socialized to some degree. And so there were these strong connections for a long, long time, really up and through the time I graduated from high school, I had connections with many of those families, the Jabars, the Nawfels, the Carters, many of them in the region, and of course I still see many of them today.

AL: And can you talk a little bit about your grandmother, describe her. And did you know, you knew your grandfather somewhat?

JM: I did, but I was a boy really when my grandfather passed away. My grandfather George passed away in 1972, so I was only twelve years old at the time. So he did die as a fairly young man, I think he would have been seventy-two then. So while I knew him as a young boy, I didn't know him as a maturing young man, I knew him really as a child. And my impression of him is fairly limited. He was a good man, he spent some time with his grandchildren, but he wasn't particularly effusive about showing affection or anything like that.

My grandmother, Sitto, on the other hand, she was really kind of the center of that household. And she was, I think probably because of her personality and her energy and her enthusiasm for all of her family members, we spent a lot of time with her. Even as a very young boy, my mother taught school when I was a child, so my first year of school I spent every afternoon after school at my grandmother's house. The bus would drop me off there, and Sitto would be there with something to eat of course, and spend some time asking me questions about what I'd done at school and all that sort of thing. And all my brothers and sisters and cousins spent a lot of time at Sitto's house.

She's a very strong woman; she'd been through a lot. Of course she had come to this country really as a young woman, and so she had made her way in the world through really hard work and dedication to her family. She worked in woolen mills most of her life, but she was a very loving, kind person, who spent a fair amount of time with her grandchildren.

She loved my sister Mary quite a bit, because Mary tried to teach her how to read, when she was an old woman. Now, my grandmother was an educated Lebanese woman so she read Arabic, and in fact had the Lebanese newspaper delivered to her house, and other members of the

Lebanese community came to Sittoo's house to have her read things to them that came in Arabic, so she did read Arabic, but she never learned to read English. And so she called Mary 'professor,' and my sister Mary, who is just a few years older than I, spent some time trying to teach my grandmother to read English for a period of time, but I think that was slow going. Of course, when you're in your sixties and seventies, it's a hard thing to learn a whole new language.

But Sittoo of course had done a lot for a lot of people, she was well liked in the Lebanese community that was in the area of Front Street and very popular, I think had a lot of friends who spent time with her and with Jiddoo. I'm always curious as an older individual, how Jiddoo was accepted. Of course, he was an Irishman, and the rest of them were Lebanese from Lebanon, and he was an Irishman who spoke Arabic, because of course he'd been adopted by Lebanese parents, older parents who, after he was orphaned, so he probably had a little bit different perspective on the whole community than those who'd immigrated directly from Lebanon.

AL: And talk to me about when you first were involved with your Uncle George's political aspirations. And I'm thinking of campaigns, the '74 campaign, so it would probably be the year earlier?

JM: Yeah, believe it or not, most of us nieces and nephews to George were recruited, some willingly, some unwillingly, to work on his '74 gubernatorial campaign. I think it was an exciting time for us as kids. I was just a little boy I think at the time, in eighth grade, you know, just starting to understand politics and what it meant to be involved in politics. I had a course, I had occasion to meet some, what I would view as pretty important people in Maine politics at the time, Ed Muskie had come to our, my childhood home on several occasions, of course George had worked for him as a staffer, and Ken Curtis had been there.

My folks were active in politics, even though my father was a federal employee. He was careful never to be directly involved, but my mother was active, as a school teacher, and they had a whole host of friends who were very, very active in supporting Ed Muskie. And so we were connected to politics all through our lives. And then when George decided to run for governor, we were a little army of envelope lickens and stamp lickens to help him in his initial effort. And of course his sister Barbara was married to Eddie Atkins, who was a prominent business person in Waterville, had been a long-time Ed Muskie booster and backer, and in fact his print shop, Atkins, I now own half of Atkins with my brother Peter, bought it from Eddie's son from his first marriage.

Eddie was a very, very important part of Ed Muskie's early political success, as his, that was Ed Muskie's print shop, Atkins Printing. So that print shop became sort of central part of George Mitchell's gubernatorial campaign. We spent a lot of time down there, putting printed materials together, getting them out in the mail to supporters, we canvassed a lot of streets, the nieces and nephews did – I'm trying to remember the various people who were involved in that gubernatorial campaign, it was so long ago. Oh, Bruce Chandler, Bruce and Nancy Chandler were very, very active, they were from China, Bruce later became of course a state judge, but he

was a very prominent Democrat, active in that campaign. Joe [B.] Ezhaya, who'd run for political office several times from Waterville. My cousin Susan actually, Michael Ferris, a lot of the people in the Waterville area, very active in that campaign.

And of course the nieces and nephews, we were recruited to do some of the grunt work, which was not unusual in those days. It was a lot more labor intensive, politics was, back in those days. But it was a very good, early introduction to Maine politics, and I was one of the nieces and nephews that sort of fell in love with it then and kept active in it almost my whole life, I've kept active in politics, through high school and college, when I went away I obviously was as active as I could be as an outsider, in Illinois and then in Massachusetts, and then when I came back to Maine, got very, very active again in political campaigns when I moved back to Maine.

AL: And what year was that?

JM: We moved back in '86-'87, and then I was actually a teacher and coach in Ellsworth, Maine, and began getting involved in local legislative races as a volunteer. And then in 1988, the chairman of the Maine Democratic Party was an acquaintance that I had met. He encouraged me, after I applied for a position with the party, to work on a congressional campaign for a professor from the university, Ken Hayes, God rest his soul, he was a delightful man; he passed away several years ago. He was running for Congress against a very formidable opponent, Congresswoman Olympia Snowe.

AL: Was that in -

JM: 'Eighty-eight.

AL: Yes, because I was at the University of Maine at that time, and Ken Hayes was one of my professors.

JM: Oh really? Well Ken's just a delightful man, as you know, was a delightful man, and he had served in the state Senate, and in fact had been a professor to now Senator Snowe, when Olympia was at the University of Maine, she had been one of Ken's students. And Ken and I and a couple of other people ran his campaign, I think we raised about \$87,000. I had early in my professional career been in advertising out in Chicago, so I actually wrote and produced the television ads that we ran.

We produced them at WABI-TV, and we had one that sort of got a little bit of traction, that Congresswoman Snowe didn't much like, and we had Gary Merrill, the actor, doing our voice over on the spots, and Gary had a great voice, very penetrating. So we had, as I said, about \$87,000 to run the whole campaign, and that year one of the rising Republicans was opposing Joe Brennan in his congressional seat, a guy named Ted O'Meara, who's a terrific friend now and a very good political person. Ted got about thirty-eight percent of the vote in the general election, was viewed as a rising star. Well Ken got thirty-seven percent, and we had a lot less money than Ted.

So we didn't do too badly, had a lot of fun, I learned a lot from Ken, learned a lot in that campaign. And then after that campaign I decided I wanted to work very hard to try to change how the state party assisted in elections, and so I got much more involved in the state party organization and apparatus, and then later on ran for state chairman, and was elected as state chair actually when Bill Clinton was elected president. So I was the Democratic state chairman at the time that Clinton was inaugurated.

AL: Okay, and so how long did you serve in that capacity?

JM: I was there for about a year-and-a-half, because much to my surprise, and the surprise of many others, Senator George J. Mitchell decided not to seek reelection, and because he didn't decide to seek reelection in 1994, I resigned from my position as state chairman to run for Congress. But while I was chairman, I had a fair amount of interaction with Senator Mitchell because, of course, one of my principal jobs was to raise money for the state party. Well, it doesn't hurt to have the majority leader of the United States Senate as one of your two United States senators, so I regularly went to Washington to ask for his assistance.

I think the Senator was always extremely careful about not overdoing it with the fund-raising. He obviously had an obligation to raise funds for the members of his caucus for his own reelection campaign, and for the state party. He was one of the elected leaders in Maine Democratic politics who was always very concerned with the strength of the party; some of that was because of his own history. Of course he'd served as a chairman for the Maine Democratic Party, and had a real interest in seeing the organization strengthened as a critical part of how to advance the cause of the Democratic Party.

So he was very generous with his time and effort, but I went on a number of occasions for fund raisers down to D.C., and he was helpful, we had a fund raiser down there that I worked with. And I think by and large we raised at that time I think more money than the state party had raised in probably a decade. We had a fair amount of success and were able to retire some old debts and put some new programs in place, and I think helped a number of Democrats both at the legislative level as well as those seeking higher office. So it was a pretty good success.

And of course when Bill Clinton was inaugurated, George was the majority leader, and so that offered great opportunity for Maine politicians like me to have front row seats, if you will, for the inauguration. And that was quite a thrill. My then spouse and I traveled down, with a number of other people from Maine, and were very much part of that inauguration of President Clinton.

AL: Tell me about that experience, what was it like?

JM: Well, it was great actually, we had tremendous seats behind the president that the majority leader had set up for us and a number of other people, and so we weren't very far from where the president was sworn in. And they had a great reception for people from Maine that the majority leader had organized in a very ornate room in the Senate, in the Capitol. And

interestingly enough, after the inauguration, my former spouse, she was then my spouse, and I, and Patrick McGowan, who had been a leading Democrat for a number of years, had of course served in the legislature and then ran for Congress and almost beat Olympia Snowe, in 1990 and again in 1992, losing by really just a handful of votes. Patrick was then looking around for his next political move; he later became regional director of the Small Business Administration with the Senator's help.

But Patrick and his spouse and my spouse and I were sitting in the majority leader's inner office, after the inauguration. And of course the Senate has to confirm some critical part of the president's Cabinet that day, the day that he's inaugurated. And we're in there and we're watching the parade, and believe it or not, I was so arrogant as to have thought it was okay for me to sit in George's seat at his desk while we watched TV, McGowan, McGowan's spouse, my spouse, and I had my feet up on George's desk. In walks the majority leader with Warren Christopher, the future secretary of state, in tow. Well I came out of, and George says to me, without missing a beat, "Jimmy, do you mind if I use my office?" Well I came out of that seat like there was a cattle prod under me, jumped up as rapidly as I could, and we shook hands with Mr. Christopher, and George introduced us all, and then we scurried out of there embarrassed and ashamed that we thought we were big shots, sitting in his office. But that was a good anecdote, and kind of fun.

But the thrill of seeing the inauguration up close and having an opportunity to see what was an enormous change that our country was undergoing at the time was really unforgettable. I had an opportunity, when President Obama was elected, to go to his inauguration, and I decided not to go, a) because it's really quite a hassle to go down there, but b) I didn't think I could ever have the experience with President's Clinton's inaugural talk, and so I just thought, one's enough, other people ought to deserve to go, and I gave my tickets up to some friends who were thrilled to go. But it was a great experience, it really was.

AL: And tell me about your run for Congress, this happened in '94, was it the -

JM: 'Ninety-four, yeah.

AL: Was it when Olympia went to run for the Senate, and her seat opened?

JM: Right, of course, yeah. So Senator Mitchell of course decided that he'd had enough and was moving on, and so with that change, that whole domino effect occurred and a number of people in that year decided that they would run. Of course that meant Tom Andrews, the 1st District congressman, decided to run for the United States Senate, his seat opened up, Olympia Snowe decided to leave her 2nd District seat, her seat opened up, so on both the Republican and Democratic side there were very intense primaries.

And I was in what I believe was an eight- or seven-person primary with the now governor of the state of Maine, John Elias Baldacci, who's also a cousin of mine. He's a distant cousin. People say that, talk about us as cousins, but the reality is John's grandmother and my grandmother were

sisters. So if you think about in your own life, if you can name the grandchildren of your grandmother's sister, it's not easy. So it's not like he's a first cousin, but nevertheless, he's a family member that I'd known since I was a boy. We were in the Democratic primary together, and fortunately for the citizens, they chose wisely and nominated John Baldacci in the 2nd District, not me.

John ran a great campaign, so it was myself, John, Mary Cathcart, who was a sitting state Senator at the time, Janet Mills, who's now the state's attorney general, she was in the race, Jim Howanec, who was the mayor of Lewiston, ran a strong campaign as well. Then there were a couple of candidates who have, or one candidate's been a perennial candidate since then, Jean Hay Bright, she's run for office on a number of occasions, and there was a young man from Downeast Maine, Shawn Hallisey, who had his own set of problems and issues.

But anyways, it was a vigorous campaign. Short, it was very short, because of course the primary in Maine is held in June, and George stepped down from his seat in March, it was late February or early March when he stepped down, if I'm not mistaken. In fact, it was quite a snow and rain storm the day that his announcement became public. I think he had traveled back to see his staff in Maine, to let them know that he wasn't going to seek reelection, and I had an interview on WABI because I was then sitting state chairman of the Maine Democratic Party. So I went over there in quite a snowstorm, to have an interview.

And I had pretty much decided that I had wanted to seek higher office coming out of my tenure as campaign manager for Ken Hayes, and then as state chairman, and even though I thought it probably a pretty almost hopeless task to try to take on Olympia Snowe, I saw that as an opportunity that I ought to pursue in 1994, because it was an open seat. I had looked at '96 as a more likely time to run against Congresswoman Snowe, but circumstances changed and so I thought it was a good opportunity so I did it. I think in hindsight, it was quite presumptuous of me to even seek the nomination. I don't think I really had sufficient political experience to do it, and I think as I said, though somewhat in jest, I think really, truly, the voters did make the right choice, Congressman Baldacci turned out to be a very effective congressman, and in my own view has turned out to be a terrific governor. And so things have worked out for the best I think for Maine and for me personally.

AL: I have sort of a broad question to ask you. You saw your uncle in different political situations over many years, did you see him hone or develop his skills or, give me a sense of that?

JM: Well to be honest, I think my view on that, or my opinion, is colored so much by those who were so long involved with him. Let me give you an example. Charlie Micoleau is a lawyer in Portland, and of course was George's executive director when George was state chairman, and later became a strong supporter of George's 1974, and was also active in Ed Muskie's campaign, served as Ed Muskie's administrative assistant in fact, in Washington.

Charlie and I were in business together for a while, and so he talked a lot about how George had

evolved as a campaigner. And so as a boy, I wouldn't know if he was good at it or not in 1974. Certainly I saw between my early observations of him as a public speaker, and my observations in the last few years. I view him as a much more powerful public speaker, even today, than he was back in the early '80s, when I was in college. He ran for election of course in 1982, after he had been appointed. I was still in college at the time, but came back to Maine periodically and saw him speak, and I think there's a world of difference between the speeches he gave in 1982 and the speeches he gave in 1992. He clearly was a much more forceful, confident communicator in the '90s than he was in the '80s.

I have been a lifelong student of politics, it's always been a passion of mine, I've been fortunate to have made a living tangentially connected to politics, and so I view myself, again perhaps with a little bit of conceit, as a good judge of political people and as a student of politics, and I'd say in my view he really did evolve into a much more effective, interesting communicator. The same is the case I think with most people who occupy high office for any period of time, the governor being a great example. I don't think anybody would accuse John Baldacci of being a particularly effective public speaker when he first ran for governor. Today, on the other hand, I think when he delivers the State of the State, people have a sense of his confidence, his views, his vision, and his ability to communicate that information in a down-to-earth, genuine way, that's honest and believable, and I think that's the key thing.

Interestingly, in 1994, when I was running for Congress, I of course had met Senator Muskie on a number of occasions, and I went to Washington for some fund-raising for my campaign and Senator Muskie was kind enough to visit with me at his office, at the law firm that he was with. It was a beautiful office, and the publication, *The United States' One Hundred Greatest Senators* had recently come out, I think in 1993 or '92, and Senator Muskie's in that book, as you may know. And he was very proud of that, and he showed it to me and we were talking about politics in Maine, and he was giving me some advice and he told me a great story.

He said in 1968 he'd been Hubert H. Humphrey's vice presidential partner in the presidential race of '68, and Muskie had gone to Independence, Missouri, to see Harry Truman, to ask for his advice. This was very early in the campaign, and Truman must have been, gosh, in his nineties at the time, if I'm not mistaken. I can't remember how old Harry Truman was when he died, but he was quite an old man. Muskie goes to see him in Independence. And Muskie said to me, "I'm going to give you some advice, young man," speaking to me, he said, "I'm going to tell you what Harry Truman told me. And he said to me, Ed, "Two things I'm going to tell you: tell the truth, and be yourself." And Muskie says to me, he says, "Now that sounds like simple advice, but when you think about it, there's a lot of depth to that advice. Because if you are really being yourself, and you're true to yourself, sometimes in politics, telling the truth is hard, because you might not get the votes you want." "But," he said, "that was the best advice I'd ever received." So he turns to me and he smiles and he says, "So I'll tell you, Jim, be yourself, and tell the truth." And with that the meeting broke up and I left.

So I thought it was great advice, because if there is a certain death now to anybody in politics, it's those who aren't genuine. I've observed that more and more as I got older and have

followed politics, and it's been a delightful game to be part of. But I think being genuine is probably *the* most important thing in politics, even though many in the public and the pundits are always decrying how politicians are phony and fake. I think those who are really effective at it, are not, and they develop trust and rapport with their colleagues in order to get things done. And I think if there was a hallmark of George Mitchell, it's that he was genuine and trusted by both sides. And I think that's in many ways why he had the kind of successful career that he did.

AL: And now today, do you continue to be involved in politics actively?

JM: Oh yes, yeah, yeah, in two ways really. Many of the people who are in state government are friends of mine and I've worked with them for a long time, the governor for example, I'm very close to and I helped him in his election effort and his reelection, I spent a lot of time volunteering on his campaign. I'm active, very active with the state legislative races, and some of that of course is professional, I'm a lobbyist and so I spend a fair amount of my time interacting with these people. I never get paid for my political advice anymore, it wouldn't be appropriate, but I do spend an awful lot of time giving advice to the Democratic caucuses and the Democratic leadership about how best to move forward on their efforts to maintain their majority at the State House. I've enjoyed that very much, I hope that I have a good reputation with the members of the Democratic leadership, and it's one that, it's an activity that I very, very much enjoy, because I can be involved in it without being a candidate.

My experience as a candidate, while educational, is not one I'd repeat. There are some people who are cut out for it; I clearly am not one of them. You got to have really a tough, thick skin, and you have to have the ability to change from being very careful and clear in your communication to being able to communicate in an almost simplistic manner with people who aren't as informed on the issue. And so that variability, and that patience that you have to have to switch between the various types of audience that you need to appeal to, it's just not something that I'm particularly good at. As an advisor, as a strategist, I think I'm all right, and I've enjoyed it very much and will continue to do so for quite some time, I hope. But my interest in seeking or holding elective office myself is less than zero.

AL: I want to switch gears a little bit and ask you about some of the traditional foods that your grandmother made, or your family made. I know probably, if I recall, like your mom learned to make some of those dishes as well, bringing up you kids?

JM: Sure, oh yes, absolutely. Well, my mother and father lived with my grandmother for a while when they were first married. My father was in the Marine Corps, and when he came back to Maine after leaving the Marine Corps I think, and my sister Ann can confirm this, I think they lived with my grandparents on Front Street for several months, and at the time, my grandmother taught my mother a lot of the dishes.

We ate Lebanese food, as a boy growing up, I'd say at least once if not twice a week, so kibbeh, cabbage rolls, zatr, loubia, all kinds of different dishes my mother learned to make, and taught us kids how to make them. I still make Lebanese food for my children, I make zatr and loubia, and

occasionally I made kibbeh, though my kibbeh's not very good, but all of those dishes were very much a part of our growing up. Sittoo often, not often, always at holidays had Lebanese food, along with the Christmas turkey or the Easter ham, there was always Lebanese food served at her house on the holidays, and that was a big part of growing up.

She made her own bread often, when we were children growing up, and that was always a great thrill to go into what they called the summer kitchen, which was a kitchen attached to the other kitchen, where she baked her bread. And she bought flour not by the bag full you get at the grocery store, but by the sack full, and would make all this bread, and would throw it in the air and bake it in the oven. Ultimately, as she got older, she stopped doing so much baking, but that was quite a thrill, when you were a boy, to go down there and get Lebanese bread fresh out of the oven, still steaming hot.

My mother made all kinds of different Lebanese dishes, and so did her sisters-in-law, Yvette and Prin, both girls who grew up in the Waterville area and married Mitchell boys, they learned how to make Lebanese food, and all of them made it. So when I went to my cousins' house there was often Lebanese food there being served, even though those who made it were not Lebanese, they were taught by Sittoo to make it for their spouses, and they spent a lot of time working on making good Lebanese food. So that was a big part of our growing up actually, the food.

The kids always ask for it, my kids, when they come home, for me to make Lebanese food, and my mother, their grandmother, often makes it at holidays as well. So it's a big part of our family life, food, as it is for many ethnic people.

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

JM: Well, I'd say that one thing I'd add which I believe is important is, politics is a tough business. And those who get into it, while many see their motivation as selfish and narrow, the people I've run across in politics have almost always done it out of interest to serve their community, their region, their state, and on a few occasions, people I've met, their nation. And I hope that the tenor of political discourse will change so that people will have a better sense of how many sacrifices these people make. And I would say for most political people, they often sacrifice their family life, but without a strong family to start out it's very, very hard to be involved in politics.

So I'd say that the strength of our family, and me as a boy growing up, and I'm willing to bet George as a boy growing up and as a young man, the strength of his family was a very crucial component of who he became as a man, and what that's meant for his ability to be a leader in our society and around the world.

AL: Great, thank you so much.

JM: My pleasure.

End of Interview