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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Paul J. Mitchell
(Interviewer: *Mike Hastings*)

GMOH# 025
July 31, 2008

Mike Hastings: This is a recorded interview of the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project, a project of Bowdoin College. Andrea L'Hommedieu is the project director; I am Michael Hastings, the interviewer. The interview is taking place today at GHM Insurance on Main Street in Waterville, Maine. It's July 31, 2008, our interviewee is Paul Mitchell. Welcome.

Paul Mitchell: Thank you.

MH: We begin these interviews by asking you to state your full name, spelling it, your date and place of birth, and your mother and father's full name.

PM: Well my full name is Paul Joseph Mitchell, P-A-U-L, J-O-S-E-P-H, M-I-T-C-H-E-L-L. I was born in Westfield, Massachusetts, on January 20, 1926. My mother's full name was Mintaha Saad Mitchell, M-I-N-T-A-H-A, S-A-A-D, Mitchell, M-I-T-C-H-E-L-L. My father's full name is George John Mitchell, G-E-O-R-G-E, J-O-H-N, M-I-T-C-H-E-L-L.

MH: Thank you. Given that you were interviewed by the Edmund S. Muskie Archives, we're going to try not to repeat the questions that were asked in that interview, but with your permission we will focus today on your father and your mother and your brothers and sisters. Can you tell me about your father?

PM: Well my father was born in east Boston, Massachusetts, September 2, 1900, and was placed in an orphanage at two years of age. He was put into the Catholic orphanage for Irish children in Boston, Massachusetts, on Huntington Avenue at about two-and-a-half, and remained there until he was about three-and-a-half when he was then trained to Bangor, Maine, and taken in by a parishioner at St. Mary's Church in Bangor.

MH: How did that happen?

PM: Well, that's how they did those things back then: the children, the church would take the children in that, when it was apparent that – my grandmother had passed away and it was apparent that my grandfather was unable to take care of the family. And four of the children (there were five children), four of them were put into the orphanage and my aunt, the oldest in the family, was allowed to be on her own. And the other children were taken in by families in different parishes throughout New England, one in Bridgeport, Connecticut, one in Manchester,

New Hampshire, and one in Portland, Maine, and my father in Bangor, Maine.

MH: Now, was his name Mitchell then?

PM: No, it wasn't, it was Michael Joseph Kilroy, and he was taken by a family that was a Lebanese family with no children and renamed George John Mitchell. They moved to Waterville some years later – he was taken in, as I said, at age four, which would have been around 19-, I don't remember the exact date, 1904. And they relocated into Waterville, Maine, where there was a sizeable Lebanese community, was raised in the Lebanese community primarily in Waterville, and remained named George John Mitchell.

MH: What did his adopted father do, do you know?

PM: He owned a little grocery store in the neighborhood, and my father worked in the store as he grew up and lived right there at the home.

MH: I see. And your adopted grandmother, what was her name?

PM: Her name was Mary, and she was really a wonderful person. My father loved her very, very much. And I never knew the grandfather. We were living in Massachusetts at the time, when I was born in Massachusetts, and when he passed away my father returned to Maine, to Waterville, to take care of his mother who at that time just did not wish to relocate to Massachusetts.

MH: He ran a store.

PM: Just a little grocery store.

MH: Right in the neighborhood where you lived.

PM: Right in the neighborhood.

MH: Right, I see, I see. And did your father, how old was he when he died?

PM: When my father passed away?

MH: Yeah.

PM: When my father passed away he was seventy-one, just two months short of the seventy-second birthday. He died in July.

MH: So you knew him fairly well.

PM: Knew my father you mean? Oh, absolutely, at the time I was into my forties.

MH: Yeah, but I mean he was...

PM: My father passed away in 1972, so I, you know, we were very, very close the last ten or twelve years. He had retired from Colby in 1965, and so he lived another seven years approximately, and we really had a very nice relationship all through our lives and especially at the end when he had retired, he was able to visit a good deal more than he had when he was working.

MH: And tell me about your mother.

PM: Well my mother came to this country after WWI, in 1920 and, ostensibly to bring a niece to Waterville, Maine. Her oldest sister, who lived in Waterville, Maine, at the time, had been married in Lebanon and had a child, and she and her husband decided to come to America to establish themselves here. And as often happened with immigrants, they left their child in Lebanon to be taken care of by my grandfather in Lebanon. But WWI came along and they were unable to go back and get her or send her over, and from 1914 actually until 1918, November 1918, the war was on, or the peace settlement hadn't been finalized – actually the war ended in November 1918 – so they came in 1920. At that point my mother was eighteen, my mother was born in 1902, October 12, 1902, so she was eighteen years old at the time, and my niece, or her niece, my cousin, was about ten, ten, eleven years of age, and my mother brought her over. Ostensibly to go back, but she met my father and decided she wasn't going to go back.

MH: What part of Lebanon did she come from?

PM: She came from a mountainous community called Bkassine, B-K-A-S-S-I-N-E. The largest city in the area there is a city called Djezzine, it's a city today of about maybe seventy-five or eighty thousand people. It was a Christian enclave in Lebanon.

MH: It's in south Lebanon, in southern Lebanon?

PM: Right in the central, central south, or south central.

MH: Have you visited Lebanon?

PM: No, I never have, but my sister Barbara has visited I think on at least one occasion, and I believe two occasions.

MH: Do you have any relatives there that you know of?

PM: Not really at this point in time. I had a cousin who visited us here many, many years ago and went back to Lebanon and just recently passed away. He has a brother that lives here in Waterville, so we get a good deal of information about Lebanon from the cousin that's here in Waterville, who was raised there for a number of years before he went to France and got

educated in France and then went into business, and then relocated to Waterville, Maine.

MH: Do you know anything about your mother's father?

PM: Oh, I know, yeah, my mother's mother had died when my mother was a young lady, or a young girl actually, and her father stayed alive until, my grandfather passed away it was in the late '30s – I'm not sure of the exact date but I'm going to say right around 1939.

MH: What was his name?

PM: Amin, Amin Saad, and a very nice person, as I understand it from my mother. She adored her father and she loved him very deeply, and I think one of the things that my mother really missed in her life was not going back to see her father before he passed away.

MH: What was his business?

PM: He was self-employed, he was basically a farmer. He owned vineyards, he grew grapes and sold them in the marketplace, and did very, very well, I might add. And so he, he was the oldest in his family and he made enough money to send his brothers out overseas, to Mexico, to the United States, and supported the family very, very well. They always, there were four sisters; my mother was one of four sisters. She was the youngest; we had an aunt in Bangor, Maine, an aunt here in Waterville, and an aunt that remained in Lebanon.

MH: Okay, okay. What was the name of the eleven-year-old that she accompanied to the United States?

PM: Jean.

MH: Jean, okay, I see.

PM: She was Jean Boles.

MH: How would you spell Boles?

PM: B-O-L-E-S. Now I think it's Americanized from –

MH: Right, sure.

PM: I wouldn't even try to give you the last name (*unintelligible*).

MH: Now, I know that you're related in some way to Governor Baldacci, now can you explain that connection?

PM: Well, the connection is, as I mentioned, there was, one of the sisters lived in Bangor.

She had a daughter, who was actually about two months younger than I am. That was John Baldacci's mother, her daughter Mary was, Mary and I were very close friends as well as being relatives, and so therefore John Baldacci's grandmother was my mother's sister.

MH: Got you, okay.

PM: And I was obviously very, very close to Mary, we grew up together, we visited Bangor quite frequently when we were younger, that was our big vacation, to go to Bangor and visit my aunt and uncle.

MH: They had that wonderful restaurant under the bridge.

PM: Well they did, but that's before that all occurred.

MH: Oh, yeah okay.

PM: My uncle in Bangor had a, he also had a little grocery store down on Hancock Street in Bangor, and yeah, he did very, very well in that store.

MH: That's great. So your mother comes to the United States with this eleven-year-old niece, and where did she meet your father?

PM: She met him right in the same neighborhood. At that point my father's family had moved to Waterville, and the Lebanese enclave was primarily along Front Street and the Head of Falls area, they lived in Head of Falls area, and my mother's sister lived in the Head of Falls area. Now the area itself is relatively small, probably two acres in size, if it's two acres in size, and so you couldn't miss meeting people in that small space. There were sixteen or seventeen homes just in those two acres, and I don't know how many children but in my time there were probably ninety to a hundred, a hundred odd children growing up in the area there.

MH: And they were all Lebanese for the most part?

PM: Yeah. There were a few French families there, but primarily Lebanese.

MH: I appreciate your showing me the pictures on your wall here, and I will try to get copies so that we can have them to accompany this interview. Your mother worked in the mills, is that right?

PM: When my mother came here she had no work experience. At eighteen actually she had no work experience. And obviously there were no textile mills in Lebanon, there certainly weren't any at that time. And she, when she decided to stay, realized she had to be employed some way. And so she began trying to work in the mills, and she eventually learned how to weave, she became an outstanding weaver in a woolen mill. She was an excellent weaver, and went to work in various woolen mills in the area. The American Woolen Company had a whole

bunch of mills in New England. In Maine alone, in central Maine, they had one here in, there was one in Fairfield, there was one in Skowhegan, there was one in North Vassalboro. In addition to the American Woolen, the Wyandotte Mill was in Waterville; Cascade was in Oakland, so there was numerous opportunities for being employed in the area.

MH: And the mills that she worked in, she worked in more than one?

PM: Oh yes, she worked in several; she worked in Skowhegan for a number of years, she worked in Canaan, Maine, she worked in Waterville at the Wyandotte, she worked at Cascade, she worked in North Vassalboro, whenever the jobs were available. Oftentimes the mill would have a particular run, and when that was over they would be down for a period of time, well you'd go someplace else if you could find another job, wherever they opened up.

MH: What were they making in these mills, I mean for the most part?

PM: Well, they just made cloth. I don't know precisely -

MH: So they were making like woolen shirts and -

PM: No-no, they didn't make the shirts, the cloth, they sold to a shirt manufacturer.

MH: I see, so they weren't making the final product, they were just making the cloth.

PM: That's right.

MH: I see, okay. Did she drive?

PM: No, she didn't.

MH: How did she get to these places?

PM: Well, strangely enough a neighbor was also a weaver, and he and my mother pretty much went together wherever they were going, except when she worked in Waterville – it was just across the street from the home so it was no problem for her to get into the, to walk to the Wyandotte Mill. But if she had to go to Skowhegan, she would be transferred, if they worked the same shift she'd go and come for the most part with the neighbor.

MH: I see, I see.

PM: And if he wasn't available, there were always numerous opportunities because there were many weavers in the area looking for different positions to take.

MH: How old was she when she married?

PM: My mother was twenty-two.

MH: I see, and your father?

PM: My father was twenty-four.

MH: I see. Now what was he doing during this time?

PM: He worked for the Central Maine Power Company. Central Maine Power Company back then, we know them as an electrical power distributor now, back then they also had a retail operation and they sold gas. Not gas for cars, but rather gas for home use, and they had lines in the ground. Up by the Keyes Fibre plant in Waterville, there was a production plant there that made the gas.

MH: Gasification, probably from coal.

PM: Yes, gasification. And they pumped it into the lines and it was distributed out to the various locations, wherever anyone wanted gas there was a line going into the home. And my father actually was a laborer, he worked a jackhammer – break open the street, get the gas line fixed, or the installation of a new gas line -

MH: I see.

PM: - and he did that. Then the Central Maine Power Company, I think under an edict by the state, had to disengage itself from that particular activity, sold it to a company in Lewiston, Maine, in the mid-‘50s, or early ‘50s, 1950s, and that company really had some very difficult periods. My father eventually, well everyone was let go; the company really went right out of business.

MH: Oh really?

PM: And that’s when he went to work at Colby College.

MH: Okay, right. Yeah, the Senator in one of his books talks about this, I remember, it was a period of, your father was unemployed for a couple of years.

PM: He was about forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty years old. I think the Senator’s comments, if I recall, were that, at that age, and you don’t really have much of an education, you really have a great deal of difficulty finding another job. And he went to work at Colby as a janitor and eventually worked as a supervisor of maids and janitors.

MH: I see.

PM: Under the manager of the entire operation at Colby.

MH: And did you live in just one house in Head of Falls, or were you in several places growing up?

PM: No, we lived in one house in Head of Falls, and then we moved, we made a historic move for us, we moved across the tracks to the other side of the street, on Front Street. We still had the tracks in front of us, but prior, Head of Falls we had the tracks in front of us and the river behind us. Well we got away from the river at this point; we went on the other side of the tracks, moved up the street on Front Street. So I lived in two homes in Waterville prior to returning to Waterville myself later in life.

MH: And where did these tracks lead?

PM: Well the tracks actually were for the Central Maine, for the Maine Central Railroad, and they led from Waterville, the tracks out in front of us were the tracks that were on the front line; they went to Augusta, Brunswick, into South Portland, or Portland/South Portland. Waterville was a railroad junction at that point, because they had the back tracks that took, that left Portland, went up to Lewiston, and on the backside through Belgrade into Waterville. So Waterville was a junction as well as a very significant railroad center at that time.

MH: Now, you had passenger service all during this period.

PM: Oh yeah, yeah.

MH: And so you probably traveled on the train a fair amount.

PM: Traveled, that's the only way we traveled.

MH: When you went up to Bangor to visit your cousins, did you go on the train?

PM: We eventually had a little car. My father was able in, I'm going to say 1940, just prior to the war, to buy a 1929 Chevrolet, one of those S-stick shifts on the floor, you know, you shift about a yard up and a yard down, and we'd go up to Bangor with that car. But when I went to University of Maine after I got out of the service, I went by train for the most part up to Bangor and then take the bus into Orono.

MH: I see.

PM: You know, go up and visit my aunt, same thing.

MH: Tell me a little bit about growing up in Waterville. What was it like?

PM: Well, I think it was a lot of fun, quite frankly, when I look back on it now. I think that we, we had a lot of children in the neighborhood that we lived in, and a lot the same age, we had

a lot older and obviously some, many younger, but we had quite a number our age. And we probably spent a lot of time outdoors in various sporting activities, not organized the way they are today. Quite frankly, sometimes I think they're too organized today. We organized our own games, we settled our own issues verbally, and we didn't, I think that's one of the things children, young people miss today. They spend so much time, I believe, watching TV, they don't communicate with each other. Sometimes very, very forcefully communicating, but that was how the, you learned to settle the issues that way. Today I don't think they realize how difficult it is to settle issues verbally and the first thing you know, they're either punching out each other or worse than that, they get involved in some very significant issues. I think that's one of the things, one area where children today really miss, activities where you have to work with other people, in close proximity to them, you may not like them very much but you still have to learn how to get along with them.

And so we had a lot of children, we'd play ball, we played football in the fall, baseball in the summer, and we'd play with anything. We'd use a broom handle for a bat, we kept ourselves occupied in that kind of activity for the most part. And then of course the old Boys Club/Girls Club was virtually right in our neighborhood, so in the winter time we spent enormous amounts of time in the Boys Club/Girls Club.

MH: I see, now how did, that had been there, that was there when you were very young?

PM: Oh yes, yeah.

MH: Okay, that's a long standing institution in the town of Waterville.

PM: Yeah, and it isn't, nothing like the building they have today here in Waterville, which is a magnificent building.

MH: I've seen that building.

PM: And I say that they do something that we never were able to do, they handle, as I understand it, like six to eight thousand children. Well, they had no way they could handle six to eight thousand children when I was growing up. And it was primarily, you had to walk there to begin with, now they bus them in from all over the area, which I think is wonderful because the children are under supervision to some extent, to a significant extent, and you know they're not going to get into serious difficulty that way. We didn't have that kind of activity, we had to walk to the Boys Club/Girls Club, but from where we lived it was a five minute walk for the most part.

MH: Now, I sense that you liked athletics. Did you, which did you prefer, baseball, football?

PM: I preferred baseball.

MH: Baseball, okay.

PM: And I did, I think I had a really nice career, for me at least, in baseball, both at Bates College where I went when I was in the navy, I played there, and I played at the University of Maine after I got out of the navy.

MH: Back in Waterville, though, did they have organized leagues for baseball? In other words, or was it just pick-up kind of things?

PM: No, they had, well high schools had organized teams, obviously. In the summer time -

MH: Summer leagues?

PM: Well when we were young they didn't have young league, they didn't have any Babe Ruth league or Little League, no, we didn't have that. We'd make up our own games that we'd play with the north end gang, let's say, or the south end gang, and we had our games going that way. Later on we, I played summer baseball when I was in college, but prior to that I played American Legion baseball. The coach at Colby College back then, Ed Roundy was the coach of the American Legion team, and I had the opportunity of playing four years American Legion baseball.

MH: Did the family come out to watch you?

PM: Excuse me?

MH: Did your family come out to watch you?

PM: My mother did more than my father; my father was not really what you'd call much of a, he wasn't into sports to the extent that many fathers are. Actually, I got to tell you, I coach Little League baseball and there are a lot of fathers who get too involved in the game, and they really should stay home. Because they want, they're screaming at their children, they're screaming at the coaches, they're screaming at the umpires, and you want to tell them, "Hey, you're not doing anything positive in this regard. Your son's having a good time, let him have a good time, so he committed an error? Well someone else committed an error, so what? The umpire missed a call, okay, he missed a call." That doesn't mean, it's not a life and death issue but they get this idea - I stopped coaching after about four years, I couldn't hack it any longer, to listen to parents who never put a baseball glove on and were telling everyone how to play baseball. Never bounced a basketball, but telling everyone how to play basketball, and that kind of thing. And that really turned me off.

MH: So you graduated from Waterville High School?

PM: Yes.

MH: In what year?

PM: Nineteen forty-four.

MH: Nineteen forty-four, and you, and so you went immediately, you went into the service immediately after that?

PM: I went into the, I was lucky in a way, I was very, very lucky as a matter of fact. In 1943, I turned eighteen January 20, 1944, and at that time they would take you right out of high school, when your number came, when your age came up during, right in the middle of the war. And so I went to the draft board in December of 1943 to see what various options there might be available for me. I had no interest in being in the Army, so I knew I wanted to be in the Navy, but just what did I want to do? When I got down there they advised me, "Look, you are in the college course at the high school." I did fairly well in academics and they said, "Why don't you test for a program called V-12." Colby at the time had a program for the Army Air Force at Colby, and the Army Air Force, there was no separate Air Force as there is today, it was either the Army Air Force and the Navy Air Force.

MH: Right.

PM: Well the Navy still has its Air Force because you don't move an airfield someplace; they have to move a carrier. So I didn't, I really still wasn't interested in the Army in any way, shape or manner, not even the Army Air Force. This program, the V-12 program, led into the Navy Air Force, if this is what you wanted to do. You had to complete a course of study in the V-12 program and then switch into the V-5, which was the Air Force portion of the Navy's program. So I said, "Well, what do I do?" And they said, "You have to test for it." "Where?" "In Boston." So I got a ride to Boston, right by the Boston Garden, the Navy building was, and I went in and I tested in December, December 17, if I remember correctly, 1943. They tell you immediately whether you passed or not. They told me I had passed, and I said, "Fine, what do I have to do now?" And they said, "Well you have to come back the next day for a physical." Well I had an aunt in Quincy so, well I had already made arrangements, they had told me prior to that, that in all probability, if I passed I'd to be over, stay another day. So I stayed with my aunt, got back in the next morning, took the physical and passed. And I'm now in the Navy. Well they said, "Go home, you must complete high school, and you better graduate or you won't be in this program. You'll be in the Navy, but not in the program." So I came back and I graduated, and I got my orders right away to report to Bates College.

MH: So you were the first one out of the house.

PM: I'm the first one out of the house.

MH: And you go all the way to Bates. Was that a surprise, did you expect to go much further?

PM: You know, it's kind of interesting, my mother was in tears that I was going into the

service, but all I was going to, from here to Lewiston, Maine, and going to college on top of that. It was an accelerated program, three semesters, four, four and four, so June 30, 1945, I complete the course at Bates, they send me – I had a short layover at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, New York for about, a little over three months – and then I got sent to the University of Iowa where the V-5 program was. I then was shifted into the V-5 program and -

MH: Was this all aiming at making you into a pilot, or?

PM: A pilot, or some aspect of the Air Force. And I spent about three months at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, and then from there, with a short layover at the Ottumwa Naval Air Station in Iowa, and then sent to Glenview Naval Air Station outside of Chicago, north of Chicago, for flight training. And I remained there until June of 1946, I went there probably in March, and really barely got involved in flying because the war was over and they were really looking for you to be done, to go home. They wanted to, and they were terminating all these programs, and they terminated ours, they made the option, “You can stay in the Navy if you want, but you have to enlist for five years.” And I had no interest in enlisting for five years, because if you flunked the program you went back to being a seaman first class, or go home. And to a person, we all decided, “Let’s go home.” And so I was released, I wasn’t discharged, I was released from active duty in June of 1946 and officially discharged probably a year or two later, from the Navy.

MH: So did you come back to Waterville?

PM: I came back to Waterville and I enrolled at the University of Maine, and that’s where I completed my education.

MH: So you were a graduate of the university in?

PM: Nineteen forty-nine.

MH: Nineteen forty-nine.

PM: I opted, in my senior year I could have, I only needed to do five semesters, and so I did the first two years, the two semesters, I had one semester to do in my senior year, and rather than go in the fall and graduate in January, I preferred to graduate with the class so I took the fall off and went to the second, the spring semester and graduated in June. During the fall I took a trip to New York City; I had decided that I wanted to go to graduate school, and I went down to Columbia University and got the necessary information. And I sent them the information they wanted from me, and provided I graduated, I enrolled at Columbia to do, as soon as I graduated I went to summer school at Columbia, in 1949, I took two or three courses at the time, and then did the full year from September of ‘49 until June of ‘50 at Columbia, and I earned a master’s degree at Columbia University.

MH: In what?

PM: Actually in education, and I never taught a day in my life. You know, it's just one of those situations that, at least, I came back to Waterville – this is interesting. I came back to Waterville to apply for a teaching position, and I was told that I made the biggest mistake of my life getting a master's degree from Columbia University.

MH: Why is that?

PM: I couldn't believe it. Because no one else had a master's degree, and they'd have to pay me a little bit more money. And we were talking about, I don't know, two hundred and fifty or three hundred dollars, and I said, well you know, "I'll forego the money." And they said, "You can't do that. The superintendent of schools tells me I can't do it."

MH: My wife had exactly the same problem in 1993.

PM: Is that right?

MH: In Hampden, yeah. She has a master's from Columbia, and to think she had a better chance of getting a job without the master's degree than she did with, which is kind of, it seems cockeyed, but -

PM: He said nobody in the system had a master's. So I went back to New York and I thought about it, and I said, "Gee whiz, I don't want to teach in New York." But I had to work, so I started doing, I went to work in a management program with a large department chain, department store chain, and that really wasn't what I wanted to do and I then got involved with an insurance company, Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, out of Boston, which was at that time the – and still I believe – the largest workers compensation carrier virtually in the world, certainly in this country. And I stayed in New York City until late 1956, I stayed with them for six years, I worked for Liberty Mutual, I went to work for them January of 1951 and left in September of 1956 and went, they transferred me to Boston.

MH: How did you like living in New York City?

PM: I loved it, quite frankly, I enjoyed it. My two oldest children were born in New York City. I don't think, I'm not sure how much I would have liked it had I remained there until the present time, but I really enjoyed it at that time. You know, you're in your twenties, I wasn't making an awful lot of money but I was making enough that we were able to have the two children. My wife worked as a secretary at the St. Regis Hotel, which at the time, and still is, one of the most fashionable hotels in the city. And –

MH: Where did you live?

PM: We lived, when we started out, we stayed on the West Side, I lived on the west side of Manhattan, up near the school, for another year after graduating. I might add, by the way,

graduating, Dwight Eisenhower was president of Columbia University at the time, prior to his presidential election. And then we moved out to Forest Hills in Queens, into an apartment complex that was just being built, a brand new apartment complex. And to show you how things change, at the time we moved out there, and this is in a building that they were still finishing up, we paid a hundred dollars a month for a three-room apartment that today I understand is like \$3000 dollars a month, and I'm thinking to myself, "Wow-di-dow," you know, "this is really some kind of change." And then from there we moved out to Long Island, we moved into a community called Baldwin, Baldwin, Long Island. We stayed there until we left to go to Boston, but we lived, when I worked in Boston, Liberty transferred me up to Boston and I went into the sales department in Massachusetts, and I lived in a town called Wilmington, Massachusetts, which is right up close to Lawrence, Andover, in that area there.

MH: Now, Liberty Mutual has a number of offices in Boston. I know they had a big office in Norwood, on Route 1.

PM: Well they are -

MH: Where were you located?

PM: I was located in the headquarters, right on Berkeley Street in Boston. Liberty right now is a big, big company, I mean they're a multi-billion dollar, I mean between all the activities they're involved in at the present time with other companies, they bought Safeco, they bought Progressive, not Progressive, well there are two or three carriers that they purchased. They probably do fifteen billion dollars, twelve to fifteen billion dollars worth of business a year. That's their corporate headquarters, in Boston.

MH: They do fire insurance as well, don't they?

PM: Oh yeah, all casualty, all casualty lines. They're very, New Hampshire's very, very lucky, they have a place in Dover, New Hampshire, that, they employ approximately, I'm going to say anywhere between three to four thousand people. Now that has a significant impact on the area. Oh, that we should have something like that in Maine.

MH: It would be wonderful. Now what were you doing for Liberty Mutual?

PM: I was a sales person. I was, as I said, I started out as a claims adjustor, my first half a dozen years with them, and then I went into sales. I wanted to go into sales, and they let me go into sales and I stayed in sales. And I came back to Waterville, you know, things change sometimes. My wife is from Waterville, she wanted, very much liked to come back to Waterville, and an opportunity became available with a small agency called the J.B. Friel Company, where it was really a four-person operation. The owner, who at that time was in his early seventies, and he had his son-in-law, who decided he didn't want to be in the agency so he left, and there were two ladies in the agency along with him. And so he wanted someone in there to assist him, with the possibility of purchasing the agency at some later date.

And almost simultaneous with that, Liberty wanted to transfer me to Buffalo, New York. And I thought, I grew up in snow in Waterville, but all I ever saw from Buffalo was four times as much snow. And I thought about it, and I talked to my wife about it, and she very much didn't like the idea and I, almost as much as I didn't like the idea, and I told them I really didn't feel I wanted to go to Buffalo. And they pretty much indicated that, "If you don't go, it impacts your career with us." And that said to me, "You ought to be thinking about something else to do," even if I remained in Massachusetts, go someplace else, because this is how you apparently progress, this was, I was told this, you progress on the basis of how often you possibly have to move and you move freely and easily, not reluctantly.

So I decided I would move, but I would move to Waterville, Maine. And I became involved in the agency, and when the gentleman who owned it passed away, three, maybe four years after I started with him, I purchased the agency. And from there, this is where we are.

MH: I see. Was it originally called GHM?

PM: No, it was called J.B. Friel.

MH: J.B. Friel. What does GHM stand for?

PM: Well, what we did is, when I bought the agency I was very much involved in carrying out the urban renewal program for the city of Waterville.

MH: I wanted to ask you about that.

PM: Well that, they overlapped for a bit, and it was during the planning stages. At the time I was involved in the municipal government here. I came here in 1958, and I ran for municipal office in 1959 and I won my seat in the board of aldermen. We were a bicameral system of government at the time, one of the few communities in the country that still operated under a bicameral system of government.

MH: So what are the two houses within -?

PM: The board of aldermen and the common council. The council was obviously the congress, the 'House of Representatives,' and the 'Senate' was the board of aldermen.

MH: So it's kind of a hybrid between selectmen and town council, basically.

PM: Yeah, so, but we had no selectmen.

MH: Right.

PM: So I won my seat, I might add in a very significant Republican ward, which was my

home ward when I lived here and still, when I returned to Waterville, was back in the same ward. And I won the seat and was on the board of aldermen, and I ran for reelection and won again. But about that time, the city was exploring the possibility of doing an urban renewal program. And when I was with Liberty I had been involved with a number of contractors who were involved in Boston in urban renewal, so I had some talking experience about urban renewal but no real significant experience. And when they were hiring a director, the chairman of the Authority was a friend of mine, his son and I were very close friends, asked me if I would care to be the director of the Urban Renewal, the executive director of the Urban Renewal Authority. And I thought about it – and this is prior to my purchasing the agency – and I said, “Yes, I would be very much interested.” And so I worked with them on a part-time basis through the planning period, to get the plan-, to, actually it was pre-planning, it was to put the organization, put the paperwork together to apply for a significant planning grant. And that took about a year and a -

MH: That would be a federal government grant.

PM: Yeah, federal government, and with some municipal participation. It was a quasi-municipal body with five trustees. And while I was doing that is when the gentleman passed away, so I had to make a decision at that point in time whether to remain with the Authority or remain with the agency, and I couldn't do both. And so I really wanted to do the program for two reasons: first of all, you hate to get involved in monetary situations, but it was a much better monetary situation for me than the agency at that point in time. And so I had a friend, Hodgdon, Wayne Hodgdon, who had a small agency and he and I had sat down and discussed the possibility of merging the agencies, he would continue running the agency, I would divorce myself from any participation in the agency, that was one of the stipulations that was made by the board of the Urban Renewal Authority, which I was in full agreement because there'd be too many opportunities for conflict of interest. And so he agreed that's what we would do, he would run the agency and I would not be a part of that agency, the insurance agency, I'd remain with the Authority but I retained my ownership. And part way through that program, while I was carrying out three different projects, four different projects for the city, the Goddard Agency decided to merge with us. So we changed the name from J. B. Friel first to Friel, Hodgdon and Mitchell, and then we dropped the Friel, because there were no more Friels at that point, so we dropped the name and then we went alphabetically, GHM.

MH: I was looking at it and thinking, because I'm studying your family and I couldn't think, who is G.H. Mitchell. I couldn't find him.

PM: No, no, that's Goddard, Hodgdon and Mitchell. And to jump way out ahead, the other two over the years decided to leave the agency and I became the sole proprietor. This is long after the completion of the urban renewal program, which by the way, I went with them, to be with them to get them going, and I figured I'd be there two or three years. I ended up staying sixteen years as the only executive director they ever had for the four projects.

MH: Tell me about it, because I mean obviously from the photographs you'd shown me before we began this interview, the face of Waterville changed a great deal.

PM: Well the downtown, of course most people are familiar with the downtown, they call it the Concourse Project, while for us it was the Charles Street Project, because Charles Street ran right straight through the middle of the project. And it was a downtown project; we acquired eighty-four buildings and demolished eighty-four buildings in the downtown area to open up a significant parking area, which is presently available for downtown merchants. And we opened up a section of the Main Street, which really at that point in time had nothing there of any significant value to remain. And the planners said, “When you have a shopping complex, the customer has to see the parking before they see the shopping complex, or they’re not going to enter into the shopping complex on the possibility that there might be parking available, not generally at least,” and so we opened up a section.

There was a lot of controversy over that, but we ended up doing that, we opened up probably about four hundred feet on Main Street into this parking lot, that you can see. Long before you get to it, you can see it, and you could also see the shopping complex on the other side of the parking lot. And on the inside portion, it opened up on the backside of the stores, on the west side of Main Street, so that it served all of downtown, not just the shopping complex that was being built. That was the key that we wanted, we wanted the entire downtown area to participate in that parking lot. And the parking lot went from a parking area that existed prior to urban renewal probably of 130 cars, privately owned I might add, subsequently purchased by the city but it was privately owned, 130 cars, to one that now has I’m going to say seven hundred. So it was a significant transformation of the downtown area.

MH: I was very impressed. I took three-quarters of an hour and walked the circle around those parking lots, and down near where you lived as a child, before we had this interview. And I, it is impressive that you have such a vibrant center of town. I mean I’ve been to so many Maine towns that are just, they’re empty basically.

PM: Well, you know, there are times when I’m a little disappointed that we’re a bit empty, but I am proud, quite frankly, of the work that was done to keep the downtown as vibrant as it is. We’re no different than many of the, throughout New England, most of the downtowns are old downtowns. And of course they’ve been impacted significantly by the construction of shopping complexes on the periphery of downtown, especially where if there’s an interchange by the Interstate system in any way, shape or manner. So we hoped to be able to do – and I might add, at the time that we were doing that project, which is called the Charles Street Project, at the time we were doing it, Elm Plaza, on upper Main Street, was being built, and so there was a lot of controversy over, “Why should you be doing this downtown when this is already going up uptown?” And the theory was, and I think it worked out, that even though we took down eighty-four buildings, the new buildings coming in and the upped value of the adjacent buildings to the parking area, and even the buildings on the other side of the street away from the parking area, would all have a greater tax return to the city than was there before, and there was no question we wouldn’t have a deteriorating downtown. If nothing else, we’d at least keep it somewhat stable, and that’s really what we were hoping, first of all, that we would have a very significant increase in valuation. Well, whether we did or not, I don’t know. I don’t recall the figures, but I

think we did very well.

Because the second project was the Head of Falls Project, which is adjacent to the downtown, which wiped out a number of very derelict buildings, forty-four of those, and we changed the configuration of the traffic pattern to some extent and we made it much easier for the traffic flow. And you know, that's forty years ago. Even today, I think if we were operating under the old system, we'd have a terrible time downtown, if you got any traffic at all downtown. So I really believe we saved the downtown as well as make it much easier to move along. And we got significant participation from the state on the connector road in the Charles Street Project that runs at the south end of the project. The state built that virtually free for us. And then we got the depression on College Avenue, taking the road underneath the tracks as it crossed College Avenue, where the old Colby campus was. So we got a lot of things that way.

But the biggest thing we got and I don't think many people in Waterville even begin to understand or realize this – they understand it once they hear it, but I don't think they realize it. Midway through the Charles Street Project, and I might add, there was constant confrontation with the city government over the financing of this project.

End of Tape One
Tape Two

PM: And the city's participation at that time was something like four hundred thousand dollars, which is a significant amount of money back then. But they got a lot of grants and gifts by the participation of the state. The state's participation would, sometimes a portion of it would be granted to the city to wipe out a portion of their obligation. And any time the city owns the parking lot, any municipal activity within the project area, its cost was, offset the city's cost of the project. So they got a seven-hundred-car parking lot, as well as the connector road, which flows the traffic much easier, it bypasses to some extent downtown, in the Charles Street Project for virtually nothing.

Now, along comes the federal government, just about the time we're beginning the redevelopment process after the demolition has occurred, and says, "Oh, by the way, we have this new legislation," and I might add, Senator Muskie was responsible for it: Clean Water, Clean Air. "You can no longer combine your sanitary systems and storm water, you cannot do it." And we had planned to do it; we were going to use the same sanitary line to empty into the Kennebec River right where it was emptying for fifty years prior to this. They started to build the new treatment plant, we had to now go back and redesign the systems in Waterville, within the boundaries of the project. The city was really annoyed with this, and it cost them maybe, I'm going to say, another hundred and fifty thousand dollars. But for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, they got the complete separation of the water, storm water, Main Street, the entire Concourse area, Spring Street, a portion of Silver Street, Elm Street right up to Park Street. I mean they got a multi-million dollar activity that they would have been mandated to do had they not done it under the project. Not maybe mandated at that moment in time, but it was a very short period of time that they'd be mandated to do it.

MH: So you're saying in the long run it was a very good deal money wise.

PM: What a deal the city got. And you know, if you take the money, now along with that we were beginning to plan the Head of Falls Project, we got quick approval by the city for the Head of Falls Project because that was the one they wanted us to do in the very beginning.

MH: And that was mostly demolition.

PM: That was all demolition, and it did not do the thing that we wanted to do in Charles Street, which was to increase the tax base. So they said yes to that. Now all of a sudden, they had to also separate all of Front Street, reconstruct all of Front Street, all the way up to the old Colby campus and take out the Colby campus. Well, you know, they got all of this for like a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. And you say to yourself, "Whoa, what was the complaint about?" because today – the North End Project, I might add, and we'll get to that in a second -

MH: That was the third one.

PM: That was the third project, was a gift to the city, virtually nothing they paid, absolutely zero. And saved, I'll show you how in a second, tied in to this separation. So we got that, the separation done now, and the whole downtown commercial area virtually was separated by the Urban Renewal Authority at no cost, or very little cost, to the city. So they thought that was great, they loved that. So they, we were talking about the North End at the time. We were pretty much done with Charles Street, we were well along the way with Head of Falls, the city decided they were going to build the school up in the North End. And we said, "Listen, why don't you let us delineate a project up in the North End, because there's a lot of things you can do up there. There is some derelict housing, we could provide some land for public housing and we can do some other things, and we'll design the project around the school, and your cost of the school, to the extent that it supports the project area, will be prorated and you virtually will get a project that doesn't cost you anything." Well they liked that idea very much. So we did that -

MH: When you say they, who are you saying, who is it really you're talking about?

PM: They? The city, the city, the council –

MH: The bicameral –

PM: I used to meet with the council twice a month for sixteen years. I had a lot of meetings with them.

MH: You had, in many respects you had a lot more government experience than the Senator did.

PM: Well, yeah.

MH: In a way.

PM: In a different kind of experience. So we went up and designed the project around there. Now I might add, a lot of other things are happening at the same time. When we started to do the second project there were some houses that were occupied. And now HUD came to us, Housing and Urban Development, came to us and said listen, you cannot do another project unless you create a Public Housing Authority.

MH: Low income.

PM: For low income and elderly. So I went to the city council and explained what I needed, and it was a contentious vote but they approved it, and I became the chairman, the original chairman of the Waterville Housing Authority, only because of my connections at that point, in my dealings with HUD, at this point I'd been dealing with them for eight or nine years, and so to get the thing organized and underway I stayed on for probably two years and then, and I did that with the approval of the board of the Urban Renewal Authority, because it was two different boards. And then they subsequently got their own people to run the organization after they got the paperwork in to begin getting some of the funding.

Now we go out to the North End and the city didn't, we didn't really have an awful lot of, the kind of housing you were going to tear down. But there were some, there was some housing there that was really not decent, safe and sanitary, that was the distinction the federal government made, decent, safe and sanitary. And you always had to have a three-piece bath. Okay, what we did is, we did a lot of infrastructure work for the city. And one of the things that we did, the main sanitary line for the entire North End of the city flows down from, and it was called the Hayden Brook line, there was a brook years up, you know, five hundred years ago that ran right down through there and -

MH: And you used that depression to bring your main -

PM: Yeah, took it right down into the river, into the Messalonskee River, or stream actually.

MH: Where it's very wide, that bend where it's very wide?

PM: Well you know, as you go up Western Avenue in Waterville, I don't know if you're familiar with where Western Avenue is, you remember Western Avenue has that depression, when you leave Elm Street, you go down, then you come back up towards the stream? Well there's a depression in there, it used to dump right in the Messalonskee and then get carried into the Kennebec. They had to separate that. And then we said, well you know, it still collects now even separated, it collects an awful lot. They have a collection point there now for the sanitary, which takes it to the treatment plant. Back then they didn't. But then they built the collection manhole to take it to the sanitary line.

But there was an awful lot of storm water that came from way up in the industrial park. We separated that and took it under the road, under the College Avenue right at the depression, out to the Kennebec River. And I asked the engineer at the Waterville Sewage District, “What did that save the city?” Because that was going to be in the line being to the treatment plant, and that meant they were going to be treating just rain water. He said, “That separation will save the city a hundred thousand dollars a year.” Just that separation alone of the Hayden Brook line.

So, you know, here’s the city getting all this work done. The infrastructure was this: we rebuilt Main Street in the project area all the way up to Oak Street, Oak Street, Drummond Avenue, Edwards Street, Brook Street, all those streets, Ticonic Street, anyplace you walk in the North End where there is granite curbing is work we did, because they don’t do granite curbing, they do not do granite curbing when they’re doing their own curbing, it’s always asphalt. We did granite curbing. And, you know, it didn’t cost them anything, that project cost them nothing and they got millions of dollars worth of work done free, and saved themselves a ton of money besides.

So over the years I’ve looked back and said, the grants that we received - Then we went down to the South End, by the way, we did some infrastructure down there, but by then the program had shifted from urban renewal to community development, and by then I was tired and I wanted to go back to my insurance office. And I think it was a, it’s like Manny Ramirez now: “The Red Sox are tired of me and I’m tired of them.” And I was tired of it, and they were tired of me, and so I -

MH: It’s a long time for a public service job.

PM: Yeah, it is, and especially in a small community where there’s always someone who’s firing bullets at you because they don’t like what you’re doing, or they just don’t like you, or they just don’t like any kind of government.

MH: Or any kind of change.

PM: Or any kind of change. And so I, it was time for me – the only thing we did down in the South End that I always was happy about, if you start just about a hundred yards or so beyond the Lockwood Mills, which is now going to be redeveloped, a couple hundred yards, on that side of, the river side of Water Street, traveling south, there were six, eight, ten family housing hanging over the riverbank. Some of that housing below the street level on the back side, there probably were a hundred families, fifty to a hundred families living in housing all the way down to, if you know where the Notre Dame Church is, just beyond that.

MH: Was that a big fire hazard?

PM: Oh, you wonder what would have happened. You’d have to jump; those who lived down below the street level probably could jump out and jump into the river. You know, it was not exactly what you’d call high-rent housing. And so, but I look back on that and I think to myself,

“Up to today’s date, if you took the money we got from the federal government,” and I don’t recall exactly how many dollars we got but it would probably approximate ten million dollars, and you say, “Okay, from say, let’s say in the middle of the project, 1970, to the present time, how much would that ten million dollars be today?” If you capitalized it or every seven years it supposedly doubles in value. So you’re looking at forty or fifty million dollars worth of work that this city got, and you still have people say the worst thing you ever did was do the – I’m saying to myself, ‘I don’t know what century you grew up in but you certainly aren’t in the present century.’ But it was an interesting undertaking, I might tell you, it was a very interesting undertaking. And I’m not sorry I did it, but if it was being done again I would not want to be the guy doing it.

MH: I see your University of Maine degree diploma on the wall, and I know, because I work for the University of Maine, that you’re a trustee now. Can you talk a little bit about your relationship over the years with the university?

PM: Well over the years it’s not been that close a relationship, I’ve always supported the university. I might add I’m not certainly a Harold Alfond type supporter. I wish I were, and I’d like to be able to do that kind of thing. But I’ve always been a very strong advocate of the University of Maine. I think the University of Maine, that system is the system that is going to have to be the system that is going to provide the education to the greatest number of young people in the state of Maine for the future of this state. Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin do a magnificent job, but they don’t have the facilities, first of all, to handle the thousands of students that are going to be required, that are going to require some opportunities in college. You can’t, you know, you got some great schools, St. Joseph’s, New England College, Husson College, College of the Atlantic, you got some wonderful schools in the state, but they have an agenda of their own and that agenda doesn’t say, ‘Just the state of Maine.’

I mean you take especially the top three, Bates, Bowdoin, and Colby: their agenda is worldwide. They’ll take students from Maine – I think they have now committed to do more than they’ve ever done before and I think it’s wonderful because they are obviously magnificent schools, and you get an education from those schools, you go anyplace you want to go. You say, “Bowdoin,” you say, “Colby,” you say, “Bates,” whatever, and right away the door opens. You may not be the best guy there, the best person there, but the door opens for you. And I think it’s wonderful. I do think, though, that for the good of the state of Maine, you really, really have to do something to make sure that the University of Maine System is prepared to take on every young person in this state that is capable of handling a college education, provide them with a college education.

You know, I’m not much on, “Well we can, if we shrink it up a little bit, we’ll just get the best students.” I’m saying, “No way, you don’t just need the best students; you need all the students who have the capability of doing the work, that opportunity. You need to give them all that opportunity.” And I think the future of this state is going to depend upon how successful the University of Maine System is. That’s my advocacy when I’m on the board. I really -

MH: How long have you served on the board?

PM: I've been on there four years now; I'm in my last year of the term. And I just have a very strong love for the University System, and especially I think Orono and Portland [University of Southern Maine], those are the two drivers. Those are the two drivers. Portland is going to have to be, as I see it – I could be wrong – it's going to be primarily a commuter school. It sits in one third of the popu-, in the middle of one third of the population of the state of Maine, and that's not going to reduce, it's going to increase, the population in that area, and it's going to be more than one third. So Portland has to be geared for that. They've had a little rough water here the past year or two over the overruns, but I think that'll take care of itself in time. And I think with the kind of things that we're doing now, I think the present chancellor – the past chancellor was a great guy – the present chancellor is a super person, very, very smart, very aggressive, and knows where he wants to go and I think he's got a board right along with him that knows where it wants to go.

And our feeling is, and certainly my feeling is it's a lot like building a house, you have so many priorities, the state has so many priorities right now, you have for instance the fuel situation, which is a dangerous situation; you have people who need help emotionally, psychologically one way or another. But you can't have a leaking roof in a house, you have to fix the leaking roof or it's going to destroy the rest of the house. Before you get around, you can't paint a room that needs painting while the roof is leaking, so you might have to cut back a little bit on the painting and fix the roof first. You might have to still make some very hard decisions; the legislature has to make some very hard decisions to make sure that the University System grows in the manner that it's going to have to grow in the future if it's going to be prepared to serve the citizens of the state of Maine. And so you might have to do some things you really don't want to do, you are doing, you're reluctantly cutting back in some areas, because you've got to get the economy, and those schools are going to provide the drivers for the economy that'll get you the money to do some other things, or do more things in the areas you've cut back. It takes several years to do that, there's a lot of pain and suffering. I don't know how it's going to fall about, and I worry about it, I really do. And I think that – I don't know why I'm worrying because I'm eighty-two, and I'm not likely to -

MH: Grandchildren who need it, though.

PM: Well, that's a good point, except here's my situation: I have four children. I have, my oldest son lives in Marblehead, Massachusetts, and he has five children. They're not likely to come back to Maine; they're just not likely to come to Maine. My daughter, who is the second oldest child, lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and she has four children. They're all familiar with Maine, they have summer property on the lakes here, they come, they love Maine, but they don't see the opportunity for them in Maine, and I doubt like the dickens that they will come back to Maine. My oldest grandson is in, just outside of Amherst, Massachusetts, he's not going to be coming back to Maine, he's an engineer. My granddaughter, his sister, lives in Phoenix, Arizona; she's not likely to come back to Maine. The next two children, this is my oldest son, they're both at Bowdoin, I know they're not planning on coming back to Maine because I just left one of them, he's at the cottage right now. And then my daughter's children, her oldest

daughter, who's graduating from Texas, she just graduated from University of Texas graduate school, is already working in Fort Worth, Texas; she's not coming.

The point I'm making is, I only have two sons who have children here, three, they have three children between the two of them, and not one of them is planning on being in Maine, because they do not see the opportunity to stay in Maine, and it disturbs the dickens out of me.

MH: I will tell you, though, because I work on the Orono campus, that I often will ask out-of-state students how they happened to come to Maine, and many times the answer has to do with the fact that they had grandparents in the state, and they have summer memories. You know, they like the summers so much that, and they were looking around for a college or a university, and they thought maybe I'd like to go be in Maine year round, at the university. That doesn't speak to your point about opportunities after university, which I think is a very valid one. But many of our out-of-state students come because they have a summer house or a place on the coast or something.

PM: No question. And take my own experience: I came back to Maine but I had to have an opportunity in the business I was already in, in the insurance business. Otherwise, I'd have spent my time probably in Massachusetts, where I was born. I only lived there for four years, so I have no history in Massachusetts; my history's all in Maine. And so I'm saying to myself, 'Wonderful.' And I think we get people, young people who come to Colby, come to Maine, go to Machias, who decide to stay in Maine, but that's a relatively small number. That's a relatively small number.

MH: You are not the only person in your family who went to the University, is that correct, did your -?

PM: No, my sister went to the University of Maine.

MH: Your sister, and John?

PM: John went to the University of Rhode Island; Robert went to the University of Rhode Island, and George -

MH: They both went to the University of Rhode Island.

PM: They both went to the University of Rhode Island. They were both outstanding basketball players, and as a result, Rhode Island at that time was a national power in basketball, and so they both went there, on scholarships I might add, and George went to Bowdoin.

MH: Tell me about Robbie. Robert – is it Robert?

PM: My brother Robert. Robert was, you know, I miss my brother so. He was the third in the family; he was about six years younger than I was. He passed away -

MH: Did you call him Robert or Robbie?

PM: I call him Robbie. I called him other things besides Robbie, too. He was a terrific guy; he was a very, very smart fellow. He became a federal bank examiner, and he was a top examiner. He became the president of two different banks in his career. And he had his tennis court in his back yard and he was very competitive, we'd go out and play tennis. If he lost he'd really be upset; we would tease him mercilessly, but he didn't lose too often. But he was really a super guy, and he had a great family, he had seven children and all of them -

MH: Where did he live, and which banks was he the president of?

PM: He was Pep-, of Pepperell in Biddeford, and I can't tell you the name of the one in Boston. What happened in Boston was, he had retired – my brother suffered from leukemia at the end of his life, and they put him on some experimental drugs with the idea that he'd only live a few years. Well he ended up living about seven more years, so that was wonderful. And he was in Boston most of the time because he was being treated at Dana Farber at the time. So the FDIC (the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation) asked him, would he go in and try to save a particular bank. This is when the crisis occurred with the savings and loan associations and, you know, the bank crisis about twenty years or, well not even twenty years ago.

MH: Early '90s.

PM: Yeah, early '90s, because he passed away in '96. So he said, "Fine," and he went in and he worked there. The bank, I don't recall, I think it got eventually bought out by another bank, but he had to leave part way through that because he was totally unable to carry out the functions. He did, he spent about two or three years there, though, trying to help get the thing stabilized so that it would save the bank. Now whether the bank was subsequently saved or not, I don't know. But he was a, he really was. And from my standpoint, I miss him enormously because I did my banking with him at Pepperell and he wasn't embarrassed or ashamed to come in here and blast me out if he didn't think I was doing something properly, and I listened to him and, because he really had a tremendous understanding of banking and he helped me enormously in the business, aside from the fact that he was my brother and I loved him so very much.

MH: So he and the Senator both had an interest in tennis apparently, okay.

PM: Oh yeah, they both played tennis.

MH: Do you play tennis?

PM: Oh, I (*unintelligible*).

MH: Okay, was tennis something that started in Waterville or something you all, you took to later in life?

PM: No, I think we started, not, we started in Waterville. No, we didn't take it up; I never even owned a tennis racket when I was in college, I mean. And when I was playing baseball, "What do I want to bother with tennis for? I mean that's a little sport that doesn't...." Well, then I found out tennis is a very difficult sport, but I took it up when I came [back] to Waterville.

MH: Okay.

PM: Yeah. And he built a tennis court shortly thereafter in his back yard, and we had a great time, we used to have a great time playing tennis. Now George was not, he'd come around from time to time. That's when he was a senator, he'd stop in and we'd play a little bit of tennis. But most of the -

MH: I worked for him in the '70s, or excuse me, in the '80s, early '80s. That was his, that's how he relaxed.

PM: He didn't learn from us, he learned nothing from us. Because when he got to playing tennis and he came and played, he wiped us all out. Oh yeah, very much so. So, John was a good tennis player. I mean, let's just say everybody played athletics so we were able to still move around fairly decently. It was then trying to learn a little bit about how to play the game, not necessarily how hard you could hit the ball or whatever. But we had a great deal of fun. Robbie's wife Janet became a good tennis player, and my sister Barbara was a very good tennis player, my brother-in-law, her husband Eddie. So we had matches going all the time in the summer time.

MH: And where would these, would these be right in town here?

PM: Oh yeah, just off Mayflower Hill Drive, one of the streets off Mayflower Hill Drive. He purchased the land behind him, which was another -

MH: This is John you're talking about.

PM: Rob, yeah, and he built a tennis court -

MH: Is it John or Rob?

PM: Robbie. No, John and I -

MH: So did Robbie commute from Waterville down to Biddeford or, when he was at the bank or-?

PM: No, he had an apartment down there, then he'd be home on weekends. But he'd come home during the week sometimes.

MH: But the family was here in Waterville.

PM: Yeah.

MH: Oh, okay.

PM: But he'd come home from time to time, too. So, but when he, and of course when he was a bank examiner he was on the road, he could be in Fort Kent, he could be in Manchester, New Hampshire.

MH: So it was all over New England.

PM: Yeah, yeah, and when they had the big bank crisis they sent him to Dallas, Texas. Oh yeah, so he really was an outstanding banker, he understood banking. I used to tell him, "You're a typical banker, you're so damn conservative you drive me crazy." He says, "Well the problem is, we try to save people like you." So I said, "Rob, thank you very much, I'm glad you saved me at least."

MH: So the other brother who went to Rhode Island is John.

PM: John.

MH: Did he come back immediately after going to college?

PM: No, he, yes, no, John, when he first came back, yes he did, he coached at John Bapst High School.

MH: In Bangor.

PM: In Bangor, for about three or four years, and then he went from there to Tucson, Arizona, and coached a year there at Salpointe [Catholic] High, and then he came back to Waterville and became coach at Waterville High School. And then has for the past thirty-five years been the assistant coach at Colby to Dick Whitmore, and prior to Dick, I don't recall who the coach was but he, his first three or four years there was with the other coach.

MH: And now, when I worked for the Senator, I remember that all of the printing for the campaigns was done at Atkins Printing.

PM: Yeah.

MH: Your sister and her husband owned that?

PM: That's right, yeah.

MH: Okay, I walked by it.

PM: Well it's sold now.

MH: I walked by, I saw some signs up the street.

PM: It's sold now, and strangely enough, up until when my brother-in-law passed away in 1996, no, 1992, his oldest son Ralph ran the business up until this year. And now my two nephews, my brother Robbie's, two of my brother Robbie's sons, have purchased the business. Now they don't run it, they bought it and they have someone running it for them.

MH: I see.

PM: It was an interesting way the thing developed. The oldest, Eddie, Ed senior, my sister's husband, oldest son Ralph got to be retirement age and decided he really wanted to get out, and then the two purchasers ended up being nephews of my sister.

MH: I see. I ask these questions because I'm trying to get a feel for the whole family. I mean, it's very clear you have a very tight knit family and you all seem to get along very well together.

PM: Well we do, but the kids all, you know, once in a while, with a group this size, Robbie had seven children, I had four children, John had two, and so we, the kids get along well but it gets to be sometimes a little competitive and I try to cut that back a bit. I don't like all the competitiveness to the extent that I'm doing better than you and you're not doing, this kind of stuff, we don't need that.

MH: Are you able to get together, you know -?

PM: We get together from time to time. It's more difficult now, because my children are all married and they have their own families, and my brothers' children are all married.

MH: So you become more part of those units.

PM: Well, they have to. My wife sometimes will say, "Gee, I wish Paul could get up a little." Well his wife has a family too, and they spend a good deal of time. But we have one thing going that really, as far as my own particular family is concerned, we have this place on Great Pond in Belgrade, and we're lucky, we have a very significant piece of land right on the water, and so everyone in the family, and any other family within the family that wants to come, is welcome to come. So there are times when I'll have twenty-five to thirty people at the cottage. I told my wife the other day, I said, "This place is taking an awful beating," you know. But it's not an awful beating; it's a nice beating in a way. We've had the place now for forty-five years and you know, we really, really enjoy it enormously.

MH: I don't want to take up too much of your time, we're an hour and eighteen minutes into

this now, but I wanted to ask you, I saw all the pictures on the wall that look like most, many of them were taken when the Senator was in Washington. How did your life change when the Senator became a senator?

PM: Well you know, it's funny how it changed, because in the insurance industry it's a hundred percent, well not a hundred, it's ninety-eight percent Republican. They have no interest in the Democratic Party whatsoever. But when George was a senator, at the national headquarters, he was ace number one for them. They said, "He's the greatest thing that ever happened to us." At that –

MH: He'd actually worked in the insurance industry briefly, hadn't he?

PM: That's right, and see, not many people realize that George worked for the Travelers for about four years when he was in law school. And, but aside from that, I mean their issue, the big issue back then, when he really first got into the Senate, shortly thereafter, was bank participation in insurance, which eventually became a reality. But the industry was, at the level I'm at, not at the company level, they don't care one way or the other, but at the agency level, which I'm at, we didn't want bank participation in insurance because we felt that was just too great a threat to the business as far as our concern is.

Because if I'm a loan officer and I'm loaning you a million dollars to do this, this and that, and you're buying all this equipment and you're going to buy this business over here, it's very easy for me to say, "Oh by the way, I can take care of your insurance for you." And you as a borrower, with no other recourse to go to, is not likely to say, "Thank you very much, but I've got someone else that's doing it for me." You're likely to say, "Oh, well, why don't you do that, thank you very much." Well the legislation that was finally approved disallows that, they have to have a separation from the two kinds of activities. So it wasn't what we really wanted, but it was as much as we could get, but it's worked out pretty well.

So I'm on the board of directors at the time, of the Insurance Agents Association in Maine, and we used to, every year in April we have an annual get together in Washington and go visit the various congressional people. You probably saw them when you were in Washington. And so George, being senator, they obviously wanted me with them all the time. Well that started actually before that, it started with Senator Muskie. And the industry here in Maine really bad mouthed him something fierce, and couldn't understand why they couldn't get to him as often as they would like. And came to me and said, "Would you please come on our board and see if you can get" Well I knew I could, and any time I needed to I would call the senator, I had been working with him all through the urban renewal period because he was very interested in urban renewal – and I can tell you a lot of stories about that aspect of it.

And so I would call the senator and he'd say, "You're welcome, just don't bring anyone else with you." So I'd go down and meet with him and go over the issues with him, he'd say, "Okay, see what we can do." And that's how it came about. And then obviously George replaced him, so they said, "Why don't you..." you know, I stayed on the board for about six years; I

eventually became the president of the association. But I would go in, and Bill Cohen was super, always met with us. The congressional people were okay, too. I mean Dave Emery at that point was getting ready to run against George, so I don't know that he was very happy to see me, but he never threw me out of his office so I guess it was okay. And the congressional people were good, but I really had a nice relationship with Bill Cohen, and obviously a very nice relationship with George.

As a matter of fact, you see those two pictures on the wall here, that's not, one of them is in the Majority Leader's Office and I'm sitting in his seat, and the bottom one is his regular office, I was the acting majority leader at the time, and the other one, I was just in the Senate office. And there's a picture of, on to the far right, with Senator Muskie.

MH: Very nice, yeah.

PM: Yeah. But it was, it was an experience. And they would, they'd say to me, when I'd go down in to Washington, "Well you know, we love, yes, we love the Republicans, they're for low taxes." First of all, the big issue was banks and insurance, and when the Democrats say, "Okay, we're going to work on that," you guys would say, "Well okay, you're going to work, but we're still going to vote against you because you don't, you supposedly tax too much." That's the only thing – now I'm being political – the only thing Republicans say, and I think that's why they're beginning to lose, is, "Well they're going to tax more." They have no program, they have no plan, and the irony is, for me, that the two biggest deficits ever run in this country's history have been by the Republicans during the Reagan administration and this administration [George W. Bush]; both of them leave with trillion dollar deficits. And they say, "Well," you know, "it'll straighten a little later on." Really? How much later on is it going to straighten? This one's going to take forever. Well it certainly isn't going to get, I don't think it's going to get straightened out in my lifetime. But I'm being political now.

MH: Oh, it's all right. This has been great, and I do thank you for this. I'd like to invite myself back, if I could.

PM: Any time.

MH: I think, we try to limit the time to an hour and a half, two hours, but I, if I could possibly, I would like to get some of those, the pictures of the town, and I'll have them blown up and we can have you talk about the changes that went on in Waterville under the redevelopment project, I think that would be very interesting.

PM: I'd like to see them blown up, because it's kind of hard to distinguish different areas.

MH: We can do that. And I want to bring this, I want to kind of end this by asking you to kind of cycle back to your parents again. What did, what was your mother's impression of all the things that her kids did? I mean, your lives have been very different from the one that she led, and the same for your father.

PM: Well actually, I got to tell you, as a youngster, my mother's life probably was a lot nicer than our life, because she came from a family, as I mentioned, my grandfather was somewhat of an entrepreneur. And my mother never worked a day in her life until she came to America, you know, she had maid service. So she didn't know anything about, "You have to work for a living." But she was so tough. People have asked my brother George a number of times – and I've been in the audience – they say, "Who was the most influential person in your life?" Now my mother spoke broken English, but she could read and write Arabic. She was one of the few people in the community here who could read and write, so she was educated that way. And so George would say, without a hesitation, "My mother." You would have thought it would be, "My father."

Many people say, "Well how come not your father?" Well my father was a great guy, he was a wonderful person. Considering his background when he was a youngster, when we now know you are impacted more as a youngster on things, to some extent, informs a lot of your personality, to be institutionalized when you're two years of age, come out at four years of age, come to a foreign family who can't speak the language, who then learned how to speak perfect Arabic, my father did, can't read and write Arabic but could speak perfect Arabic, only went to the fourth grade, and got to be the guy he was. He never touched one of us physically in any way, shape or manner. But you knew when he was upset, and you, if he looked at you and said, "I don't ever want to see that again, or hear it," that was the end of the discussion and that was the end of never seeing it again, or never saying it again.

But my mother was the tough person, I mean she –

MH: What was she passionate about?

PM: Who?

MH: Your mother.

PM: My mother? Her family, the family. She loved her, the family was everything to her, see. Her whole life was devoted to her family, which includes my father obviously, and the five kids. She would do anything to keep the family together and to keep them healthy. I mean she worked when she never worked before in her life, and she did everything she could to make the family life easier for her children. And she was a very, very - And she wasn't a tough person from the standpoint of physical – my mother was only five foot two, probably weighed a hundred and ten pounds – but she was just a very tough person mentally. She never, ever in her life looked back and thought, 'Gee, I came from something better than this.' What she had, she thought, was worth more than anything she ever had, with the five children and husband.

MH: Was she a religious woman?

PM: Oh, very much so, very much, she went to Mass every day in the later part of her life.

When she was working, she couldn't do that. She never, I can remember my mother when we were, I'd be going out and she was getting ready to go to work, she always had her little Arabic prayer book, and she'd sit there and read prayers for probably a half hour to an hour before she'd go to work. Every day, every day. And that's the kind of a person she was.

MH: And what was your father passionate about, what did he like to do when he wasn't working?

PM: Well my father loved to read, and he was very passionate about two things – my father was great on railroads. He could tell you what every railroad, about every railroad company in this country, how much trackage they had, where they went to, what they shipped primarily, he loved railroads. I think my father always wanted to be a railroad engineer –

MH: Interesting.

PM: - number one. Number two, he was passionate about geography. I don't know if you've ever heard the story George tells about when he, my father would test him and then he tested my father.

MH: No I haven't heard it.

PM: This is a great, great story. So my father, he knew the boundaries of - The only magazines he got, two magazines: one was the *Railroad* magazine, and the other one was the *National Geographic*. Now here's a fellow, didn't make a lot of money, subscribing to the *National Geographic*. Every map they ever had he had, he'd keep them all. And he could go over and he knew every boundary of every country, every boundary of every state, every capital of every state, every capital of every country, I mean what languages they spoke in that country, the big cities in that country, I mean he knew all of it, he just, that's what he did. And he'd test George, and test us all, but mostly George.

So one time – now George told this story, I never knew this, I heard George tell the story at Colby. He said to my father, "Let's reverse this, I'm going to test you now. What's the most populated country in the world?" My father said, "Well, China." "Okay, yeah, you're right, China. How many cities in China with a population over one million?" My father hesitated and looked, and he's mumbling to himself, he says, "Ten." And George says, "Yeah, that's right. Well this one here I'm sure you won't know, Dad. In the order of their population, can you figure them out?" And he said he went down the line, and I don't think he missed a one, in the order of the population. That's the kind of person he was, he just was, he was fascinated by geography, and history but mostly geography.

You know, after WWI – I just finished reading *1919*, what a fascinating book, how they came and settled the issues of the war, which they didn't settle, that's why we had to some extent WWII.

MH: And a lot of the problems in Africa.

PM: Oh yeah, and the Middle East. And so he knew the boundaries before, during, and after. I mean, he'd go right down through it. He could miss it a little bit, but I mean for the most part, if he tested on that kind of stuff he'd have tested as a super genius. That's what he made, that's what his life was, he loved that.

MH: Was he a religious man?

PM: Oh yeah, every Sunday to Mass. He didn't go daily as my mother did, but every Sunday to Mass, he never missed Mass. And I don't know if he was anywhere, he never, I never saw him reading out of a prayer book, but he was not as religious as my mother was in that regard, but they left us all pretty much with some religion. You know, things change an awful lot, obviously things are changing in this country, with churches all over the country, but he left us I think firmly, at least with us, with me, my own family, in a pew, let's say, that is for us.

But you know, things change. Your children marry other people, and they have issues of their own. So you have to, and you can't, I've never been the kind of a person that says, "You're going to have to do it this way here or you're not in this family anymore." I never would do that, I never could do that. I think to some extent I like to think I take after my mother. The most important people in the world for me are my kids and my grandchildren, and now I've got two great-grandsons.

MH: Congratulations.

PM: And I love my nieces and nephews. I mean, basically I love everybody, I honestly do.

MH: You have a son who works here in the agency with you, right?

PM: Yeah, that's my youngest son.

MH: His name is Robert?

PM: Billy.

MH: Billy, excuse me.

PM: I don't have a Robert in the family. I got a Paul, a Linda, a Jeffrey, and a Billy.

MH: Yeah, yeah.

PM: Billy is my youngest son and he's done a magnificent job here, he's made it easy for me to come in here and have an interview like this and not have to think about anything on my desk. And anything you see on my desk does not relate to insurance.

MH: Is that right? That's great. Well thank you very much, I think we'll end it here, and I do appreciate it. I know that you have lots of nice places to be during the summer, and probably in front of this recording is not one of them. But I appreciate it, thank you very much, and we'll be back.

PM: Okay.

MH: Thanks very much.

End of Interview