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### Interview with Chris Mann by Mike Hastings

Christopher 'Chris' Mann

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## ***George J. Mitchell Oral History Project***

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**Chris Mann**  
(Interviewer: *Michael Hastings*)

**GMOH# 070**  
March 16, 2009

**Mike Hastings:** Good morning. The following is a recorded interview of the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project, an activity at Bowdoin College. It's March 16, [2009] Monday, it's 7:35 in the morning. I'm Michael Hastings, the interviewer, the interviewee is Chris Mann. Chris, you ready to begin?

**Christopher Mann:** Certainly.

**MH:** Let's start, we have a kind of a formal way of beginning. Could you give us your full name and could you spell your surname.

**CM:** Sure, full name is Christopher Mann, first name is C-H-R-I-S-T-O-P-H-E-R, last name M-A-N-N.

**MH:** And could I have your date of birth and your place of birth?

**CM:** Date of birth is December 19, 1962, and I was born in Augusta, Maine.

**MH:** Your father's full name and your mother's full name.

**CM:** Alden Mann is my father, and then my mother is Deana, D-E-A-N-A Mann.

**MH:** Could we begin with them? Can you tell me, where did your father grow up?

**CM:** Dad grew up in Ellsworth, and moved to Bucksport and eventually to Augusta. Mom grew up in Texas, met my father when he was a bank examiner, traveling, and later married and moved to Maine to live with us.

**MH:** For whom did your father work, actually?

**CM:** My father worked for the State Bureau of Banks and Banking. He was the director of securities.

**MH:** Senator Mitchell had a brother, Robert was a bank examiner, and I just -

**CM:** How interesting.

**MH:** Yeah, I can't remember for which agency. So they're both from Maine, well, your mother is from Texas?

**CM:** Correct.

**MH:** And your Dad's from this area?

**CM:** Yes.

**MH:** Okay. You went to local high schools?

**CM:** I went to Cony High School here in Augusta.

**MH:** What was it like growing up in Augusta, Maine?

**CM:** Augusta was a kind of, for a capital city, it was a small town in some respects. In the '70s, I think, a lot of people growing up wanted to move someplace else where there was more action. In fact, a lot of people growing up used to refer to it as Disgusta, because there was not a lot going on, the economy wasn't great. As you recall, in the '70s we had the Arab embargo and the oil crisis, employment was moderate. There wasn't a lot of things for kids to do. And ironically I've found, as I've gotten older, that a lot of the kids that wanted to get out so badly, some did, some didn't, but those who did oftentimes, as they grew older, wanted to come back and raise their families here. And I'm glad I had the opportunity to do so, eventually.

**MH:** Did you live right in town, or did you live in a surrounding community?

**CM:** Right in town, about four or five blocks from the Capitol.

**MH:** Is that right, not far from where we are sitting then.

**CM:** Correct.

**MH:** Okay, and so your schooling then was in local elementary schools and all that?

**CM:** Yes.

**MH:** When you were in high school, what interested you?

**CM:** Well, I took all academic classes. I seemed to get off on a tangent in current events, politics, things like that. I grew up in a home where my father was interested in watching the news every night, was involved with some of the issues of the day. And I recall at one point going down to Capitol Park, across the street from here, shortly before the end of the Vietnam War, and it wasn't a protest, but just going to see events like that, or also going up to the Augusta

Airport when, I believe it was Hubert Humphrey, flew in for an event. So, I had an interest in current events and a somewhat budding interest in politics, but nothing overt at that point.

**MH:** Were your parents involved in political parties or party affairs?

**CM:** My mother, not at all; my father, somewhat. Again, ironically, he is a very conservative Republican, to my fairly liberal Democrat. I don't know if that's rebellion or what it is, but it is what it is, and we have had some, and continue to have some very interesting discussions as a result of that.

**MH:** Did your mother work inside the home, or did she have a job?

**CM:** A little bit of both, yes, she worked inside the home, she worked outside the home at times in various jobs; primarily stayed at home.

**MH:** Siblings?

**CM:** Two brothers, besides myself.

**MH:** Where do you stand, what order are you in?

**CM:** I'm the eldest, and my middle brother Andy is less than a year younger than I am, he's 360 days younger, and then my youngest brother Danny, who's five years younger.

**MH:** And what did you do in summers when you were living in Augusta?

**CM:** Again, in Augusta there wasn't a whole lot going on at that time. We had a neighborhood over on Chapel Street here in Augusta that had a lot of children that were around the same age. We spent a lot of time outside, just massive hide-and-seek games, playing war, going to the library a fair amount, getting into trouble. Not bad trouble but just, you know, tossing firecrackers at the next door neighbor's house or something, just to get them riled up; just kid stuff. And it was generally pretty nice in the summertime, there were enough kids to keep you busy. The problem was, because there wasn't much going on in Augusta, it was very easy to get into mischief, but nothing bad.

**MH:** And after high school, what then?

**CM:** After high school, I worked in Augusta for awhile in a restaurant, or several restaurants. And then my father, who was worried about my academic pursuits, or the lack there of, finally sat me down and said, "Look, why don't you just take a couple of courses at University of Maine, drink some beer, meet some girls, and who knows, you might learn something." And I think that was his way of using reverse psychology to get me to actually go full time, and I eventually took a couple of courses at University of Maine in Augusta. I took a couple of introductory political science classes which I really enjoyed, and then I ended up transferring

down to Southern Maine, University of Southern Maine full time where I -

**MH:** Was it Southern Maine at that time?

**CM:** It was Southern Maine, yes, it used to be Portland/Gorham, but it had just changed fairly recently after I came down.

**MH:** So you were taking most of your classes in Gorham?

**CM:** It varied. I had a number of political science classes in the Portland campus and some of the core classes in Gorham. They had a bus that would take us back and forth to the two campuses for our various classes.

**MH:** Did you live on campus?

**CM:** I did, yes. First year, I lived on campus, then I had also joined a fraternity and I moved down to the fraternity house about a year-and-a-half after I had started.

**MH:** And what did you study?

**CM:** Political science.

**MH:** There seems to be a thread running through this.

**CM:** Again, current events, I enjoyed the political science classes. I was also very interested in history; I took a number of classes in constitution law, again, just because it was something of interest. Of course, the core classes. And even in my non-academic pursuits, my involvement with the fraternity was somewhat political, in that I kept trying to take on various offices within the organization.

**MH:** What fraternity was it?

**CM:** It was Delta Chi fraternity. I eventually became president of that, and it was a very good experience for just learning about dealing with people and how to run an organization, and it was an enjoyable experience, a challenging one, but enjoyable.

**MH:** While you were at the University of Southern Maine, were there any particular professors that you were fond of or became close to?

**CM:** There are several. There was Professor Barnes; I believe she was from Georgia, very heavy Southern accent. I took a number of history classes from her and thoroughly enjoyed them, she was a very good teacher, liked to challenge the students. Another professor, Professor Fisher, was a political science professor of mine who was constantly trying to challenge the students. He would literally beg the students to confront him, to ask him questions, to question

whether what he was saying was correct or not correct and give reasons why. And that's something that I've come to appreciate years later because he truly, I think, had the best interest of the students at heart by simply trying to get them to think critically, rather than getting them to simply believe what he said.

**MH:** Any political activity while you were in college?

**CM:** I was involved in a work-study program with the Public Interest Research Group, the University PIRG.

**MH:** What did they do?

**CM:** They did a lot of basic community outreach for various issues. Most would probably suggest it's a liberal leaning group. Some campus activities organization. I wasn't buried up to my neck in it, I think it was an interesting group but it was also a work-study program that helped me earn money.

**MH:** How long did you do that?

**CM:** Oh, a couple years anyway, at least two.

**MH:** So you graduated when?

**CM:** Boy, I think it was '88, 1988.

**MH:** And did you have work lined up after you graduated?

**CM:** Yes, that's where I started my involvement in politics in earnest, where my next to last or last semester in college, I did a, not a work-study program, but an internship. I had originally wanted to do an internship for George Mitchell, Senator Mitchell, and there was none available at the time so I talked to the folks on, I believe it was Congressman Brennan at that time, I think it was his first or second term as a congressman, and they were going to take me on as an intern. And I found out from my advisor, another political science professor, that there was in fact an internship opening up in Senator Mitchell's office and I jumped on it, and spent I guess half a year working in the Portland office as an intern.

**MH:** Now, where was that office located?

**CM:** That was down across from Deering Oaks Park, in the Federal Building in Portland.

**MH:** Do you remember who the staff people were with whom you worked?

**CM:** Sure, Sharon Sudbay was I guess the head of the office; Jeff Porter was Senator Mitchell's driver, and also worked as paid staff in the office I believe at that time; Margaret

[Kneeland], I forget her last name now, and Mary McAleney, off and on. She would go spend part of her time in the D.C. office and part of her time typically in the Portland office. Very good group, very nice group, it was an enjoyable time.

**MH:** What kind of work were you doing, actually, when you were in the office?

**CM:** A lot of it starting out was just basic answering the phones, sorting mail, sorting letters, sometimes I think they had me compile some draft responses and as they got a better handle on what my abilities or inabilities were, they got me involved in more advanced work, and advanced is a relative term in a small office.

**MH:** What do you mean?

**CM:** I think they were actually trying to encourage me to further pursuit in this field, because they had me doing research on things like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, there was some debate in Congress at that point, and they had me contact the Congressional Research Service and get some materials and draft a basic brief for the Senator on where we were at, on that particular topic. I have no idea if he ever saw it or not, it was clearly something from a kid who was just starting out, but from my perspective, I was grateful because they were simply giving me a chance to delve a little bit deeper into the whole process and learn a bit more.

They seemed to like me at the office, they were very encouraging, and once that was done, we talked about next steps. I told them that I wanted to continue in politics. I believe at that point I was just getting ready to graduate, or maybe I did graduate, and so I was looking for work, and Mary McAleney mentioned to me that Joe Brennan, Congressman Brennan at that time, was running for reelection and was looking for campaign staffers, and she said that there was a paid slot, I'd basically be the office manager and I'd work with Joe Sudbay, who's been involved in Maine politics for quite some time.

**MH:** Is he related to Sharon?

**CM:** Yes, he's her brother, he's been involved with Maine politics, I think he was one of the heads of the handgun group down in Washington, D.C., at another point, and I believe now he's currently a co-writer for a fairly popular political blog down in D.C. called, I think it is called AMERICAblog. So there was Joe Sudbay, a couple of other folks, and I signed on as their office manager, never had done any campaign work, and that's sort of where I cut my teeth.

**MH:** This was a reelection campaign for Congressman Brennan or was it his -?

**CM:** Yes, it was '88, I can't recall if it's his first or second term, I don't recall.

**MH:** The Portland office was located on Congress Street I assume, somewhere?

**CM:** Yes. No, I take that back, it was Free Street. It was a kind of dumpy little office, but

was large enough so we could have the combined campaign in there, so it was not only, it started off as just Congressman Brennan, but then of course the, geez, was Senator Mitchell up for reelection that year?

**MH:** Yes, he was that year.

**CM:** That's right, because Sharon was in that office as well. We on occasion would take a van out and go put up signs and take them down or whatever. Yes, we had the combined campaign in that office, and good experience. It was a lot of work, a lot of hours, as always, the pay's not going to make you rich.

**MH:** When did you begin that work? I mean was it like four months or two months or one month?

**CM:** From?

**MH:** I mean, from when you began to the election.

**CM:** Oh, we started off, let's see, it must have been around July or August anyway, and that was with a completely empty office, and having to order all the office equipment and then all the supplies. And we had a very interesting group in there, we had of course Joe Sudbay, and then Pat Eltman, who has been involved with state and national politics for quite some time, Frank O'Hara was our press secretary. Once things got going in earnest around August, I would say, September, the place was always buzzing. A lot of work, as I said, we'd come in at seven-ish and frequently stay until eight, nine o'clock.

**MH:** So, was Joe Brennan successful in that race?

**CM:** He was.

**MH:** Who was the opposition, do you recall?

**CM:** Boy, I think it might have been Ted O'Meara, possibly.

**MH:** Who's a Republican from South Portland? Or something, yeah, I can't remember where he's from.

**CM:** I think it was O'Meara, I could be wrong, but.

**MH:** So the election comes, and then what do you do?

**CM:** Well, I had thought maybe I could try to get on Congressman Brennan's staff here, or in Portland at the time. They didn't have any positions open so I, there were a number of us from that office that were looking to stay in politics and do something related, and Mary Mac called us



up and said, "Look, there are a couple of positions up in Augusta, you wouldn't be pages, per se, but you'd pretty much be doing the same type of thing with, depending on your level of interest and your level of ability, legislators might ask you to do some research, it's a basic 'foot in the door' and you might find something you can move on to from there, but at least it's something to keep you in food and rent, and also involved in politics and meeting people that you'll probably be working with at one shape or form later on down the line if you do stay in politics."

So, I went up to the legislature for I think a year-and-a-half, maybe two years. Interesting job, we learned about the state side of things and how the state legislature process goes, and you met a lot of the state legislators, and basically worked with the sergeant-at-arms and the post master over at the capitol, and the document people, things like that. Interesting work, it was fun. After about a year, a year-and-a-half, it was time to move on because it gets, it's not -

**MH:** Were you in actually a leadership office, or were you in a support office?

**CM:** Yes, just a support office. This was just basic grunt work.

**MH:** I see. Who did you report to?

**CM:** Peggy, there were two women, Peggy was a sergeant-at-arms, and Margaret was -

**MH:** Peggy Shaeffer?

**CM:** I'm forgetting the last names now.

**MH:** Do you remember who controlled the legislature during the time you were there?

**CM:** Yes, Charlie Pray was the Senate president, of course Joy O'Brien was secretary of the Senate, John Martin was speaker.

**MH:** So the Democrats were in control.

**CM:** Yes.

**MH:** At least the House, I mean, House and Senate.

**CM:** It was House and Senate, yes.

**MH:** Okay, so after a year-and-a-half?

**CM:** After a year-and-a-half, again, it was interesting, but for someone who is interested in pursuing a career in politics, it became stale after a point. And again, Mary McAleney called and said, "Listen, I've got a position down in D.C. that's opening up and I am wondering if you are interested."

**MH:** What was Mary McAleney's position at that point?

**CM:** Mary McAleney was an administrative assistant for Senator Mitchell, and she was in the personal office. And she said, "The one thing that I require is that I need a one-year commitment from you, if you come down." She said, "The pay is not good, we start everybody out in the personal office either on the phones or in the mail room, of course you're non-professional staff." So I thought about it and took the leap and went down, and that was the beginning.

**MH:** So you started out on the phones and the -

**CM:** I started in the mail room.

**MH:** The mail room.

**CM:** Yes, I started in the mail room, and it's interesting, there was a method to the madness, and that by starting either on the phones or in the mail room, you learned very quickly what the basic issues were, what people were calling about, what people were concerned about, what legislative initiatives were hot, which ones were not, who a lot of the major players were. We learned about the staff and how they interacted with other staff from other offices. So it was a good way to familiarize yourself with the process.

**MH:** Did you have much contact with the Senator when you first came?

**CM:** Somewhat, not a lot. I don't recall ever having a lot of contact with him, because at that point, I think it was summer of '89, he was majority leader. So he had his personal staff, he had the Democratic Policy Committee, and he had his majority staff, then he also had committee staff. So he, to put it lightly, he was quite busy. We'd see him from time to time, but not a lot, not a lot of interactions.

**MH:** So how long were you there, what was the total length of time you spent in Washington?

**CM:** In Washington, about twelve years.

**MH:** Where did you stay that long?

**CM:** Senator Mitchell, I was with him for I think around four years.

**MH:** If you divided the people you worked with on the Mitchell staff into the more senior and less senior, who fell into those categories, names you recall?

**CM:** Hard to say, because in some respects, the less senior advanced and moved on, and even over the course of four years or so, there isn't always a lot of movement with the most senior

because you're working for the Senate majority leader and you're a legislative aide, chances are you're not going to go anywhere, that's about as good as it gets. But there were some openings, and even when there weren't there were opportunities to sort of move up even within your certain position, get more experience, do more advanced work.

But there was a group of us that all came down at the same time. Mary McAleney, we used to refer to as a mother hen because she was constantly trying to pull people, young people, fresh out of college, either from Maine or who had Maine connections but had gone away to school and wanted to be involved with politics, she was constantly trying to pull them down to D.C. and get them started. And she was very successful at it, she got a lot of us started, a lot of us stuck around. Even those that went back to Maine fairly early went on to do, you know.

**MH:** So who were some of the people that were with you in that period, who came down from Maine?

**CM:** Let's see, I came down, well actually shortly after I came down, I was friends and actually served, worked in the legislature with Gary Myrick, he was out of Guilford, and he and I started off in the legislature, and I went down in June, he came down in July or August and actually stayed with me for awhile. He is now Senator Reid's [chief of staff].

**MH:** Now, what was your living situation in D.C.? That's always a challenge, if the salaries are low.

**CM:** It's always a challenge. There were a lot of us down there, there was, gosh, Kelly Currie, who was press secretary, who's now in New York City, there was Kelly Riordan [Horwitz], who I believe is in New York now.

**MH:** What are they doing in New York?

**CM:** Kelly Currie, I think, is in a law firm in New York. Kelly Riordan, I believe, I know she went to law school, I believe she's a lawyer, I'm not positive. There was Sandy Brown who, boy, I'm not sure where Sandy is now.

**MH:** Sandy Brown worked there actually in the early '80s, when I worked there.

**CM:** Yes. Grace Reef was down there before a number of us. Gosh, there were a bunch of us. And you asked about living situations, most of us that came down at around the same time, within a year or so of each other, would start off making, I don't know, eighteen, eighteen-five, which was low by Maine standards, and to try to live in a metro area on that kind of money was difficult. It was hand-to-mouth a lot of times. So there'd be four or five of us living in an apartment, or there was one place in particular on Morkham Lane in Arlington where a number of staffers lived, and that was the place where we'd all go for the parties and the get-togethers and the cookouts. And it was a real fun time, there were a lot of us around the same age, who had similar ideologies, who were working for a man who could really make things happen, in his

particular position at that time. So it was very exciting, and it was also exciting just being around a new group of people like that who had similar views, who all, most all of us had Maine connections.

**MH:** Were there events that you recall during that period, the national events that seem to stand out?

**CM:** Oh, absolutely. Well, of course the election of President Clinton. We were all down there for the first, and many of us for the second inaugurations. The first one was just incredible, because it was coming off the heels of President Bush, the first President Bush. Bill Clinton was elected and there were all kinds of inaugural events. And of course, being on the majority leader's staff there were certain perks, you'd get certain tickets to certain events and things like that where, in the preparation for the inauguration, you would get to go to 'staff only' events.

I recall one at an auditorium where they had several different groups practicing for the actual inaugural, one of the inaugural events, Fleetwood Mac, Michael Jackson, a couple of other big name groups. So a bunch of the staffers were able to go to that and see it. I recall a number of us getting to come up to the majority leader's office Fourth of July and watch the whole Fourth of July festivities from his balcony, which overlooks the entire area from the Capitol to the Washington Monument, and it was just incredible; you'd see the fireworks going off behind the Washington Monument. And so, you got a bunch of kids from a rural state like Maine, sitting in one of the best spots in Washington, D.C., on the Fourth of July. You talk about an American story, or at least an American event, it was fun.

**MH:** So, toward the end of your roughly four years on the Senator's staff, what were you, how did that differ from what you were doing when you started?

**CM:** I had become a legislative correspondent, and from that point was given additional responsibilities doing research for a lot of the legislative aides, because there weren't any positions opening up or moving. So I think to ensure that they could keep people who wanted to stay on challenged, they would give you increasingly more responsibilities within your current position, which was fine, that was interesting. I was doing a number of issues as a legislative correspondent for my various legislative aides. My issue areas were health care, I did work with research and development with mass transportation and a number of other issues, but I was there for the whole health care reform effort, first with the Catastrophic Health Care Act that unfortunately had to be repealed because of just public outcry, and then again in the first year or two of the Clinton administration, their health care reform efforts, which unfortunately, once again, came to naught in the long run because of significant, I don't know if I'd characterize it as public opposition so much as public interest opposition from various groups that spent a lot of money to get the public whipped up against the bill, or the effort, I should say. Interesting that twenty, twenty-five years later, whatever it is, we're still talking about the same issues and the same needs, and we're still at square one unfortunately.

**MH:** Let me ask you a bit of a technical question. I think that the public often hears people

refer to being a legislative correspondent. When the Senator received in his Washington office a letter from a constituent in Maine who had two or three issues on their mind, would you explain exactly how he would respond? What's the process for getting him a response?

**CM:** Do you want me to answer that?

**MH:** Yeah, yes, I do.

**CM:** When you're in high school, you take a civics class and you get a very general view of how legislation works at the national level, how our government works. When you go down to D.C., I think a lot of that really flies out the window and you get a much more realistic view of how things work. I think, similarly, people think that when they write their senator, the senator is sitting at his desk in a room someplace and is penning his responses and signing the letters. And they don't recognize that, well, Senator Mitchell in particular, was from six thirty, seven o'clock in the morning 'til probably nine at night either on the Senate floor or in meetings or whatnot, and simply just didn't have the time to do that.

So that's what legislative correspondents and legislative aides do, they would see what people are writing in about, and we'd get a letter in about, "Dear Senator Mitchell, I think you should reform the health care in this country, it's horrible, you need to reform it and do thus and such." And we would craft a response, run it through the legislative aide for that particular issue, and then put it through several other filters to make sure it was accurate, that it was written in a manner that was consistent with what the Senator's views were, and in language similar to that which the Senator used. It would get a sign-off, and then typically we'd have an auto pen sign it and send a response.

**MH:** Did he see all the letters, or a portion of them, or very few of them, or how did you decide what he actually saw?

**CM:** I think he did see a lot of them. I mean, clearly you've got hot button topics on which people write in by the hundreds, or thousands, and he might see the first response, okay it, and we'd use that for subsequent responses to the same question. I think he did probably review a fair amount of what went out, and at times, when he was not able to, there are people who had been with him for many years who would. We had a fairly sophisticated filter system that would, I think, catch anything that would not be consistent with what his views were.

**MH:** And toward the end of your tenure, working for the Senator's personal office, what were the legislative, did you have some broad areas for which you were responsible?

**CM:** Yes.

**MH:** And what were those?

**CM:** Well, we had health care, transportation, I was working with Grace Reef on the

reauthorization of what used to be called the Highway Bill, but there was a particularly significant change at that point where, I believe Senator Pat Moynihan was on Environment and Public Works Committee, I think he was chair, and several other senators were looking to try to make some significant changes to the, quote, "Highway Bill." And the result of that was ISTEA, or the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, which basically turned a lot of what we did with transportation programs on its head and got us more involved with public outreach, public involvement with, rather than having state departments of transportation just go in and lay a lot of tar down someplace, we had to go in and start seeking public input, trying to address issues. There were a number of significant changes in the bill that made it sort of a watermark. We had the Health Care Reform Act, I think I mentioned, we had, what else, I'm drawing a blank.

**MH:** Am I correct in assuming that some of these topical areas were covered by committee staff who reported to the Senator, and some were retained by the state of Maine staff, or personal staff?

**CM:** The issue work was typically done by the D.C. staff, be it the personal office where there's legislative aids or the committee staff. I think at that point Senator Mitchell was on the Finance Committee, he might have been on EPW, I can't recall. But yes, that would typically be handled by the D.C. staff. The Maine staff would handle a lot of the constituent services issues. If a veteran came in and said, "Geez, I've got this injury and I can't get Togus to help me out with this," or, "I need help getting Social Security disability payments," or what have you, that would be more along the lines of what the state staff would typically pursue.

**MH:** Did you find yourself coming up to Maine during recesses, or did you ever get sent on special assignments back to the state to talk to groups?

**CM:** On fairly infrequent occasion. A lot of times we would come back to the state during the campaign periods, take a couple weeks vacation and come up to the state to help work in a combined campaign, or for Senator Mitchell's campaign. And we'd also do work, I believe five or six of us took a couple of weeks off and worked on the campaigns of Harris Wofford, who was running for Senate, and Ed Rendell who, I think he was running for mayor at the time, of Philly. Was it Philly? I don't know.

**MH:** What was the connection there?

**CM:** There a number of us also from Maine that, not only in Senator Mitchell's office, but also the personal office, but also in the Democratic Policy Committee, there were people working for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, so there was this fairly large network of folks within the Democrat Party, from Maine, who were working in positions that would allow us to go off and do different things if we were willing to spend our vacation time to do so. But it was fascinating, because you got to go and do different types of things that you might not otherwise be able to do, or have opportunities that weren't necessarily available to other staffers in other offices outside of Senator Mitchell's office. It was a good sized

networking group.

**MH:** So why did you decide to leave?

**CM:** Well, there were rumblings that Senator Mitchell was going to retire, I believe in, was it '94, '95? And I don't know that a lot of the staff had heard about it yet. I hadn't either but I think, and I don't know this for sure either, but I think Mary Mac had probably gleaned that there were a number of us that still wanted to stick around and stay in politics, and she started suggesting other areas that we might want to look into. I ended up going over to the secretary of the Senate's office and was working on the non-partisan Senate floor staff, in the bill clerk's office, and that was interesting. Very, very different from what I was doing.

**MH:** Who was the secretary of the Senate?

**CM:** The secretary of the Senate was Jeri [Thomson] [*sic*: Matha Pope?], I forget her last name right now.

**MH:** A lady?

**CM:** Yes.

**MH:** Okay. I don't, names aren't that important, but I wondered if, was it a former Mitchell person?

**CM:** I'm not sure what or if she had any involvement with Senator Mitchell or not, I don't recall. And her name will come to me, or her last name will come to me in a moment, but I worked in that office. Actually it was with one of the granddaughters from Senator Byrd as well.

**MH:** So you stayed on Capitol Hill for awhile?

**CM:** Yes. That was interesting, just from the prospective that you'd see, long after the rest of the Senate staff had gone home, the floor staff has to remain because if the Senate's in session, you're there. And so you got a chance to see a lot of the players, a lot of the senators after hours where they were less guarded. And I don't mean that in a reckless sense, just they were people doing their jobs, and they were a little less tense and you could have conversations. And I am not trying to insinuate that we were buddy-buddies with a lot of these folks, but you could have conversations with a Nancy Pelosi or a Bob Dole or Jesse Helms or, it was just a different atmosphere. And frequently, we'd be up quite late at times, as the Senate was in session, debating legislation that was controversial or whatever.

**MH:** So you were in the bill status office, is that right?

**CM:** It was the bill clerk's office.

**MH:** Bill clerk's office, oh.

**CM:** Yes.

**MH:** And what is the function of that office?

**CM:** They basically, in real time, track everything that goes on legislatively on the Senate floor. So we would be watching the Senate floor on C-SPAN, and we'd also have it piped in by speaker from the floor, and we would have to track and record everything that occurred. So you'd be having consideration of an underlying live bill, with an amendment to an amendment to an amendment, and a modification of the amendment to the amendment to the amendment, so it got kind of complicated but you really had to be on your toes and listening and watching what was happening, because that is the information that the Library of Congress uses to track and publish information about legislation that everybody else relies on.

**MH:** Is that a large staff?

**CM:** No, it's small, there were three of us. Our boss, the bill clerk, would be frequently on the Senate floor and of course the other two of us would have Senate floor privileges to go out there as well. But very different from what I was doing, enjoyable, learned a lot from it, but I really missed being a partisan staff member. So after about a year-and-a-half, maybe two years of that, I got a call from another colleague with whom I had worked on Senator Mitchell's staff who had just been hired on as a legislative director for newly elected Congressman Baldacci, our current governor. And she said, "I need a staffer, I need a legislative aide, and I need someone that can write, I really need someone that can write well and knows the legislative process, because we're staffing up and it's been so -," you know, we need it. So I said, "Yes, I'd love to come back over, I'd love to be back on partisan staff again." And that was '94 I think, it was the Republican Revolution, when Newt Gingrich became speaker of the House and things changed quite a bit; we were in the minority.

**MH:** So this is your first exposure to the House.

**CM:** Yes.

**MH:** Okay.

**CM:** Yes, I went from the Senate over to the House, and there wasn't, unfortunately, a lot that we could do as the minority party at that time. And there was also significant change in just the whole paradigm of how people interacted on the Hill. I think, in a lot of respects, Senator Mitchell was probably, and the senators that served with him at that time, were sort of at a watermark period, or a change in eras, if you will, where at that point you could still have people like Minority Leader Bob Michel and Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill going out for a beer or a drink after having a hot, partisan debate on the House floor. The same can be said of people in the Senate as well, you could tear each other apart during the day on the floor, but there was this



understanding that after hours, you take off your partisan hat and you become people again. You're serving your state, you're serving your country, you go out for a beer, you have supper together, I mean Democrats and Republicans still interacted. I think after the so-called Republican Revolution that occurred in '94, after Newt Gingrich became speaker of the House, you saw a marked increase in partisanship, and also you saw more of a divide created between the D's and the R's. You saw less comity, c-o-m-i-t-y, on the floor. You saw it even less I think after hours, things got nasty. And people I think held grudges, and people got their noses bent and it was a rough time. And it was particularly difficult being in the minority because you didn't have a lot, especially in the House, that you could do to be relevant.

**MH:** Was John Baldacci new to the House?

**CM:** Yes.

**MH:** I see, so it must have been a much smaller staff.

**CM:** Yes, considerably. Although, again interesting in that smaller staff, much more interaction with the member. It was less formal, you could easily walk into the congressman's office and have a discussion about a specific issue or legislation or amendment or a special group that was coming in to meet with him. Much more accessible simply because, unlike Senator Mitchell, the congressman had nowhere near as many people on staff, had nowhere near as many requirements for his time. And that's not to say that he didn't bust his tail either, because he would be in first thing in the morning and work late at night, and got back to Maine as frequently as he could, but it's just a different setup.

**MH:** Would you recall any interaction between John Baldacci and George Mitchell? I mean, I understand that they're distant cousins, but -

**CM:** Yeah, yeah. Not, I think during some of the campaign periods there was. At that point also, Senator Mitchell either had or was just about to retire, because this was in '94, '95, so I don't recall a whole lot of interaction. I mean occasionally, back home, during campaign events, the Muskie Lobster Bake, things like that.

**MH:** Right.

**CM:** You'd see a number of them together, but.

**MH:** So how many years were you in the House side?

**CM:** I started with Congressman Baldacci in, again, I think it was '94, and was there in D.C. until 2000, and then he asked me to come up to Maine and run his Bangor office and I did that until, oh, until he left Congress and ran for governor, which was what, 2003, '02?

**MH:** Now, you were single all this time, or?

**CM:** No, I had had girlfriends down in D.C., and then in '99 married my first wife down in, we were living in Virginia at the time. We came up here to Maine when I came to run the Bangor office for John, and shortly after 2001 she wanted to go back to Virginia, she missed her family, and I was here and this is where my family was, and we parted ways.

**MH:** I see.

**CM:** I got married not too long after that to my current wife.

**MH:** And you live, now you live here in Augusta, or you live outside of Augusta?

**CM:** Just outside of Augusta, in South China. After being in a metro area for twelve, twelve-plus years, I wanted to come back and find someplace that was more rural. And my wife and I found an old farm house out in South China that needed a lot of work, and we have been working on it for the last five years now, but we got some property with it, and it's quiet and we love it.

**MH:** So you've been working for the Maine Department of Transportation since Governor Baldacci became governor?

**CM:** Yes.

**MH:** I see. Can you tell me a little bit about your role with the department?

**CM:** I work in the Bureau of Planning, and we basically do the long range plan, we're one of the few state agencies that's required to do planning twenty years out, because of the lead time required for various types of construction projects. So we're responsible for our twenty-year long range plan and our six-year mid range plan, as well as our public outreach processes, some major planning projects, such as the feasibility studies for Brunswick Naval Air Station redevelopment. We're sort of the public face in a lot of respects; I think our deputy commissioner refers to the group I'm with as the 'people' people. We're the ones that frequently go out to the public meetings, that go out to the corridor committees, that talk to people about transportation planning and what's going on, and what are your views and how can we accommodate you on this particular project.

**MH:** Have, or I should say did, your experiences in D.C. really prepare you for this job?

**CM:** Yes, absolutely. I'm required, one of the things I liked about D.C. was that you learned very quickly, out of necessity, to think critically, think fast, be able to change channels, if you will, very quickly when it comes to legislation, or watching, being able to advise a member who is getting ready to vote on the House or Senate floor on a specific amendment, what that amendment means, how it affects the State, whether it's a good thing, a bad thing. So you get a good skill set, between things like research and writing and critical thinking, and learning how to deal with constituencies, learning how to deal with people from your home state who are very

upset, in a manner that can hopefully address their concerns. You get a skill set like that, and it's helpful in virtually any sort of professional situation you get into.

State Transportation was something I never expected I would be involved with, I just happened to have seen the job advertised at one point, shortly after Congressman Baldacci became Governor Baldacci, and they were looking for someone who had policy experience, and thought it would be interesting, sort of a different track to take. So yes, it's been interesting, I enjoy the work. I've got to say, once you have been bitten by the political bug, it's hard to get rid of it and I still miss being in the thick of it.

**MH:** Ever have any interest in running for office yourself?

**CM:** Boy, I don't know. I've got an eight-year old and a four-year old, got a great wife and a nice quiet place out in the country, and I just don't know if I'd want to open myself up to that right now. Maybe someday, I don't know. To the extent it might occur, it probably would be locally, or at most state legislature and that might even be a stretch. But frankly, I like the staff work, I like being behind the scenes. I like being able to do the writing and the research and providing what I hope is good advice. But it's fun to be in the thick of it like that, you're generally on top of the issues and know what's going on before a lot of the public-at-large does. And it's exciting.

**MH:** Do you find yourself before legislative committees frequently, or do you accompany the commissioner when he goes, or do you help him prepare?

**CM:** I help a lot of the folks that go before the legislative committees prepare at times, depending on the issue. I don't appear a lot before them myself. Typically, that's the commissioner or a deputy commissioner. I do a lot of research and providing advice on federal legislative issues, the Stimulus Package, for example, that's coming out of Washington now, I've been heavily involved with that; the reauthorization bill that's going to be coming up in the near future. So I still keep a little bit of a hand in it because again, it's something I enjoy, something I'm familiar with. And as a result of being down there for awhile, I think it's something I'm good at. So the extent that we use it at the state [level], I hope I am helpful.

**MH:** Now you're, I guess technically part of the executive branch of state government under John Baldacci, who you worked for when he was a congressman. Do you also follow George Mitchell's activities from afar?

**CM:** From afar, certainly. I think a lot of us followed him when he was involved with the Irish peace process, and is coming up to its ugly head again in recent times with the death of, I believe it was an Irish policeman in, no, it was an English policeman, and the new splinter group of the IRA claiming responsibility. Also watched him with the whole Israeli-Palestinian negotiations several years back, and it seemed like we were so close at one point to potentially having, if not a resolution, at least an understanding.

So yes, you certainly watch the man from afar and his involvements publicly. And you hear from time to time his work in baseball and the whole steroid investigations and things like that. But, interesting man in that he seemed to know his own mind, he knew he was at the top of his game and he knew when to get out. You get some folks, it's sort of like a boxer that retires and then comes back several times to try to regain his glory and can't. I think George Mitchell could do so regardless – I think he'd make a wonderful Supreme Court Justice. But yet, he still seemed to know when it was time to get out, just before the Republican Revolution, and just before things basically went to hell in a hand basket as far as partisanship goes, and the inability to get anything reasonable done, he seemed to know and understand what was going on and, or maybe it was just serendipitous, I don't know. He got out and he stayed out, and he's gone on to other things, and you can arguably say that his work with the Israeli-Palestinian issues and the Irish-English issues are as important, or more so.

**MH:** You mentioned the paradigm shift, to use an overused phrase, that occurred about the time that John Baldacci entered the Congress.

**CM:** Yes.

**MH:** The Republican Revolution. Do you sense any shift, or are you looking forward to a new direction? Do you anticipate it, or do you think we're going to, the extreme partisanship is going to stay with us for awhile?

**CM:** That's a tough question. I think that the new administration, and clearly I have a bias, I think the new administration has attempted to engage Republicans, in spite of what I think was a mandate in the election for a change in party, a change in focus. I think in spite of that, President Obama has worked hard to engage Republicans in the House and the Senate on things, such as the stimulus bill, for which they all voted no.

We saw a similar situation happen shortly after Bill Clinton became president, and he passed a significant budget on which Republicans all voted no. And yet, in President Clinton's tenure, the man inherited a budget deficit of, I believe it was about \$250 billion from Bush senior. When he left, he had a budget surplus of I believe it was around \$400 billion. I mean, he had turned the tide; he had turned the whole thing around. We were on solid footing, we had a surplus, we were addressing our national debt, the economy was good, and then the new president came in, President Bush the second, and again, I think things truly went to hell in a hand basket very quickly.

Partisan, yes, but I think you would be hard pressed to refute it. I think our new president has got a huge job ahead of him. He will clearly need some very good people working with him to accomplish it. I think the stimulus bill is a good first step, his goals with regard to health care reform are a good step, if he can overcome a lot of the imbedded interests that will do whatever they can to throw up roadblocks. I think partisanship is going to die hard. We are a very, very, very polarized society when it comes to politics, and you have things such as, yes, radio talk shows that are poisoning the debate with less than honest assessments of what's truly going on.

We'll have to get into a situation where people are seeing results of the new president's efforts before we see the tide turn, before we see public dissatisfaction get to the point where they are so fed up with partisanship. And there's nothing wrong with partisanship to an extent, but with the poisonous debates, they're not even debates, the poisonous language that is out there, the less than truthful comments that are being made, I think it'll take some time but I'd like to say I hope that it will abate, if not disappear.

**MH:** I'd like to follow up a little bit on your comments about partisanship. When you were work-, I'm going to cycle back to when you were working for the Senator, could you characterize your relations, and the staff's relations, with the other staffs from the Maine congressional delegation? Was it, tended to be more competitive or cooperative, or a blend of the two?

**CM:** It was a blend of the two, very much so, we would clearly work together for various interests in Maine. We would work, and I think this is borne out from a number of different comments I've heard at different times when I was down there that, from other staffers and other offices, that there was some degree of surprise of how closely the Maine delegation worked together on Maine issues. By the same token, you would have a situation sometimes where we have a senior senator from Maine, at the time and still is, Olympia Snowe, but a junior senator being a majority leader had some, I don't think it was necessarily at their level, but generally at staff level, friction about who was leading the party. And from my perspective, you've got the Senate majority leader, it's no question. But I think there were times at which Senator Snowe's staff felt that they should be given more deference, and I think we did try to give them deference. I think they probably just weren't quite used to the idea of the junior senator being the head of the entire party, and the head of the entire Senate. A growing pain, I guess.

**MH:** We've covered a lot of territory here, is there any episode or story that you enjoy telling about your years in Washington that we should record for posterity, or?

**CM:** Gosh. There were a lot. I mean the inaugurations, I was fortunate to be there for a number of the joint sessions of Congress, Nelson Mandela came to speak before a joint session, and several other dignitaries spoke before a joint Congress, I was able to attend some of those. The friendships I made were wonderful, the experience I had was great. You think about a kid from a podunk town like Augusta, Maine. And I don't mean that in a derogatory sense, but we're a rural state and a small capital, and that's probably why I am back here living and raising my family here, I love it.

But to have the opportunity when you're fairly young, to go down to Washington, D.C., and work for one of the most powerful men in the nation, is just something else. The ability to go down and do so at a time when a new Democratic president is elected is even more so. The opportunities that a lot of the staff had were once in a lifetime. Sandy Brown, I mentioned earlier, she had gone over to work for Amtrak, I believe, after Senator Mitchell retired. And then she had, during Senator Mitchell's tenure, she was also on the Kennedy Center Board, and I

recall a girlfriend and I at the time going off to celebrate something, and Sandy was able to secure third, fourth row back tickets to a Broadway show in New York of *Guys and Dolls*, as a result of her connections with the Kennedys. Just little things like that, that most people don't get a chance to experience. It was a real opportunity. I'm grateful I had the opportunity, and I met and still stay in contact with a number of the folks that I worked with, and yes, it was nice.

End of Interview