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Interview with Najeeb Lotfey by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Najeeb 'Naj' S. Lotfey

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Recommended Citation

Lotfey, Najeeb 'Naj' S., "Interview with Najeeb Lotfey by Andrea L'Hommedieu" (2009). *George J. Mitchell Oral History Project*. 88.

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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Najeeb S. "Naj" Lotfey
(Interviewer: *Andrea L'Hommedieu*)

GMOH# 150
September 24, 2009

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. The date is September 24, 2009, and I'm in Portland, Maine, with Najeeb Lotfey. Did I pronounce that correct?

Najeeb Lotfey: Absolutely correct, fine.

AL: Could you start by just spelling your full name?

NL: My full name is Najeeb, that's N-A-J-E-E-B, my middle initial is S as in Sam, and the last name is Lotfey, L-O-T-F-E-Y. Everybody wants to put the F before the T, but it's not Lotfey, it is Lotfey. But my friends call me Naj, that's the N-A-J of the E-E-B, for short, so everybody knows me as Naj.

AL: And where and when were you born?

NL: I was born in July of 1932, in the Depression years, right here in Portland, Maine, about three miles from where we're now sitting. As a matter of fact, behind you is a picture of the home, that four-family building there, I was born not in a hospital but on the second floor of that building. And it still stands today, no longer in the family, but it was owned by my family for some seventy years and I sold it about ten, twelve years ago.

AL: That must have been hard.

NL: No, well, it served its purpose and it was nice, but we kept it that long. I had moved out of there when I first got married but my sister remained on the first floor until about ten or fifteen years ago, she now lives just a, not even a mile from me now, so we sold it; too much of a headache.

AL: And what was it like growing up in Portland during that time?

NL: Wonderful, as I remember. Things weren't as hectic as today, family didn't have a car, but everything was neighborhood like, we had no problem finding fun things to do. It was a short walk to Munjoy Hill and the Eastern Promenade and the beach, a short walk to the piers where we would take fishing line and drop off for fishing, plenty of little baseball sand lots, and it was a good life.

My parents were immigrants from Lebanon, and that's a little bit of a connection perhaps in my, something that might have drawn me towards George Mitchell, his Lebanese background, but not directly. Obviously, living in Portland, I did not know him as a child living in Waterville, but it was nice.

AL: What were your parents' names?

NL: My father's name was Elias, that's his picture up there; you notice it sits in the highest spot in this room because I think highly of my father. He was an immigrant from Lebanon and he served in the United States Navy in WWI, and his brother, who was only seventeen, served in WWI and was killed in action in WWI, serving for the United States. His name is on a plaque in front of Portland City Hall as one of the people who were killed from WWI in Portland.

My mother's name was Lillian, she was also, she was born actually in LaSalle, Illinois, I don't know what her family was doing there at the time, they were from Lebanon, but they went back to Lebanon when she was just an infant and didn't come back to the United States until she was age twenty-three.

My father was born in Lebanon in 1889, his mother and father immigrated to Portland, Maine, to find a better living in this country, left my father in Lebanon with an uncle, and he didn't get to see his mother again for seventeen years, but he eventually came [] to Portland. By that time my grandfather and grandmother had separated, my grandfather moved to Boston, my grandmother lived on the first floor of that same house that my father had bought, and she died in 1941 so I do remember her.

But in any event, my father came over here in 1909, to the United States, joined the navy during WWI, as I mentioned earlier, and after he got out of the service he followed the work that his mother had done, which was a peddler. They would go around to the farms in Scarborough and Bailey Island and sell clothing, first carrying it on their backs, and then getting a truck. And that was how he brought us up, how he bought that house, and the little house next to it, and so that's the story of my parents.

AL: So you were just born as the Depression was hitting.

NL: That's correct.

AL: Do you have any memories of that?

NL: Well, not really except that in later years, like now, as I reflect back, I think we had a sense that times were tough. We didn't waste things; what we had to eat we were happy to have. I often laugh at that picture in the middle there, see that picture, this is myself in the middle, my brother and my sister, and if you'll notice the clothing and then look at that picture and see how skinny I was, it had nothing to do with the lack of food, that was just me. But I often kid people

and say, “Look at that, we were Depression kids, we had nothing.” And that wasn’t a reality, we never were without food, we never were without a bed to sleep in, never were without a roof over our head. But I can remember my father struggling, and not wasting, and I think that was instilled in me. I’m one of those guys that will gladly donate a hundred dollars to a good cause, but if I find two things on a grocery shelf or in some store and there’s a penny difference apart, you know which one I’m going to buy, the less expensive one. Or you learn to do without, and you learn to prioritize on what you need.

So I really do think that it’s not just me, other friends of mine who were born during that same time frame, it was different I think, just growing up in the atmosphere, and perhaps that may be taking place today, with the recession and people who are doing without. They may not realize what an impact it is having on them until later years, when their children will say, what are you skimping for? Well, you know, that sort of thing.

AL: So your dad, did he do peddling your whole childhood?

NL: Yes, my father, as I said, my grandmother before him started the business, and when he came over and when he got out of the service, he chose to stay here in Portland rather than to live in Massachusetts where his father was, his father had remarried, and he took over from her and he did that business, peddling, right up until he died at age sixty-six.

During the WWII years, because of the limitation on the amount of gasoline nonessential businesses for the war effort could get, he couldn’t get enough gasoline to travel to Scarborough – that may seem like a very short distance, but put things into perspective, that was farmland back in those years, and so it was a long ways. I don’t think I saw Scarborough until I was eighteen, frankly. Or even where I’m living today was a long ways, although as the crow flies it’s only three miles to that property, across Back Cove. So he jacked up his truck and went to work at the shipyard as a custodian, cleaning bathrooms, doing whatever he could, whatever he had to, to earn a living, and after the war he went back to it. While he was working there, there were some things that you might send to customers by mail, but for all intents and purposes, his truck was jacked up and he had a job at the shipyard.

AL: And you had brothers and sisters?

NL: I had [a brother and sister]. I was the youngest in the family, I had one brother who was about a year-and-a-half older than myself, and my sister who was just eleven months older than my brother. My sister lives seven-tenths of a mile from me right now; actually she now lives in the first home that my wife and I lived in when we got married. We sold the home, but not to her, we sold it to a family who then sold it, there were a couple of transitions, but she always liked that little house that we had, and so when she got ready to want to move out of that apartment building, that house came for sale and it’s now within walking distance of us, so we’re close.

My brother went to Bates College, he was a school teacher, he taught in South Portland and then

went on to be the principal of a high school in Berwick, Maine, and then he married a gal from Syracuse, New York, went there, but he died at age fifty from a respiratory problem that he had. So my sister is a widow, and she lives nearby.

AL: And where did you go to, what did you do after high school?

NL: Well, after high school, I was one of the lucky ones that probably listened to my high school teacher, much the same as probably young people listen to George Mitchell and why he's so interested in education and all that sort of thing. My high school bookkeeping and accounting teacher was a nice man by the name of Sam Giftos, lived in South Portland, now deceased, and the day I graduated from high school I still did not know what I wanted to do, believe it or not, but I apparently did well in bookkeeping and accounting in high school so he said to me, "Why don't you go on to Northeastern School of Accounting. It won't hurt you, you are good at it," and so on.

I took his advice, and I'm not talking about Northeastern School of Accounting in Massachusetts, I'm talking about a very small Northeastern School of Accounting, which was located on Danforth Street in Portland, Maine. It was a small school, I went there, there were only about twenty in my class, but I did very well, I excelled. I don't usually like to talk about myself about that, but since this is an interview and you want the facts, I tell this not because I'm trying to boast, just because I'm so happy with life and the way things turned out.

I digress a little bit – one of the things I try to instill in my grandchildren, when you come back to them, but this interview is not about me, it's about George Mitchell, but I have four grandchildren and I have two sons, and I have always said to them a couple of basic things: nobody owes you anything, you have to earn it, and I firmly believe that; second, I tell them, the more you learn, the more you earn, and I believe that, too. Some people earn more than others, but the learning part is what's important. Without the education you don't get very far. And the third thing I always try to tell them is, maybe it's really the first thing, it's about honesty and being good, and I always say to them, whenever – because my father said this to me – whenever you look over your shoulder to see if somebody is watching you, it's your conscience telling you you're doing something wrong. And it's true.

So I went to Northeastern School of Accounting, I had all good grades, all A's, for whatever reason, they chose me president of my class. It was now in 1953, the Korean War was on, I knew I would get drafted probably, so rather than seek an accounting job in public accounting immediately after I got out of school, I took a job as the office manager/bookkeeper at a place called Ideal Laundry, here in Portland, and sure enough, four months later I got a letter from Uncle Sam, "I Want You," and I went into the service, served in the army for two years, and came back out and got an accounting with a public accounting firm. [I] stayed with that firm for five years, moved on to another firm that I stayed, became a certified public accountant in the interim, was with that firm for thirty-some odd years, became the managing partner of it, retired in 1995, and here I am today, sitting in my office. I don't do any outside work except for two people that were clients of the firm that I was with, that's Macdonald Page, one of them is

George Mitchell, and the other is another friend of, who just happened to be a friend of George but that's not how the connection, was Frank [J.] Gaziano, who owns National Distributors. So I still hover over the work for both of them, I don't actually crunch the numbers, the firm does, but I know [their financial affairs].

AL: You give it a second look type of thing?

NL: I give it the first look and collect all the information from the two clients, I probably know about each of them more than anybody knows, and I hand it off to people in my office to grind out the information. And so, that's my background.

AL: So does that connection keep you in touch with Senator Mitchell?

NL: All the time, spoke with him a few days ago. I call him at home when I need to. Most often now he works out of his home, because of his involvement with the Middle East situation he had to give up his practice with the law firm in New York, DLA Piper Rudnick, which he actually was the chairman of the board of the international firm. It's a big, big firm, and I've gotten to know some of the people in that firm, again because of things that I do for George Mitchell. But yeah, whenever I need to talk to him, I don't hesitate to call him, and whenever he needs to talk to me, he doesn't hesitate to call me either, and more often than not I try him on a Saturday or a Sunday because during the week he's busy at other places that I don't [want to disturb him], or he's in far away places. But he has called me on his cell phone from places as far away as Egypt, as far away as Israel, you name it, he's called me about something, or - I'll inject this now, it's part of what I wanted to stress is, of all of the clients that I have served over the years, he is probably the most responsive person, as busy as he is he invariably, when I call him, I hear from him within twenty-four hours, but most often a lot sooner than that. No matter what I want. And we don't talk idly, we don't chit-chat about how's the weather today or anything else, you know what I mean, we get right to the point, we both know that, and that's the way it works.

AL: That's impressive.

NL: Oh, I'm telling you, for anybody who's as busy as he is, he pays attention to detail and gets back [to you], or there are times when I need to talk to people about certain matters on his behalf, and I never give him any surprises, I know enough to always call him and say, "There's something I need and so-and-so is the person I have [to speak with], is it okay for me to call?" "Sure thing, call." So even though I might have called those people before, I want him to know what I'm doing on his behalf, because in the interim, he may have had other conversations with these people, or something else might have taken place where he would prefer that I not talk with them. As a matter of fact, when I got your letter it was straightforward and everything, but I called him and told him I had a letter for an interview, he said, "Fine, okay." So I assumed he had heard about it, but I didn't know that somebody had provided you with my name, and so I don't keep anything from him, as it relates to him.

AL: So let's go back. How did you first meet Senator Mitchell?

NL: Okay, while I was practicing public accounting here in Portland, and I had a responsible position in the firm that I was with, back in '84, and prior. Like I said, I started with the firm through a merger in 1963; that was my first involvement. But anyhow, going fast forward, I had heard of George Mitchell because he was, first, I knew of him, he had a good reputation, you read about him in the paper as U.S. attorney for Maine and a number of other things; he had not yet been chosen as the, filling out the term of Ed Muskie yet, but I knew of him. And by the way, I knew Joe Brennan because Joe Brennan, the governor, or former governor of Maine who appointed George Mitchell to be the person to fill out the unexpired term of Ed Muskie, was also born in the same block that I lived on Munjoy Hill. I didn't know him closely, but I knew who he was, and at a later date and during his administration, again because of my involve- - I'm going to come back to, I haven't forgotten where I was - and because of my good position in public accounting, Joe Brennan appointed me as a member to the board of the Finance Authority of Maine, so I served on that board for a couple of years.

But anyhow, so going back to George Mitchell, I had heard about him. Well, after he fulfilled his term of office, for the term of Muskie, he then had to run for office on his own, all right, and for that he would need some people around to do certain things for him. Well, if you look across the street at that house right there, that white house on the corner, okay, there was a man who lived in that house who was a very, very good friend of George Mitchell and a big supporter. He's now deceased, but probably somebody might have mentioned him: it's Joe Angelone, okay.

AL: Oh, yes, he lived right there.

NL: He lived right there, he lived there before we moved here. We now, this is our thirty-seventh year here, and he was there before us. So we -

AL: But you knew, you were neighbors.

NL: We were neighbors, and we got to be good friends with Joe Angelone and his wife Pat, they lived right there. And he was a strong supporter of George Mitchell and a fund raiser, and very strong in Maine politics, Democratic politics in Maine, Joe Angelone.

AL: And he had a restaurant where people would gather and [discuss politics].

NL: Well, he had a pizza [parlor] his brother started, brought the pizza business here from Rhode Island, way back, way back, going back sixty years now. They now have three stores here, and one is less than a mile away. But anyhow, but yes, Joe had a pizza parlor and they would gather in the back of it I think, and probably a lot of political transactions and political discussions went on there, in each of the pizza places.

So anyhow, I forget what it was but he had a cocktail party or a gathering for something at his

home one evening, and George Mitchell was there. And of course unbeknownst to me, I think Joe Angelone had spoken to George and probably said: during your campaign you're going to need somebody to take care of your Federal Election Commission reports, and you need somebody credible and all that sort of thing. He must have mentioned me to him, because George approached me in that house that evening and asked me, would I work on his campaign doing that function. And as I said, I had heard about him, I had a lot of high regard for his honesty, his integrity and just, he was a good guy, and is a good guy, and so I said yes.

At that time I think Mary McAleney might have been working for him, but to be honest with you, if I met her on the street I probably wouldn't remember her. I'm getting a little old, getting a little forgetful. But there was also a fellow named Larry Benoit. Now, Larry Benoit may be one of your people on your list, I don't know, but they kept excellent records so my job was made easy, but nonetheless, I had to sign it when it was done, submit them through his office. So I did his election, Federal Election Commission reports, and took care of it. That's how I first got to know him, and that grew into, he asked our firm, me, would I please do their tax returns, the personal tax returns, and so I've been doing his personal tax returns since that time. The firm has it, but under my supervision. And when I was active in the firm, I actually did them. As time went on, they got to be more complex, but as I said earlier, [George] always responded, always very good.

So I met him that way, and met his first wife Sally, lovely lady. And I can go on when you want to ask me more about that and George, I can tell you some things there that are okay to tell because they're all, in my mind, I'm trying to think of all the pertinent things that in my mind stand out prominent with George Mitchell, and that was one of them.

AL: In what way?

NL: Well, George Mitchell was born, as you know, in Maine, and raised in Maine, and he met Sally I think, before I knew them, she was from New Hampshire. She probably didn't realize just how far George was going to go, and this is hearsay but, I mean I think it's true, she hated to leave, she hated to live in Washington, didn't live in Washington. So George went to Washington after he was in the Senate, and she remained living in South Portland, they have a daughter, Andrea, same name as yours.

But I can remember vividly one day, George Mitchell called me up at my office and said, "I have something terrible to tell you." You have to forgive me, I really get emotional about this, because he said to me, "the most terrible thing in my life to this day is happening" – those might not have been the exact words, but it was early in the morning that he called me and he said, "My wife and I are getting divorced. But," he said, "it's amicable, and I want you to look out after her, I want you to also look after any of her things, whatever it is, and I'll pay for it, I'll pay for the work." And so from that time on, I did do George's work separately and did her work separately.

And I could tell in my conversation with Sally that it was an amicable separation. I would go to

her house, I never heard any ill will or anything to speak of, and when she died, she died, oh, just within the past ten years, I think it was cancer, and George took care of the funeral arrangements and everything, and after the funeral, what do you want to call it, luncheon, if you will, was at her house in South Portland. So it was a nice relationship that became unwound in terms of marriage, but that never became unwound in terms of respect for one another, which I like very much. And that was the first time, at that meeting, that I met George's present wife, Heather Mitchell.

So from that point forward, I continued to do George's work. And as he was practicing out of a law firm in Washington, I'm sorry, he was in the Senate, Senate majority leader, and when he first was sworn in my wife and I flew to Washington. He made tickets available to the Angelones, and there was a family next door, Tim O'Neil – has that name been given to you, they used to play tennis together all – Tim was my neighbor also, Tim was not the next house, but the next house up the street, worked for Portland Glass, and the next house was Gene Cohen, who owned Portland Glass, so it was just by chance, it's how I met these people. And so a group of us took the plane one morning from Portland to Washington, attended the swearing-in, a little ceremony, and flew back.

And on other occasions I had occasion to go to Washington, D.C., on business, with another associate of mine, and George made some of his staff available to show us, take us to the Supreme Court, take us to these places and see a few little things and have breakfast with him at the Senate Dining Room, he was very nice. And so that's the story of that.

And then of course when he decided no longer to be in elective office or politics, he told me about it, told me he had a bunch of money left over from the campaign, the next campaign fund, my recollection is it might have been a couple of million dollars, I'm not telling things out of school, this is public information, and he decided that rather than put it in his pocket, which he could have, he decided to create the Mitchell Institute and funded that, the beginning funding of the Mitchell Institute, and then proceeded to do all he could to tap other people who would want to contribute to it, and now you have quite an organization, that you've got to be familiar with, I'm sure, that provides these scholarships to every high school in the state of Maine.

I have never known George Mitchell to be in it for George Mitchell. I mean, whatever he did, I never once heard him say, act or behave like, 'what's in it for me?' It was always, what good can I do? Which is a great respect that I have for him, in that way, he's not a showboat, he's not a guy with a lot of toys, not a guy with, 'how much is it going to bring me?' As a matter of fact, this most recent engagement that he has taken on at the request of President Obama has required him to relinquish a lot of things because of the State Department rules. And so clearly what he's doing, he's doing for the United States and for mankind, and I know it for a fact, believe me.

AL: And is this a kind of assignment that will go through Obama's term, or is it, because of the issue that's happening right now with the attempt at peace talks?

NL: I think we will know better probably very quickly. I mean initially, I had thought that

George would be able to do it, because you know he did a study three or four years ago -

AL: That was the Sharm el-Sheikh -

NL: And I've got a copy of it right there, autographed by him for me. And he outlined what it was, and it all boils down to the settlements. And unfortunately, from my point of view, this is just my point of view, if Netanyahu had not come back into power, he was a hard – you know what word I want to use – even back before, when he was in power, and it's unfortunate. George understands, in any, I think that, I'm not speaking for George now, but I think that George very well understands, and I understand it, in negotiating with anybody, that one side can't win and the other one lose. Both sides have to go home with something, something meaningful, for it to happen, okay. Nobody likes to go home dissatisfied. And unfortunately, this matter of the settlements is a big sticking point. Whether that will be unscrambled this week or next week, I don't know. If it isn't, I don't know that it will be accomplished during the first term of Obama, but that's just my opinion and I'm maybe not as knowledgeable as many, many people on that.

AL: I guess my next question is, talk if you can, because we can't interview Joe Angelone, can you talk a bit more about him?

NL: Well, I will as much as I can, as much as I know. It's like a lot of things, I know George to a degree, but I really never did socialize with George. I didn't socialize with many of my clients, deliberately, because I like to keep it kind of what's business and what isn't business. We socialized very little also with Joe, but Joe was a nice guy and a straight shooter, and I know that he was all for George. I never forgot the time when – are you famil-, do you remember the name Oliver North?

AL: Yes.

NL: Well, all right, do you remember the speech that George Mitchell gave, the lecture, if you will, sort of, to Oliver North. Well, I remember when he apparently drafted that speech, and before he gave it, or simultaneous, I remember Joe Angelone saying to me, it might have been on his lawn, I might have been on my lawn, I might have walked across the street, 'how's it going Joe', that sort of thing. But he said, "Did you hear about that speech of George Mitchell," he said, "it is powerful." And it was, very, very powerful. I think it helped George rise several feet over wherever he was at that point, already had a good reputation, but it was the truth, if you read that. I just read it again the other night, it's just a real good, real good way of telling Oliver North that everything you've said, blah-blah-blah may be, but it isn't always, it isn't right and you have, other people have a right to disagree with this, and just because they disagree basically doesn't mean they're any less patriotic than you are, Oliver North.

And so Joe was that kind of a promoter of it. But he was also, Joe was also always trying to be a peace maker. There are, even within the same party there are people who have little battles with one another, and Joe was always trying to be a matchmaker to oh, 'let that go,' don't make a big deal out of something, we have to live together, kind of thing. So he was a nice person, and so

was his wife Pat. He met his wife Pat, she was a lady from England, he met her during the war when he was in England, Joe did. I learned this after we, we didn't know them before we moved across the street, and that's how, we knew of his pizza because we all ate it when we were young, but we didn't know him personally.

But I'm sure that Joe recognized, again, my abilities and my reputation, and brought it to George's attention, and that's why George chose me. George I think is a person also who, if you look at all the people who were around him, they were all people sort of like George, in terms of integrity, honesty and all that sort of thing. He knew, he could size somebody up and decide, I think he can decide pretty quick whether he wants them on his team or not. He has that ability, I think, to know that, to do that. And so I can't think of one person that I have become aware of that was associated, or was pitching in to help George, that I would have said, 'boy, I wouldn't want him on my team,' for whatever reason. I can't think of one person. This is not to say there may be somebody, somebody else knows better than I do, but that's the way it is.

He could size people up pretty well, and still can I think. So he's intelligent, his experience as a judge could sift it out and interpret the facts, can look for the facts, which is why I think in recent years a lot of people have sought him out to dig out the facts on baseball. There's another editorial that I, this red file that you're looking at on my desk, up until yesterday was up in my attic in a file cabinet where I kept it. Anytime I saw something special that I wanted to keep about George Mitchell, I tucked it in there, but I thought it would be well before this interview for me to bring it down and just paw through it, which is what I did, which reminded me of some things that I don't think about every day but which are there because of George Mitchell. And to me, that file is very inspirational. I admire George, I respect George, and I'm proud to help any way I can. And I think he trusts me, he knows that, I've done some good things for him, and he knows that I would never let him make a wrong mistake knowingly; if I knew something I would steer him away from it, and if I knew something he needed to do I will, and he never questions my word on financial matters of that nature when I say to him, "This is what it is, yes, I've looked into it George." If I tell him a number and he says it doesn't sound right and I say to him, "Well look A, B, C, D gives me that number." Oh yeah, I forgot about C. See what I mean? That sort of thing.

So it's been good both ways, and I have had some clients who, you ask them something, and then you ask them again and you ask them again and you still don't have it, and in a few instances in my career I said, "I think you need somebody else to do your work," get rid of it. But not so with George. If I ever stop doing work for George, it will be because my health won't permit to do it, or he needs something closer to home. Here we are, he lives in New York, still comes to Portland, Maine, to get this work done. Hah, all right. So anyhow -

AL: So does he sometimes actually come here, to your house?

NL: No, no, I'm trying to think, I don't think he's ever been in my house. No, like I said, we don't socialize, he's just busy, he's on the world scene all the time. And I don't know how he does it. I tell you, he's only a year-and-a-half younger than I am, and I don't, I couldn't, no way

begin to do the pace that he does. Just unbelievable, he's in good health, notwithstanding the fact that, again, it was in the paper, that he had prostate cancer. And hopefully he's licked that, but he's got stamina.

AL: And I know you said that the connection that you were both Lebanese is not what brought you together, but have you ever discussed that connection? Because in Maine, there's not a large population of Lebanese.

NL: Well, only in this respect. No, we haven't discussed it terms of a political aspect or anything like that, we're usually talking about food. Have you had any of this kind of food lately, you know, a Lebanese dish that my wife, my wife is not Lebanese but my mother taught her six or seven dishes that she cooks all the time.

AL: Really.

NL: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

AL: What kind of dishes?

NL: Well, kibbeh, I don't know if you ever heard of kibbeh, some people make it with lamb, my wife makes it with beef. It's ground up beef, it's mixed with cracked wheat, okay, burghul it's called, cracked wheat, just had some last week, and it's mixed up with that and onions and some other spices, sort of like hamburger, it's put into a tray so it's about three-quarters of an inch to an inch thick, baked in an oven. Delicious, just delicious, you can eat it hot or cold. And my wife makes kibbeh, then she makes tabbouleh, the salad, real good. We make rolled grape leaves, or rolled cabbage leaves, and my wife and I do that as a team, she mixes the ingredients, I do the rolling of it, I make them like nice little cigars, and she cooks them, and we love it. And so there are four or five dishes like that that my wife makes.

And so I might discuss, I might say that to George sometimes. And George was friendly with a couple of, some Lebanese lawyers in Waterville, I don't know if the name John Nale, we know John Nale, we invited them to our home one time and he came in and ate it, he loved it. Of course I know George's sister, Barbara Atkins, very nice lady, and through George I handled her husband's estate. Her husband, Eddie Atkins, he died, and so I do also monitor Barbara's tax returns. Again, I don't do them, but she likes talking to me about them so I said, "Barbara, you can talk to me any time you want, no problem." And she lives in Waterville; I've been to her home, and very nice lady. She has a place in Florida, too.

(Note: moved from p. 12:) [So, I'm sure George also likes Lebanese food when he can get it, and his sister too. But we don't really harp on the fact that we're Lebanese, although I'm proud of it.]

So we'd talk, it's sort of a silent acknowledgment that we're all Lebanese, I mean the family, they know I'm Lebanese. But that's not what drew them to me, I don't believe, and it's not what

drew me to him because let's face it, I've always said to people, there are good people and bad people in every nationality and in everything, so, but I like to think I've chosen the good people to be friends with. I know his brothers; I knew all of his brothers. There's only two of them, let me think -

AL: Yeah, Robbie passed away.

NL: Yeah, Robbie passed away, there's Johnny and Paul, I see them once in a while, whenever there's a Mitchell Institute meeting or something like that.

AL: Now, do you continue to sit on the board of the Mitchell Institute?

NL: No, I've never been on the board.

AL: Oh, you've never been on the board.

NL: No, I never, no-no, no, the only board that I mentioned that I was on, on a state level or on a big level like that, was the Finance Authority of Maine. []

AL: So you knew Sally somewhat.

NL: Yes, just in what little that I did do for her. A lovely lady, lovely lady.

AL: Did you get a chance to know Andrea at all, or was that after she was -?

NL: Well I, again, at George's request, he called me one time and he said, "My daughter Andrea, she's got a tax return and I wish you would do it for her and bill me for it," that kind of thing. And so we have done her tax return for the last eight or nine years, she's still on our list. I don't handle it, I don't have to, because I would just say give me the information, only for me to pass it on to somebody, so I, she usually sends me an email saying, 'my stuff is ready,' and I'll say, 'drop it off at the office.' I look it over quickly and see if there are any complexities that I need to ask some questions about, and then give it to a person in the office who's very knowledgeable. There's a couple of people in the office that I depend on heavily to do the work that needs to be done for George Mitchell, and I was with them yesterday as a matter of fact, and they do the work for whatever needs to be done for Andrea, too. So that's the limited amount of time I've had.

I'm a member of the Portland Rotary Club, and the fellow who is the executive director of the Southern Maine Agency on Aging is a fellow named Larry Gross, and he happens to also be in the Portland Rotary Club so I know him, and that happens to be where Andrea works, so, you know, she works there. So I don't know her well, I know she's his daughter, I know George still pays attention to her even though he's a long ways off and even though he's married again, and he hasn't abandoned one family and gone to another. He's very close to her, and he was very close to Sally. And that's where he and Sally lived, in the house in South Portland, which

they've since sold, I believe.

End of Side A
Side B

AL: We are now on Side B. And I guess my next question is sort of, what have I missed, or what is it that you're thinking about that I haven't asked you?

NL: Well, I don't, I think we've covered everything, but I just jotted down a couple of key words for myself of points that I wanted to stress, and maybe I've covered them all. I've used the word integrity, George is just about as straight and honest as anybody I know. That's my opinion. And he's very caring about people. We've talked about how our association began, I had that down, talked about his first election and my involvement there, which is how I first got to know him really, and I told you that he doesn't take on a task, that I'm aware of, for personal gains. And that even includes, in my opinion, the work, the big jobs that he's had like chairman of the board of Disney. I mean sure, we all have to work, we all have to earn money, but I don't think that that was primary in his mind, I really don't. When he was on the board at Unum, on the board of Staples, all of those companies, he gave it his best. I think he finds a great fulfillment in solving problems for any company or any organization or any country with which he's involved, it's a challenge to him.

And I really think that the very first thing is that, his mother was Lebanese and his father was Irish, must have really implanted some damn good genes in him, because all of those traits. And from what I see of his brothers and his sister, they all have some natural ability that everybody would wish they had, at least *I* think. And so he takes on these jobs and he does them, and I don't think he spends a lot of time on what's in it for me and how much am I going to earn out of all of this. It isn't. What he does, he does, and I think it's the achievement of it that he feels good about and maybe rightfully so, because so many awards it isn't funny.

I've told you about his first wife, and I told you about how very responsive he is. And even now that he has younger children, one might think, somebody standing in the sidelines might think, 'my God, how can he devote, how can he do all these things across the world and not pay attention to his kids.' Well, I think he does on the weekends, when he's home, I think he's right there. I would bet that there isn't, no matter where he is in the world, I would bet that there isn't a day goes by that he doesn't communicate with his wife and his children. Now, that may be all they need, that may be all he needs to still be able to do his thing.

I think one thing also, and again getting back kind of to Sally and why George does what he does, I think if George wasn't as active as he is in so many varied assignments, he would be very disappointed in himself. He just is that kind of a guy. You know, we all have twenty-four hours a day, you don't have one minute more than I do, or I than you do, anybody else, and so does he, and he's trying to leave this planet having done as many good things that he can in the given time that he has. I mean that's the way I would sum it up.

In the meantime, yes, he has become successful, and much of it has to do probably with his educational background, but all of it goes back to his natural being, in my opinion: the brains and the personality, and the goodness that the good Lord instilled in him through his parents. I don't know how I can sum it up any other way. And I say all that not because he's Lebanese, he could be anything, it's just because of my working relationship with him and being able to size him up in terms of the many other people that I work with, who don't function or behave or whatever the way he does.

AL: Great, thank you so much.

NL: Okay, I hope I've added something to your history.

AL: Absolutely.

NL: Good.

End of Interview