

Bowdoin College

Bowdoin Digital Commons

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

Special Collections and Archives

8-22-2008

Interview with Seth Brewster by Mike Hastings

Seth W. Brewster

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/mitchelloralhistory>



Part of the [Law and Politics Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brewster, Seth W., "Interview with Seth Brewster by Mike Hastings" (2008). *George J. Mitchell Oral History Project*. 176.

<https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/mitchelloralhistory/176>

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections and Archives at Bowdoin Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in George J. Mitchell Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of Bowdoin Digital Commons. For more information, please contact mdoyle@bowdoin.edu.

George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, 3000 College Sta., Brunswick, Maine 04011

© Bowdoin College

Seth W. Brewster
(Interviewer: Michael Hastings)

GMOH# 030
May 7, 2008

Mike Hastings: The following is a recorded interview of the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project, an activity of Bowdoin College. The date is August 22, 2008, the time is 1:45 p.m., this interview is taking place at One Portland Square in Portland, Maine, at the law offices of Verrill Dana. I'm Michael Hastings, the interviewer; the interviewee is Seth W. Brewster. Good afternoon, Mr. Brewster, thank you for taking the time for this interview. For the record and for the benefit of the transcriber, we begin each of our sessions by asking the interviewee to state his full name and the date and place of his birth, spelling his surname, and providing the full names of his parents.

Seth Brewster: My name is Seth Whitham Brewster, middle name Whitham, W-H-I-T-H-A-M, Brewster, B-R-E-W-S-T-E-R. I was born January 8, 1960, in Worcester, Massachusetts. My parents' names, my father Seward Blanchard Brewster, and my mother Carol Whitham Brewster.

MH: Let's begin with your parents. Where were they from, and were they also, did they live here in Maine?

SB: We moved to Maine from Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1961, when I was approximately one year old. My father grew up in New Hampshire during the winters. His father was headmaster of Kimball Union Academy in Meriden, New Hampshire, but he spent the summers in Maine because his father started a summer boys camp called Birch Rock Camp in Waterford, Maine, and so therefore my father spent all his summers in Waterford at the camp from essentially 1927, when he was born, until he went off to law school, or actually started practicing law in about 1955.

My mother was born in Port Chester, New York, and lived there. She went to college in Vermont, at Middlebury College, and met my father when he was at Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in approximately 1953. Again, they had spent a lot of time in Maine growing up, or at least my father had in Waterford, and they moved here in 1961 so my father could be general counsel of Central Maine Power, the primary Maine utility.

MH: Okay. And so did they, where did they settle?

SB: We lived in the town of Manchester, Maine, on the Pond Road, on the shores of Cobbosseecontee.

MH: I see, And did you go to school in the public schools there?

SB: I did, I went to public school, the Manchester school, from kindergarten through eighth grade, pretty much the same twenty-seven, twenty-eight kids all the way through – Manchester at that time was only a town between a thousand and two thousand. For high school I spent the first two years at Kents Hill School in Kents Hill, Maine. At that time Manchester did not have a high school, so they would pay essentially the tuition for us to go to any school in the surrounding area. In my first two years there I spent them at Kents Hill School. My last two years of high school I went to Deerfield Academy in western Massachusetts, and then after that I went to Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, and then finally after a couple years of working in New York, I went to Boston University School of Law for law school.

MH: Tell me about growing up in Manchester, what was it like?

SB: We lived in an 1865 farmhouse on about ten acres of land that abutted the lake, so it was a pretty great place to grow up. I had an older brother and a younger brother, and not only did we have plenty of space to move around, but we had a lake. So Manchester at that time was, it was still a pretty rural place to be. But it was, I enjoyed growing up in Maine, and I've always identified with Maine. In fact, when I took the bar exam, I took both Massachusetts and Maine at the same time, with the thought that eventually I was going to get back to Maine.

MH: When you were young, did you travel much with your family?

SB: Really did not travel that much. We made trips across the country a couple times, traveled down to the Caribbean once, but for the most part stayed primarily in New England.

MH: Tell me about your years at Kents Hill, the two years you spent there.

SB: Kents Hill at that time had a, it was a school of about 240 students, and approximately a hundred of those two hundred students were day students, kids from the area because, again, a number of other towns, surrounding towns also did not have a high school.

MH: They have a high school now.

SB: They do. The high school, the local high school Maranacook was built essentially for my junior year, and it was at that time that I decided to go away to high school. Kents Hill was a great experience, I thought the teachers were good, I enjoyed it, it was, but it was to a certain extent, it was a continuation of Manchester and going to the Manchester consolidated school.

MH: Was Deerfield very different?

SB: Deerfield, well, one, was very different because at that time was all boys, but also it was a collection of kids from all over New England and all over the country. So there were lots of

different influences at Deerfield, but one, the factor of being all boys and then a collection of kids from all over, it was, I enjoyed that experience as well.

MH: Any particular teachers that were particularly influential?

SB: Teachers with respect to, at what level?

MH: In Kents Hill or at Deerfield?

SB: At Deerfield I had a number of both teachers and coaches who were influential. A guy named Moe Hunt was my cross country running coach, I had a swimming coach named Larry Boyle, I had an English teacher named Russ Durgin, all who in certain ways helped me in terms of the way I express myself or just certain values that I've adopted. At Deerfield, Steve Lastowski was an English teacher of mind who was pretty important to me, and Steve Saunders, my Spanish teacher.

MH: Other than academics, were you involved in other activities?

SB: I was, throughout, as I was growing up, played baseball, basketball, but then I became a swimmer and swam actually in high school and in college, and actually continue to swim right up until "Peaks to Portland" not but a few weeks ago.

MH: Very good. Now, I'm considerably older than you are, but I remember Frank Boyden at Deerfield. Was he still in the picture when you were going there, or had he passed from the scene?

SB: Frank Boyden is a legend, one of, and his influence still I believe reigns over the academy. He retired from Deerfield in 1968, so at that time -

MH: Considerably before you got there -

SB: - so I didn't arrive there until 1976 and David Pynchon at the time was the headmaster. But the stories of Frank Boyden, of essentially taking the academy in 1908, in which it had twenty students and the trustees wanted to shut it down, to essentially building an institution that is one of the world's best.

MH: And from Deerfield, where did you go?

SB: After Deerfield I went to Dartmouth College and was at Dartmouth from 1978 until 1982.

MH: Tell me about your years at Dartmouth.

SB: Dartmouth was, it was a great place for me. It had rigorous academics, but also there

was a great culture of working hard and playing hard. As I said before, I swam in college so that was - A significant amount of my free time was spent in the pool. And I was a double major in both, in the engineering sciences and economics, so between the work load and the swimming took up a bulk of my time. Also in college I started a new sport which was the modern pentathlon. The modern pentathlon was a sport that was created when the modern Olympic games were started in 1896, and the sport was essentially established to be the, to incorporate the skills, the military skills of a Napoleonic courier. And in the ancient times, there was essentially a pentathlon for, in the ancient games, for an Olympian back then which comprised of wrestling and sprinting and javelin and discus, among others, but for the modern games the skills, or the sports for the modern pentathlon were cross country running, swimming, horseback riding, pistol shooting, and épée fencing, and it was a five day event. So that also -

MH: Five-day event?

SB: It was a five-day event, meaning there was one event, there was one event a day, so rather than, so the athletes would compete on the first day, which was riding, the second day they would compete it was the épée fencing, the third day would be the shooting, the fourth day would be the swimming, the fifth day would end up with a cross country run.

MH: I didn't really quite hear you at the beginning, so this started while you were at Dartmouth, or did you start it?

SB: No, I started doing that.

MH: Okay.

SB: I had a friend at Dartmouth College -

MH: So it was already going on.

SB: Oh, it was already going on.

MH: I mean it's gone on for a number of years.

SB: Right. And so therefore a number, at least three of my off semesters at Dartmouth I spent down in San Antonio, Texas, which was the national training center for modern pentathlon.

MH: Well, and as we speak the Olympics are going on now in China, is that an Olympic sport now?

SB: It is an Olympic sport. There have been -

MH: It doesn't get much coverage.

SB: It gets virtually no coverage. And they have modified the event significantly over the years to condense it, as well as to try to make it more spectator-friendly. Over the years, many multi-sport athletes, while in the past may have done modern pentathlon, now they're inclined to do something like the triathlon which is sort of much more accessible to do. Not too many people have fencing foils or riding horses that they have access to.

MH: So when you entered Dartmouth, did you have an idea of what you wanted to do after you graduated?

SB: I had virtually no idea what I wanted to do after I graduated. My father was a lawyer, my grandparents were educators, I was very good at the math and sciences, so that I sort of fell into an engineering science degree, but not clear of how I was going to go ultimately and what I was going to do ultimately. So my, and that's the beauty of a liberal arts education, is being able to take as many different courses, whether it happens to be fluid dynamics on the engineering side, or whether it's the King James version of the Bible as literature on the other side, so, and sometimes I describe myself as having a great breadth of skills, not maybe a great particular depth at any one of them. Being in a place like Dartmouth certainly satisfied that.

MH: Were you in a fraternity when you were there?

SB: I was.

MH: Which one?

SB: I was in a fraternity called Phi Delta Alpha, and there were, we had about twenty, twenty-five in my class and about a hundred brothers overall.

MH: Do you still keep in touch with a lot of your, with brothers and classmates from Dartmouth?

SB: I do, I do, I get together with some of my friends at Dartmouth almost on an annual basis, we'll go back to Hanover and have a reunion pretty much every year if the schedules work out. So I keep in very close touch with friends from Dartmouth. And, on the other side, my brother, my younger brother was, also went to Dartmouth College and also was in the same fraternity as I was.

MH: Tell me about your siblings.

SB: My older brother is deceased, he died in 1985. My younger brother is a year younger than I am, and he is the college advisor at St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, which is a, certainly a high pressure job in today's environment. He has been at St. Paul's for, since 1994. He left briefly a few years ago and actually worked for two years in the admissions office at Bowdoin College before returning to St. Paul's. His wife also is in development at St. Paul's, but she also was in the development office at Bowdoin for two years before returning to St.

Paul's.

MH: What two years would those have been? The reason I ask is I –

SB: I want to say it was approximately 2004 through 2006.

MH: I see. And so you're pretty much a New England based family, then.

SB: Very much, very much a New England based family. And along those lines, my great-great grandparents came over on the Mayflower, and some people, my friends have joked with me about, that my family got here first and we still have nothing. So maybe I have a cause of action against my predecessors.

MH: So after college what did you decide to do?

SB: After college, I went to work in New York City for Arthur Andersen & Company. Back then it still existed, and they had three divisions: audit division, tax division, and a consulting division, and I worked for Arthur Andersen Consulting, before it actually split off from Arthur Andersen to be –

MH: What did that involve, what were you focusing on?

SB: It was mostly systems consulting with various businesses. So we would go into various businesses, usually very large, and review their information systems needs, and maybe even install an information system if necessary. But some of the clients I'd worked for were Colgate-Palmolive in New York, I worked for the State of New York up in Albany, I have worked for the transit system of New York, to name a few.

MH: So you were based in New York City.

SB: I was based in New York City.

MH: That must have been quite a difference after living in Manchester, Maine, Deerfield, Massachusetts, and Hanover.

SB: It was a huge difference. I lived in Brooklyn Heights with college friends, but going from Maine to New York was a huge difference, though I did have fun. New York City is either for the very rich or the very poor, and at that time I was very poor.

MH: And you did that, it sounds like you were in New York but you were actually going out of New York a lot, you were fairly mobile.

SB: I had a lot of different projects that were outside of the city. Mostly in the area, but you know, there would be some projects that I was on the road for a while.

MH: Okay, now for the big question. When did, during all this, with this biographical background here, when did you first have an interest in politics, or did you have an interest in politics and when was it, when did it first arise?

SB: I will say that I took a course in college on political philosophy that I loved, and I read all the classics and I just enjoyed the debate of the political philosophy. And so that was when I first became intrigued, and of course it was really different from what I was doing. A large part of my course load was the hardcore sciences, and I found that when I could get into things like, something like the political philosophy, I just, I really enjoyed it. So that's sort of when I thought, 'Well, I enjoy that.' I was never someone who sought elected office, either in high school or in college, so that was not, that part of, seeking to be in elected office was not something that I sought but I did enjoy what the altruism of what government could be.

MH: So how did you make the Mitchell connection?

SB: Well again, I was from Maine, and so therefore, being from Maine was the, sort of the core. After I was in New York I went to law school and spent three years in Boston, and then I clerked for a judge in Boston -

MH: What judge was that?

SB: Federal Court Judge William G. Young, who was the chief judge of the District of Massachusetts until about last year, or maybe it was two years ago.

MH: So he was chief judge while you were clerking for him?

SB: No, he was not, he was actually appointed to the federal court in 1985. He previously had sat on the Massachusetts state courts and was very active. One of the cases he had presided over while he was on the state court was the Big Dan's rape trial, out of Bedford, New Hampshire [*sic*: New Bedford, Mass.] that got a lot of national press. So I worked for Judge Young in 1988, and one of the trials that we had actually was located out in Springfield, Massachusetts. It was a seditious conspiracy case against a Mainer, Ray Luc Levasseur and his associates who were tracked by the FBI for approximately eight to ten years for a series of bombings and bank robberies. Among the bombings that they were accused of and I believe convicted, of were the bombing of the Suffolk County courthouse in Boston, the bombing of the CMP headquarters in Augusta, Maine, as well as a number of corporate bombings I believe, like Union Carbide in southern Connecticut.

MH: What was the intent? What was their theme?

SB: Well the theme, again this is all in approximately from 1974-75 through 1982-83, maybe even '84. It was of course, from the government's point of view, was, their intent was to overthrow the government.

MH: Hmm-hmm.

SB: And that's what they were charged with. There have been only, I believe, eight to ten cases of seditious conspiracy charged in the history of the nation. So there was a political bent to what they were doing, but it was very, it was way off the screen. In fact, a couple of the members were convicted of murder of a New Jersey state trooper, I believe in 1979, 1980.

MH: I was out of the country when this trial was going on so I, I remember somewhat the Suffolk courthouse bombing, and I recall somebody telling me about the CMP, but I, because I wasn't here during the trial. What was your role? I mean you were a clerk for the judge for, how long were you clerk?

SB: I was a law clerk for about ten months, from January of 1988 until November of 1988.

MH: Did a trial like this take up a lot of that time?

SB: I took up much more time than that. In fact, I believe that this trial had the longest jury selection in the history of the federal judiciary. We spent essentially, picking a jury in this case, from March of 1988 until the end of my tenure in November of 1988, simply picking a jury. I guess the footnote to that is, is that ultimately in the case, after not only a year of essentially picking a jury and then I believe another eighteen months of trying the case, there was a mistrial, meaning the jury could not get, could not come to a decision on whether to convict or acquit.

MH: So it had to be retried?

SB: So it had to be retried, and I believe at that time that most, virtually all the members in the group had already been convicted and sentenced to twenty-five year terms or greater, that the government elected not to proceed and try them again.

MH: So you finished this judgeship, I mean, excuse me, clerkship for Judge Young; was it so discouraging that you decided to try something different?

SB: No, I was fascinated. Again, I was fascinated by the courtroom, I really enjoyed the courtroom, and this is another thing that intrigued me about politics was sort of the crucible of what went on inside the courtroom. I actually thought when I first went to law school that I was going to be a corporate lawyer; my background had been very technical -

MH: And your father had been a corporate lawyer.

SB: Yeah, my father had been a corporate lawyer. I was doing business for many different businesses when I was at Arthur Anderson, and so one of my summers as a summer clerk, law students work at various law firms - I was working for a firm named Kirkland & Ellis in Chicago, and I was working on a big corporate project which was I believe the leveraged buyout of the

Chicago Sun Times. And as I was doing this, and it was probably a two-week project, all I could think of is that it was like watching paint dry. Subsequently, that summer I worked on another project that took me to Manhattan for five weeks and which involved essentially a corporate acquisition, a hostile acquisition of an oil company, and what was being litigated was the legality of a device, a shareholder device named a 'poison pill,' whether those devices were legal, or illegal in this case, under New Jersey law. We ultimately, in that case we represented the acquirer who was trying to acquire the company, had the 'poison pill' struck down and he was able to acquire the company. I enjoyed that; that was fast-paced.

MH: You said that you had been admitted to the bar in Massachusetts and Maine. Did you not have to get admitted to these other states?

SB: Well this is actually before I graduated from law school.

MH: Oh, okay, before you graduated.

SB: So when you're a summer clerk you can assist on various practices and work with lawyers. So I, but through that experience I really decided that I liked the crucible of the courtroom, and then my third year of law school I served in a program in which I served as a prosecutor in the Quincy District Court outside of Boston, and I enjoyed that experience as well, and by that time had pretty much decided that if I were going to be a lawyer, then I was going to be a trial lawyer. So, but after clerking for the judge I went back to the firm that I had been with before, that is Ropes & Gray in Boston, and I worked for them for two, for about two-and-a-half years longer.

And then I had a friend who had formerly been at Ropes & Gray, whose father was in the U.S. Senate, who had heard that Senator Mitchell was looking for a trade person, a trade legislative aide, and he called me and said, "You know, you should move to Washington and do this. I know that's not what you're doing now, but that's quite an opportunity." So I at that stage, and this is sometime in 1991 I believe, in June or May of '91, I got my resume down there and expressed my interest at becoming a trade legislative assistant for Senator Mitchell.

MH: I see, and who hired you, besides the Senator?

SB: Yeah, sure, it was really John Hilley and Mary McAleney were the two who essentially made the decision of whether to hire me or not. But I interviewed, I mean the people I talked to were obviously John and Mary, but Bobby Rozen who had previously done the trade work for the Senator was also involved, and there might have been Kim Wallace as well.

MH: Was Bob Rozen staying on but in another capacity?

SB: That's right, Bob was doing, at that time Senator Mitchell was on the Finance Committee, and I believe he was also on environment and public works, were his two primary committee

assignments. And the Finance Committee was, with not only Senator Mitchell being majority leader but also being a primary responsibility with lots of legislation coming through, Bobby Rozen was probably swamped. And at that time what was going on was both NAFTA and the Uruguay round of the GATT were being negotiated and I think the thought was that Bob wouldn't be able to handle all the Finance Committee, on the finance side, tax side, and also do the trade side as well.

MH: So you were, were you doing anything other than trade?

SB: I probably was, but as I sit here today I'm not sure I can remember what that was. I do remember I had, there were certain things involving the U.S. Mint I may have had some responsibilities on -

MH: How about projects in Maine? Did you -? Sometimes the Senator would have legislative staff people do selected projects in Maine, and I wondered if that was your case.

SB: Sure, I mean for example, with respect to certain trade initiatives that would influence Maine constituents, for example BIW [Bath Iron Works], I remember having a number of meetings with respect to some of the initiatives that BIW was interested in with respect to some of the other initiatives that other Maine companies were interested in. So, though my projects were not sort of building or public works projects but more legislative projects on the trade side. I was also sort of responsible for meeting and talking and developing ideas and working with the Maine constituents.

MH: Did it involve any travel, your job there?

SB: I did have some travel. I'm just trying to think - I will say that in '92, which was my first year on staff, I was part of a group that went to Israel for ten days, of a number of trade legislative aides for various senators, so I did do that. There was another time that I went to Silicon Valley, by initiative by the semiconductor industry, to meet with the companies out there with other legislative staffers.

MH: Did your job involve public speaking at all, I mean did you represent the Senator before groups and give presentations and things?

SB: On very, very select basis. The only, again, the only thing I can remember that I did was, at a footwear conference I was asked to talk about legislative developments, what was happening on the Senate and in Congress on things that were important to the footwear industry. And again, I was just there sort of to talk about what was happening, not necessarily to tell what the Senator's views were with respect to that. But, and I think I also did another one of those up here in Portland, and I can't, at this, again, I can't even remember the industry.

MH: You mentioned NAFTA and the Uruguay round of GATT, could you talk a little bit about

those issues when you were working on them?

SB: Sure. The first one that really was, again, that was started to be worked on before I came on to Senator Mitchell's staff, was the North American Free Trade Agreement. In 1988 the United States and Canada had essentially secured and had implemented a U.S.-Canada free trade agreement. After that there was a decision that the executive decision, which was supported by Congress, to expand the U.S.-Canada free trade agreement to include Mexico. So those discussions were going on I believe from 1988-1989 right through until there was an agreement signed I believe in November of 1992. And again, it was essentially the elimination of tariffs and trade barriers between those three nations, again, United States, Mexico and Canada.

MH: As majority leader, what role did the Senator play with respect to NAFTA?

SB: Well the critical piece, or a couple critical pieces of the legislative piece is, first, the granting to the executive branch what is known as fast track authority. Fast track authority essentially says that if the Congress grants fast track authority to the executive branch it means that they can negotiate an agreement and Congress has the ability to vote it up or down, but they are not allowed to amend it, alter it, whatever. And one of the practical aspects of it is, is that you have, when you have multilateral trade agreements, to have continual amendments on it doesn't make it very workable from the executive point of view. So that, the fast track, the grant of fast track authority, and extension of fast track authority to the government, to the executive branch, should get that agreement completed, was already granted before I got there, but that's a critical role of the majority leader, of getting fast track authority and giving it to the executive branch. I believe that the executive branch won't try to even argue, try to negotiate without such authority, and nor do I believe that anyone in the world would want to negotiate with a government that doesn't have fast track authority.

Second, once the agreement is completed, then it has to be implemented, meaning there are a number of U.S. laws that have to be changed in order to ensure that the U.S. lives up to its obligations under the negotiated agreement. And that's the other piece that has to happen is, once the agreement is signed, the nations have to implement it, which in our case, so therefore whether it's changing the harmonized tariff schedules to be consistent with the terms of the agreement, or whether it's changing the way the Department of Commerce does either dumping cases or countervailing duty cases, the changes of rules that applies there, it trickles through so there are so many different aspects a trade agreement may impact upon domestic laws. And so therefore, in order to in essence secure, or finally implement a trade agreement, it really is up to the majority leader to ensure that happens. I mean -

MH: A lot of floor activity.

SB: Well, there's a lot of floor activity but only to the extent that, of ensuring that the, it's brought, it goes through committee and it gets to the floor and it's voted on, and to make sure the votes are lined up. Now again, -

MH: Did some of that fall on you; I mean the lining up of votes?

SB: No, no, that, the lining up of votes is done at a pretty high level. In fact during, what was legendary during Clinton's administration, because when NAFTA was in fact implemented, was in his first year of the Clinton administration. And Clinton was pretty masterful of talking to members of the House, primarily, in getting them to sign on to the agreement, to get them to sign on to the implementing legislation, to vote to approve. So that the, that effort came pretty much from the White House, to approve the legislation.

MH: You worked for Senator Mitchell at a time when he was majority leader and he was very busy, and I imagine he had a very large staff if you counted his personal staff and his committee staff. Were you actually on the committee staff, or were you actually on the personal staff?

SB: I was on the personal staff. The lines were pretty fungible, meaning there was no other person who was doing the trade work for him, so it was titular that I was on the personal staff, but I could have been on the committee staff or the leader staff.

MH: Right, you were an S-res40 person; he could designate either place for you to be.

SB: Yeah.

MH: Did you, were you with him a lot? I mean did you see him when, he was in committee, I assume, right? I mean I'm thinking that he must have been very, it must have been very short little -

SB: Well, given that everyone at that stage, I mean this is where the staff I believe were critical to him, because everyone wanted a piece of his time.

MH: How did you get that? Because, I mean who did you go to if you needed to talk to him for fifteen minutes, and how long did you have to wait before that occurred?

SB: Most of my communication with him with respect to various really important issues that had to be addressed were done through memorandum. And the rule was, is never make it more than one page, the shorter the better. Which is a pretty good rule, I mean most effective communication is actually shorter, can be much more persuasive or much more helpful than longer. So if I needed, if I, for the most part needed – because I'd like to think that I was thinking proactively – needed his input on things, I would write him essentially a one page memo that would get in front of him and he would have a response, he would be able to respond to that. There were other times where, if I really needed, if there were something, and this happened a few times, where I really needed his attention on something that was going on right then, then essentially I would talk to John, John Hilley, and say, "John, this is what's going on," and John would make the call of whether or not the Senator needed to weigh in on that one, or whether that

needed his time or not.

MH: What was Hilley's title at that point?

SB: Chief of staff.

MH: Chief of staff.

SB: And he was on majority leader staff. But John was the person, John was very capable, he subsequently worked at – I don't know whether John's going to be part of this interview process or not -

MH: Oh, I'm sure he will be. He may have been interviewed already. There are several of us doing interviews.

SB: Yeah. And he had a good feel of what the Senator needed to be involved with, and what he didn't need to be involved with. So that's, so I do remember there was one time, I was over on the House side on something that was in conference, and it was late at night, I believe it was maybe eleven or twelve at night, on conference. And I remember talking to Hilley at that time, and him getting the Senator on the phone with me for, to work out what the issue was at that particular time.

MH: Any personal recollections of episodes with the Senator that stand out in your mind during your two years, two-and-a-half years there?

SB: He was always, he was, again, very busy, and very businesslike, he was a master of sort of time management. A few of them, I mean and some of them sort of weave into my own personal circumstances. My very first year on staff I remember that, I remember there was a leadership meeting in the majority leader's office, and it was to talk about, and this was to talk about trade issues, so I was called in to staff that meeting. So you had the leadership, and again it was, as I can remember, it was [Lloyd] Bentsen, [Max] Baucus, Mitchell, and I want to say [Daniel] Moynihan was there but I wasn't sure in what capacity. And it was again involving a number of the sort of the trade issues, or what was going to come I believe with respect to NAFTA, so it was a pretty high level meeting. There were other obviously staffers who were, for their respective members were there as well.

I had just previously, within the last month or so, my son was born, and it was my job in the morning to get him out of bed, get him dressed, get him, well I actually used to commute into town with him on the subway, on the metro, and get him to the Department of Justice day care center. And so when I was walking out of this high level meeting, I noticed that my son had essentially thrown up all over the back of my coat, which I didn't see until that time. And all I could do is what you're doing right now, Michael, is just laugh.

But Senator Mitchell called I believe when my daughter was born, and also when my son was born, I had stayed home for a week to be with the kids after they were born and to help out my wife at the time.

MH: He's very good at keeping track of what is, about the important events in staff's lives.

SB: So those are the, at this stage, those are two of the sort of episodes that I can remember. There were times, there were certain times when there were certain issues coming up which he was, it was important, those issues were important to him with respect to issues involving Maine constituents or Maine footwear companies, and he was certain to impress upon you that, essentially, "Don't screw up."

MH: Who were his colleagues on the Finance Committee at that point?

SB: At that time, for the very first year, Bentsen was the chairman of the Finance Committee. On the Democratic side it was Moynihan, Jay Rockefeller, Max Baucus, Bill Bradley. On the Republican side it was Packwood, I want to say Gorton, Larry Craig – though I may –

MH: As majority leader, was he able to attend a lot of those Finance Committee meetings, or was he frequently -

SB: A lot of them he was not, I mean there were a lot of times when, you know, when essentially I was staffing the meeting and he would not be able to be there. When, as a staffer, one of my more critical times was when there was markup, when there was a bill before the committee that was being marked up. And those are some of the evenings I can remember that I was, I would work, I'm not even sure I even slept, in order to prepare for markup, so he had all the materials that he needed before we went through that, which meant essentially any prospective amendments and what the impact of those amendments were. And so that was a period of time where I remember just as a staffer, because you always hated, if there was anything to come up and you didn't have any background on it for him. He'd look at you and you'd hate to have to look back at him with the stupid look. So I really -

MH: I remember that situation perfectly.

SB: Well, I tried not to. I lost a lot of sleep to try to not have to look back at him with the stupid look.

MH: Exactly. Very good. So you did this for two years, and you were there when he announced that – sorry about that.

(Telephone interruption)

MH: Tell me what it was like to learn that the Senator was not going to run again.

SB: I think most of us were in shock. It was I believe in March of 1994 when he announced that he was not going to seek reelection, and it sort of came out, he had a meeting, he had a meeting with the staff, or there was a meeting with the staff, to tell them that he was not going to seek reelection in 1994, and a lot of people, again, most people were surprised. You know, clearly there was already discussion about the election that year. So, and at that time I had been on staff for just over two years, I came on in 1994 and had been on staff for two years, I was just sort of getting ready to, adjusted to life in D.C., but to a certain extent, for my own personal circumstances, it probably, it was good for me, not bad for me. I mean I never saw myself as a lifetime legislative staffer, but for me to have a three-year experience working for the majority leader and then be forced to do something else was not a bad, for my own career, was not a bad thing.

MH: And so you finished out the year in 1994 with him.

SB: That's correct.

MH: And then he retires, and you come back to Maine.

SB: That's correct.

MH: And how did you end up here, at Verrill Dana?

SB: Well, at that time I had, my daughter was born in January of 1994, so by that time I had two kids. And while I loved living in Washington and working in Washington, I also knew that I couldn't probably be really effective at my job and also be a really effective dad if I were to continue to keep some of the hours I was keeping. I often found my schedule, when things got down to the end of the session, and particularly when the trade legislation was going hot and heavy, that I'd often find myself at the office until midnight every night and trying to catch the last train home from Union Station.

MH: Where did you live?

SB: I lived up in Friendship Heights, in Washington, D.C., and so I can remember -

MH: Just off of Wisconsin Avenue.

SB: That's right, go up to, up off Wisconsin Avenue and then walk down the street. And I can remember a number of times running from my office in the Russell Building to catch the Metro to make sure I got that last train home.

MH: I lived near Friendship Heights as well, but I actually, I started working on the Hill before the subway was even there and it was like an hour and twenty minute commute, to go from, you

know, Bethesda to the Capital before the subway.

SB: Well now that actually, one of my more, maybe my most horrifying moment as a Senate staffer happened surrounding the subway. One night, immediately before markup, I brought my file with me because I figured I needed at least a couple hours sleep before the markup the next morning. And so what happened was, is that I got, when I got on the train at midnight, I believe I fell asleep, and then when I got to my stop I ran off the train but left my file on the train. And I realized it almost immediately as the train was leaving the station. God bless the Metro service at that time, but within twenty minutes they had found the file, they had put it on another train and I had received it, so my angst was only about an hour long.

MH: Wow. So you apply for a position here with Verrill Dana.

SB: That's right. At that time I decided that, I grew up in Maine, I had two small children, my wife was an assistant U.S. attorney in the District of Columbia, working for the U.S. attorney's office down there, so I thought that raising kids in the Portland, Maine, area would be pretty good. So I, obviously the Senator had a lot of contacts up here, but I had a lot of contacts up here, and I interviewed with Verrill Dana and a few others, and decided that I liked the people here and came to work here on January 2nd of 1995.

MH: Has your practice in Portland dealt with subjects that you dealt with when you were in Congress?

SB: Occasionally, occasionally. When I first got here it was my hope that I was going to be able to integrate some of the work that I had been doing on trade legislation into my professional work here. But I also was a trial lawyer, and so there were a few projects that I would, that people would ask for my thoughts on either legislation or interpretations of the NAFTA or the GATT or what was going to happen. And that has still happened, even this last year I have helped to weave in various arguments involving either the North American Free Trade Agreement or the current General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. But for the most part, the impact of the work that I've done has helped me in my practice but I don't advise on legislation or do essentially trade work significantly here.

MH: What types of clients do you have? I'm not asking who they are, just the types of –

SB: Sure, I do all kinds of commercial litigation, and I guess my specialty is anti-trust, anti-trust litigation. So I have represented a number of companies defending class action anti-trust claims, which is probably a core of what I've done. But I represent other businesses and can be involved in any kind of dispute. I recently had a case that was filed in federal court out in Springfield, Massachusetts involving a newspaper and the acquisition, or essentially someone taking away the newspaper, and the rights over that. I've had cases here with respect to employment contracts, and the rights and obligations under employment contracts is something that I see frequently.

MH: And you've continued your swimming, you say.

SB: I have, I actually did a, in 2000 I did an iron man triathlon, but once I actually completed that -

MH: That's swimming, biking, and running?

SB: Swimming, biking, and running. It's a two-and-a-half mile swim, followed by a 112-mile bike, followed by a marathon, twenty-six mile marathon. I finished that in November of 2000 and I then decided that trying to practice law and be a father to three kids and do it, an iron man triathlon, they all don't fit together so something had to give.

MH: So your third child was born here in Portland.

SB: That's right; my third child was born in May of 1998 right here in town.

MH: And does your wife still continue to work for the U.S. attorney's office?

SB: She continues to work for the U.S. attorney's office here in Portland. We were actually divorced about a year ago and so, but she has been at that job now for the last thirteen years.

MH: Any party activity, or political activity in the Portland area for you?

SB: Just a little, just a little bit of it. You know, really for the most part contributions and attending political fund raisers and things like that, but that's probably been the extent of it. Between, again, the practice and the kids, it's been hard for me to do much of anything else.

MH: What about contacts with the people that you used to work in the Senate with, do you see many of the people? Some of them are here in Maine now.

SB: Sure, actually Mary McAleney and I get together regularly. And so I see, of the people I see most frequently, it would probably be Mary, and, but occasionally a broader group of staff members will get together here for dinner. So, but I haven't seen, for example, some of the Washington people since I left Washington back in '94, like Bobby Rozen.

MH: Lastly I want to ask if you've had any contact with the Senator, or much contact with the Senator in the years since you left his staff in 1994.

SB: Sure, and mostly it would be at various events; I try to go to various events in which he is and we'll share pleasantries very briefly. But mostly my contact with the Senator has been through those various events.

MH: When you go to those events it's, at least I'm always struck about what an enormous network of people there are that are in some way connected with George Mitchell, either worked for him or participated in his campaign.

SB: Yeah. Well one of my, this is actually another very funny story that I might as well tell because there's no other reason, oral history is. In 1994, in September, they were having – this is during the Clinton administration – they were having a Uruguay round GATT kickoff presentation at the White House. And there were four speakers, and I'm not sure that I'm going to be able to say who the speakers were right now, other than I know Senator Mitchell was one of them, as being majority leader. I believe the, President Clinton was one of the speakers, well was the last speaker, I think Carla Hills for some reason was also a speaker –

MH: She was on the ITC, wasn't she?

SB: Well she was actually -

MH: Special trade rep?

SB: Yeah, she was a special trade representative for the Bush administration. And then for the Clinton administration it was, it was his lawyer friend, who did a pretty good job and his name's escaping me right now, I think he was one of the speakers as well. So I had done a draft of Senator Mitchell's comments for this kickoff parade, and this was essentially a sort of a rally to say, "Listen, this is what we're working on, this is the benefits of the Uruguay round and we're working on it," so they had it, it was a big event down at the White House. So I went down there with Senator Mitchell to attend this kickoff presentation at the White House, and I was in the audience. And then when the president, President Clinton concluded his remarks, he and Senator Mitchell were ushered, or started to be ushered, into the White House. And just as they were being ushered away into the White House, Senator Mitchell grabbed the president by the arm, turned him around, brought him to the rope line in order to introduce him to me. And so, and he was very gracious in his remarks, "Mr. President, I'd just like to introduce you to Seth Brewster, who is the staffer who wrote my comments," and the president was gracious as well, and he shook a couple other hands and then he went back to the White House.

So that was, that was that particular event. The next night there was a big celebration of George Mitchell's career dinner that was being held, I want to say it was at Union Station, but it was someplace, and all the luminaries of Washington were there to essentially praise George Mitchell for his career and what he had done, and including the president. And when the president stood up he said, one of the points that he made was, and he said a number of other things about the Senator, but he said, "The most amazing thing about Senator Mitchell is whenever he comes to the White House, he always manages to bring some guy from Maine with him and introduce me to them." And then he said, "Just yesterday I was well on the way into the White House when I thought, 'Yes, I have finally gotten back into the White House and not had to be introduced to a guy from Maine,' when Mitchell grabbed me by the arm and dragged me out to the rope line to

introduce me to some other guy from Maine.” All I could think of is, is that I was being the butt of the president’s joke.

MH: It would be great to have a tape of that.

SB: Actually I do, I had, I was laughing so much that I had friends who were able to pull together the clips at the White House and merge them with the clips of what the president was saying.

MH: Oh, that’s great, that’s great. We should try to get a copy of that for the Mitchell Archives, that’s a good story. We always give people the opportunity to answer the question they wish they’d been asked. Is there anything that you’d like to say about the Senator or your time working for him, or really on any topic that’s related to what we’ve been discussing?

SB: No, I mean my only point would be it was an honor to work for him. He was, when I got there, clearly revered on the Hill, and the guy who was in charge. And it was really an honor to be able to work with him, to see how he worked, to see the way he did things, and I think my career has been helped by it.

MH: That’ll be the last word; thank you very much.

SB: Great, thank you.

End of Interview