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## Beliveau, Severin oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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## **Interview with Severin Beliveau by Andrea L'Hommedieu**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Beliveau, Severin

### **Interviewer**

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

### **Date**

September 2, 1999

### **Place**

Augusta, Maine

### **ID Number**

MOH 149

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### **Biographical Note**

Severin M. Beliveau was born and raised in Rumford, Maine to Margaret (McCarthy) and Albert Beliveau, Sr. He grew up in an activist Democrat family in the 1950s and 1960s, and witnessed the rise of the Democratic Party in Maine. Mr. Beliveau attended Georgetown University, and graduated from Georgetown Law School in 1963, and practiced for a brief time in Rumford with his father and his brother, Albert Beliveau, Jr. His Maine political experience includes chairmanship of the Maine Democratic Party in the late 1960s, Democratic National Committee service, as well as state legislative experience. He also ran for governor in 1986, losing to Jim Tierney in the Democratic primary. He is married to Cynthia Murray Beliveau and they have four boys. He is currently a partner in the Maine law firm Preti, Flaherty, Beliveau, Pachios & Haley, LLC and is an influential lobbyist. He has served in such capacities as the president of the American Association of the Forum Francophone des Affaires, and the French Consular Agent for the State of Maine.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: Muskie family in Rumford; The Beliveau family and Rumford; Muskie's law practice; Albert Beliveau, Sr; Maine Supreme Court appointment; Bill McCarthy; Louis Jalbert; Democratic Party organization in the 1950s-1960s; changing Maine

politics; impact of Independents on Maine political parties; Muskie's temper; Franco-American ethnicity in Maine; 1986 gubernatorial election; Margaret Beliveau; and Muskie's legacy.

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## **Transcript**

**Andrea L'Hommedieu:** This is an interview on September 2nd, 1999 at 45 Memorial Circle in Augusta, Maine with Mr. Severin Beliveau, this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Mr. Beliveau, would you start by giving me your full name?

**Severin Beliveau:** I'm Severin Beliveau. I reside in Hallowell, born and raised in Rumford.

Married to Cynthia Murray Beliveau, four boys ages, what are their ages? Twelve, seventeen, nineteen, twenty-two. Why don't I just go and, let me just go through a narrative, that's probably the easiest thing.

**AL:** Sure.

**SB:** Of course, we all know Muskie was a native of Rumford, and born there and attended high school. From there he went to Bates College. His father was a tailor on Exchange Street. My parents were both Rumford natives, knew the Muskies quite well. They lived in the Virginia section of Rumford, and my father did a lot of business with them over the years. Then after, also during that time my uncle William McCarthy, who was a practicing lawyer in Rumford, was friendly with Muskie.

Following WWII, which I think was probably after Muskie graduated from law school, and the Navy, they, Muskie became chairman of the Office of Price Stabilization for Maine. And [he] hired, among others, my uncle Bill McCarthy to work with him, for him. At the time, I think, Tom Delahanty and other lawyers were also working with him. Following that, Muskie opened an office and practiced law in Waterville. And, but during the war the office was, he had opened his office in Waterville prior to the war. But during the war he asked Rupert Aldrich to, who was then a lawyer and clerk of courts in South Paris, to manage the office for him, at least to keep it open. And Rupert used to drive from South Paris to Waterville a couple times a week to maintain the office.

So after the war, as I said, he was appointed director of the OPS office. And then Bill McCarthy returned to Rumford.

At the time, my father [Albert Beliveau Sr.], in 1935, in 1935 I should say, my father was appointed by Governor Brann to the superior court, where he remained '35 until 1954, when he was appointed to the state supreme court by Governor Cross. We all know in '54 Muskie defeated Cross in his, yeah, for his second term. And then, in 1955, there was an opening on the state supreme court. The then chief justice retired, and Muskie appointed Robert Williamson of Augusta to that position, ignoring my father who was a senior judge. Fearful, from my perspective, that his appointment would have been somewhat controversial because he was French-Catholic. And to suggest that this was not well received by the family, would be an understatement. And to suggest that father was embittered over this would also be an understatement.

So that created real conflict between our family and Muskie. And years later, when he was in the Senate, he attempted to redeem himself. He was nice to me and my brother, we were practicing law at the time in Rumford, he said nice things about us when I was elected district attorney. And I was a state legislator in the house and the senate, and he was supportive. Then, when I ran for party chair in the late '60s, he assisted me in achieving, being elected state chairman. So, I think he probably, I think he also appointed my uncle to the municipal court, municipal court judge in Rumford for a short term. So the McCarthys, Bill McCarthy, my uncle on my mother's side of the family, was close to Muskie. And I was really relatively close to him, although I still harbored that feeling toward him in the way, the manner in which he treated

my father at the time. And that pretty much reflected what, I mean, he wasn't a profile in courage, and to some extent that can be understood politically, that he didn't want people to know that he was a Polish Catholic. He didn't, certainly didn't utilize, didn't define himself and describe it as such during his campaign, again recognizing that this was a state that had been historically Republican, dominated by Yankees, and ethnics didn't play much of a role, whether you were Polish, French, Irish, it didn't make any difference.

So, then after Muskie retired, [and] became junior partner at Chadbourne & Parke, he referred several cases to me, a couple of major clients that the firm now has here because of Muskie. And again, I view that as his attempt to redeem himself for the way he behaved back in the '50s. So that's my statement.

**AL:** Your brother, you said, is also a lawyer? And what is his name?

**SB:** Albert, Jr.

**AL:** And does he practice in Maine?

**SB:** He practices in Rumford, has done for many years. He retired a few years ago. Just another point: when he was, when Muskie was running for president in '72, I worked with him. I worked with Mitchell at the time, and I was with Muskie when he appeared in front of the, in Manchester, at the *Manchester Union Leader*. After I'll show you a photograph I have, someone sent it, I had it framed. But I'm standing right behind him. It appeared in *Life Magazine*, I was there; Mitchell and I and Louis Jalbert and a few people. I was involved in his campaign; we worked for him in New Hampshire, did a few things for him.

**AL:** What were your impressions of Louis Jalbert, did you ever work with him at the state level? You must have in the '60s.

**SB:** Did I ever. I knew Jalbert, I represented, I was his lawyer for twenty years. I knew him better than any person in the state of Maine. Louis was a great, colorful guy. Devious, unsupportive of his own people, did whatever he could to subvert Franco-politicians, fearful that they would be a threat to him. And as a consequence Louis was a very pleasant, engaging, outgoing individual, but unprincipled.

**AL:** When you were a party chair in the '60s, what. . . ?

**SB:** Late '60s, early '70s, yeah.

**AL:** Late '60s, early 70s. Who were the people that you worked closely with in that position?

**SB:** A number of people. Ken Curtis, he was very helpful, we were very close. Pease was the vice-chair, became the chairperson. The Chandlers, Nancy and Bruce, you've talked to them have you? Bruce was a very active lawyer from Waterville, knew Muskie. He retired, became, he was appointed to the superior court, retired. And [he] lives in Arizona with Nancy Chandler, who was Democratic National Committeewoman for a number of years. And also worked very

closely with Muskie on that project to raise money for the law foundation that Muskie chaired in Maine, trying to raise money for indigent. . . .

**AL:** Legal Aid?

**SB:** Legal Aid, yeah, it was a form of legal aid. Nancy was the one who persuaded Muskie to become publicly identified and to chair that effort in the, I guess it was late '80s, early '90s. And, as I said, they live in Arizona.

**AL:** How long have you been involved in politics?

**SB:** Since 1964. I was district attorney, member of the house, member of the senate, party chairman, national committeeman.

**AL:** When you were part of the senate and the house, were you representing the Augusta area?

**SB:** No, no, no, Rumford.

**AL:** Rumford.

**SB:** Yeah, Oxford County, yeah.

**AL:** How have you seen politics change in the state over the years?

**SB:** It's become more professional. By that I mean that the cost of running for office today compared to what it was twenty, twenty-five years ago, is enormous. We've seen a dramatic decline of party loyalty, the relevance of a party organization; campaigns are personalized, each individual has his own organization that doesn't depend upon the party as an institution to assist it. Although with most recent campaign financing reform, I think the party, the role of the party will become stronger, because it will be a fund-raising vehicle. It'll have the capacity and the legal ability to raise money for individual candidates. There- A dependence will develop upon the party as an institution, I think, beginning in 19-, in the year 2000, which has not been the case. Through the advent of Jim Longley and Angus King, two strong independents, and the fact that so many Democrats. . . . We don't have strong Democratic leaders. . . .

*(telephone interruption)*

**SB:** . . . the fact that he didn't have the depth of strength and support, but again, this is '72, when people expected candidates to be, you know, very strong unemotional individuals. Any evidence, any expression of emotion whatsoever was treated or considered a sign of weakness. [Thomas] Ed Eagleton, remember, who withdrew as a vice-presidential candidate because it came out that he was being, he had seen a psychiatrist. And he had to withdraw as a, he had been in fact nominated as a vice presidential candidate for McGovern in '72, right after this, so.

**AL:** How do you think it would be viewed today, in light of. . . ?

**SB:** Oh, today I don't think it, I don't think it would be the liability that it was then. But the problem with Muskie was that he was, while he was a very talented fellow, but he didn't generate the personal loyalty that's generally expected and required on the part of a candidate at that level, because of his explosive personality. I mean, he mellowed in time, as everybody does, but in the '70s, at the height of his career, he was a very difficult man to deal with, work with.

**AL:** Did you interact with him at that point at all?

**SB:** Not very much, not very much.

**AL:** You never, did you ever see his temper?

**SB:** Oh sure, oh yeah, oh, I was the beneficiary of that.

**AL:** Can you give me an example?

**SB:** Yeah: during the campaign I'd sat in a number of meetings, and I remember at the convention particularly, in, Miami convention '72, when he, actually I have, go further back. In 1968 at the Democratic convention in Chicago I had just been elected chairman, and I was, and I drove him to Mayor Daley's office when he, when Daley told him that he was recommending to Humphrey for insisting that Muskie be the VP candidate, in order to attract the Polish vote in Chicago, in order to assure that they carry Illinois. Then we had a big event for him, we had a major reception for him, cocktail party for him at the Lakeside, Lakeshore Holiday Inn in Chicago. I've seen him blow, I mean he, at a number of events, party events, conventions, fund-raising events, you know. When things just didn't suit him or didn't go according to how he thought they should, he wasn't at all reluctant to express himself.

**AL:** When living in Rumford, did your parents interact with Muskie's parents?

**SB:** Not very much, no, no.

**AL:** Did they know of the Muskies' reputation, did they have a reputation . . . ?

**SB:** Muskie senior, his parents? Oh yeah, my father, my mother, both of them, and my grandfather McCarthy, they all knew the, all knew the Muskies. As I said, he was a tailor of the shop on Exchange Street, and they had a, they had a. . . . As a matter of fact, my grandfather McCarthy, my mother would tell you this, was very close to Muskie senior, and I think may have been, I'm not certain about this, may have assisted him, because my grandfather was a lawyer, in obtaining his citizenship. I'm not certain, my mother knows more about that.

**AL:** Tell me a little bit about the Rumford community, what it looked like when you were growing up, and how it's. . . . ?

**SB:** In the '50s?

**AL:** . . . . how it's changed over the years?

**SB:** Well, it was a traditional, to the extent there is, a company town, paper mill town controlled by the Chisholm family. It had, a town in that region was solely, totally dependent upon the then Oxford Paper Company for the strong economy. The paper mill provided all the services, it was the largest shareholder, provided a number of social programs including supporting the local hospital. It's present, it permeated the whole community, affected every aspect of the community. And there was a strong sense of, there was a strong community spirit because of the relationship between, the attitude between, the attitude of the company with respect to its, the manner in which it treated its employees in the community. Had a population in the '50s of a little over ten thousand people, and that's declined to sixty-five hundred. The number of employees at the mill, the mill has changed ownership three or four times, it's now followed the route of all the paper, of the paper industry in Maine being owned and controlled by out of state, multi-state, national interests. So the sense of community and commitment to the town has left. Everything's measured solely in economic terms and quarterly earnings and what they can extract.

We see that happening all over the state today. You see that at Great Northern Paper Company; Bowater abandoned the state, had no sense of responsibility. And back in those days they could, Rumford was a small town, Rumford and Mexico was a small town, but between the two around sixteen thousand. Strong sense of community, everybody knew each other, lots of support. It was a great place to live and to raise a family.

**AL:** Was the area ethnically diverse, and if so, what was the make-up?

**SB:** Where are you from?

**AL:** Where am I from? Farmington.

**SB:** You are? Ha. Rumford, it was diverse to the extent that the, it was primarily French Catholic, secondly Irish Catholic, thirdly Yankee, fourthly Polish-Lithuanian. Yeah, the, a strong ethnic presence. Unlike other areas of the state, particularly Lewiston, the ethnics were not truly discriminated against. I mean, there was a sense of pride. I mean, I never, my father spoke French to me when I was, until well, I went away to prep school. We spoke French at home; my mother was Irish. And I, there wasn't a sense of alienation and discrimination that many of the Francos experienced in Lewiston, for instance, where it was dominated by the Yankees until the '50s and '60s. Where, if you were bilingual, or if you had a French accent, it wasn't considered a liability. You weren't criticized or looked down upon because the French community, the French community really dominated the municipality in many ways. And people like my father, who was a judge in the superior court and the Supreme Court that added a lot of credibility to it (*unintelligible phrase*). So I never, I never sensed that we were second-rate citizens, as a matter of fact it was just the converse.

**AL:** Did the different ethnic groups interact, or did they live in separate areas?

**SB:** Initially they did, initially they did. My parents were married in 1935, and that was considered a mixed marriage. I think it was the first, one of the first instances where an Irish

Catholic and French Catholic married. And because of the high profile of, my grandfather McCarthy was a lawyer and a judge, and my father was then a judge in superior court, it was more accepted. But both, there was still resistance from both families to the marriage, on both sides. My father's sisters resented the fact that he went out and married an Irish person, and the same was true for the McCarthys. And that existed for many years, many years.

**AL:** I know also your wife's brother is Reverend Frank Murray. Has he also been politically involved over the years?

**SB:** Oh sure, yeah, the Murray side of the family has been deeply involved. Cynthia's father [Robert Murray, Sr.] was actively involved in Penobscot Democratic politics in the '50s, '60s, '70s and '80s. Frank was a state rep, representative for a couple of terms. Her other brother, younger brother, is a lawyer in Bangor, Robert Murray, Jr., III. And he's a state senator representing Penobscot County. Cynthia's been active as well.

**AL:** In what capacity has she been active?

**SB:** Well, just as, she's been very helpful to me. I mean, I ran for governor once and she was very helpful. And she's been a delegate to the convention. But very, generally a very active Democrat supporting Democratic candidates and Democratic causes.

**AL:** Now what motivated you to run for governor in 1986?

**SB:** To save the state from, to improve the quality of life in the state of Maine.

**AL:** Was there anybody in particular running on the other side that. . . .?

**SB:** That caused me; that motivated me? Yes, yeah, there was as a matter of fact. Jim Tierney, who was then attorney general, indicated that he was going to run. And a group of us thought that if he ran he would lose the general election, which he did, to Jack McKernan. We thought that a more moderate Democrat, i.e., myself, would have a better chance of success in November. I lost. There was a five way primary, it turned out, and I came in second. Jim then went on to lose. So I got rid of my gubernatorial virus, a virus that seems to affect us all, or many of us.

**AL:** Who were some of the people during your run that supported you?

**SB:** What do you mean?

**AL:** When you ran. . . .

**SB:** High profile types? Oh, no one in particular. I had a group of legislators, a lot of county chair people with whom I'd had relationships, had developed relationships with when I was active. But there'd been such a long period of time between my service with the legislature that much, the younger people, the more liberal Democrats, supported Tierney, and they're historically the most active.

**AL:** The party, we were talking about the party structure earlier, and how it's hard to know whether it plays much of a role because people individually have their own groups when they run for offices now. Did the party structure, was it there to help you and support you during your. . . .?

**SB:** No, no, the party level was there in the late, this is in '86. It was after Longley, so it had been, it had deteriorated some. It had been weakened somewhat because of the, Longley's candidacy, and the fact that he succeeded. And it suggested that party organizations were not as important as they had been historically. That was due in great part, too, to the change of the ballot. Because at one time, you know, we had the big box, straight party voting. And that was eliminated in the, 1970, as the result of a lawsuit brought against the Democratic Party by Bob Monks, who brought it thinking he would run against, he wanted to defeat Bill Hathaway at the time. Bill was seeking reelection, no, he was running against Margaret Chase Smith, defeated Smith; whenever that was [1972]. So the question is, are there, was there, yeah, I had, yeah. I got, I forget what it was, I got, I came within four or five points of Tierney. And if you think about it, he had obviously been, he was attorney general, and he had his own statewide network, and it was a clear asset to him. And I had to create my own organization. And I had, I was controversial because of a number of clients I had, and that's the way it went.

**AL:** Throughout your schooling, your educational background, where did you go to college and law school?

**SB:** Georgetown. Yeah, I was at Georgetown. I was a graduate from Georgetown Law Center. Actually, I went to Georgetown at Columbia, then I transferred back to Georgetown. I became a cop with the United States Capitol police. Matter of fact Muskie was my patron that got me a job there for a year, my first year in law school.

**AL:** Throughout all those teachers that you came in contact with over the years, were there any that stick out in your mind as having influenced you in any way, or shaped your beliefs or attitudes?

**SB:** No, I think I was more influenced by my parents than by anybody else. My mother, on the educational side, she was a true academic scholar, very bright woman, very articulate, well read, good writer. And my father the ethnic, political side.

**AL:** So did your mother have books at home for you, around?

**SB:** Oh, did she have books. She's ninety-two years of age, still reads a book a week. She has, she subscribes to a service at the Library of Congress, large print books, she gets a bag full of books every two weeks. She was the Rumford library's busiest, most active customer. Also, she was a good writer, too. When she was in college she maintained a diary in Latin. She was a pretty classic scholar. I mean, she used to, that's how I did so well in Latin because my mother taught me Latin, you know.

**AL:** We've talked a little bit about some of Muskie's weaknesses, in terms of his temper. What

do you think will be the lasting thought about Muskie for the state of Maine?

**SB:** What will be his legacy in my mind? That he changed the political direction of the state in 1954. That he and, he and others, but he was viewed, and was in fact the leader of that effort to change the Republican domination of the state for several generations. I think that's, and that, because that's first, that's how I would view him. Secondly, as a United States Senator, he was very active on environmental issues. Those are the two areas. I don't think his short tenure as secretary of state carries any weight with anybody, you know. I don't think they, I mean, people have forgotten about it because he wasn't there long enough to have an impact, make an impact, do anything that was really dramatic. He played a role in the hostages, the negotiation for hostages, but he, certainly you have to give him credit for that.

**AL:** Is there anything I haven't asked for that you would like to add, that, any sort of connection that you had with Muskie or that time period that's important to tell?

**SB:** No, other than the fact, as I said, when I was chairman and I was active in the '70s particularly, I used to see him occasionally. But he was not the type of person who would seek you out. I mean, he felt that he was placed on this earth and people had to serve him. I mean, the contrast with Mitchell is what you've heard so often. When you visited with him in Washington, he felt burdened, like he was doing you a favor by listening to a constituent. And that impression, that message was conveyed practically every time you met with him. Although once you were with him and engaged him in discussion or debate on an issue, then it was obviously quite enjoyable. But he had that initial resistance, demeanor of his. And why? I don't know. But that was his make-up, and you had to deal with it.

**AL:** Thank you so much for your time.

**SB:** Glad to do it; glad you came.

*End of Interview*