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Berube, Georgette oral history interview

Marisa Burnham-Bestor

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Interview with Georgette Berube by Marisa Burnham-Bestor

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Berube, Georgette

Interviewer

Burnham-Bestor, Marisa

Date

December 6, 1999

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

MOH 161

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Biographical Note

Georgette Berube was born in Lewiston, Maine and attended parochial school, graduating from Lewiston High School. She also attended the Auburn, Maine School of Commerce. In 1970 she was the first woman elected to the Maine legislature from Lewiston. She served in the Maine House of Representatives until 1982, at which time she ran for governor and lost in the primary. She served in the Maine Senate from 1984-2000.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: environmental protection; Prestile Stream, Aroostook County; Great Depression in Lewiston, Maine; ethnic tensions; Lillian Caron and other women in local politics; Louis Jalbert; Lewiston mills; Lewiston Public Library; women's roles increasing in Maine legislature since 1970; nursing homes in Maine; and Ernest Malenfant.

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Transcript

Marisa Burnham-Bestor: The date is December the 6th, 1999, we are in Lewiston, Maine at the home of Georgette Berube. Georgette Berube is the interviewee and Marisa Burnham-Bestor is interviewing. Could you please state your full name and spell for me?

Georgette Berube: Georgette Berube, Georgette like in George and T-T-E, and Berube, B- as in Boston, E-R- as in Robert, U-B-E.

MB: Where and when were you born?

GB: I was born in Lewiston, Maine, too long ago.

MB: What were your parents' names?

GB: The family name was Beuparlant. B-E-, you want that spelled?

MB: Yes, please.

GB: B-E-A-U-P-A-R-L-A-N-T.

MB: And that was your father's?

GB: Yes.

MB: And what was your mother's maiden name?

GB: My mother was a Trembley, T-R-E-M-B-L-E-Y.

MB: And what was your father's occupation?

GB: He was in the retail business.

MB: What about your mother, did she-?

GB: She stayed at home.

MB: Did you have any siblings?

GB: Brother.

MB: What were their names?

GB: Maurice.

MB: Just him, right. And were you older or younger than your brother?

GB: Older.

MB: What has your brother gone on to do?

GB: My brother is in sales.

MB: Does he still live in this area as well?

GB: Yes.

MB: You mentioned that your father was in sales, correct?

GB: My brother.

MB: Oh, your brother was in sales. What was your father again, I'm sorry?

GB: In the business, retail business.

MB: Retail business. And did he own a shop in Lewiston?

GB: Uh-huh.

MB: What was the name of it?

GB: It carried the family name.

MB: Oh, really?

GB: Yes.

MB: And what sorts of things?

GB: Furniture.

MB: Tell me about your family's religious affiliations?

GB: Roman Catholic.

MB: And how were they involved in the community as far as their religious affiliation?

GB: Did they attend a church regularly, yes.

MB: And was a lot of the social activity that your family was involved in through the church?

GB: No.

MB: No, so how was your family involved in the community, in addition to your father's business?

GB: They paid taxes and they worked.

MB: They weren't very politically active, or?

GB: They weren't, although politics was always a key discussion at table.

MB: What were their political beliefs, what would they say?

GB: They were FDR supporters.

MB: And did you feel that that was something, you said that it was discussed?

GB: You see, my father was very conservative, but he was a traditional Democrat.

MB: He wasn't, he was affiliated with the Democratic Party but he wasn't involved in activism?

GB: No, no.

MB: What were the values that your parents impressed upon you and your brother as being important?

GB: Do unto others, that was the basic. And waste not, want not, that was one we heard repeatedly.

MB: What were some of the other ways that your family impacted you?

GB: Their morals, their work ethic, this sort of thing.

MB: How do your beliefs now compare to the things that your parents would tell you?

GB: Well, over the years one evolves, but basically I think I still carry that.

MB: And how has your life, as far as your social and political and religious involvements been different from that of your parents?

GB: I've become more politically involved than they were, which is about, and they voted and I voted, I always vote. So the difference that I, hands on if you will, by running for elective office.

MB: How did your parents feel about your becoming really involved?

GB: My father was not alive then when I ran. My mother, I called her up, she said, the first thing she said, "You can't do that, because they're not honest people." And at the time, she must have been in her eighties or eighty or so.

MB: So she had the -

GB: Perception.

MB: Did that change for her when you became involved?

GB: Well I think it did, obviously. You know, whether it changed or not, the fact that you're the daughter or the son, every parent has the perfect child, so.

MB: Did you remain involved with the Roman Catholic Church?

GB: Yes.

MB: What church did your parents attend?

GB: St. Peter and St. Paul.

MB: And that's the same one that you go to?

GB: No, I go to Holy Cross.

MB: Where did you live in Lewiston, compared to where you live now on Webster Street?

GB: I lived, when I grew up, about a few, probably three blocks down the street. Not on this street, but on another street.

MB: Did your brother stay in, close to home as well in his -?

GB: Yeah, he lives in Auburn.

MB: How did your family fall into the structure of the community as far as economic status and relations with other people because of some of those issues? I know that you were Roman Catholic so you fell into that trend.

GB: Clarify that.

MB: Okay, this is a very working class sort of mill workers sort of area. Your father didn't work in the mills, how did that make you kind of stand out and how did that, how was that, how did that impact the relations between your family and some other families?

GB: Oh, I don't think it had any effect. We were all Franco-Americans and were soul brothers and sisters, if you will. We were fortunate, we had, you know, we were not rich but I grew up in the Depression and though we had food on the table and clothing, my mother sewed a great deal.

MB: How was your father's business impacted by the Depression?

GB: Oh well, he started way before the Depression. It was difficult for a lot of people, but people survived.

MB: Did he have to change any of his, I know a lot of people did the, you know, twenty-five cents a week to

GB: Oh yeah, yeah, he carried paper [?].

MB: Did he continue any of that after the Depression, or did business rise back up again for him?

GB: It continued until '74, yes, '74. He started 1919.

MB: Wow. Did he run it the entire time?

GB: No, no, my brother did, and I did.

MB: You did as well? Oh, wow. What were some of your major memories from childhood from this area?

GB: Uneventful, happy, secure. We could play out in the street, you know, walk a block to a friend's house and not have to look behind your back. Things were different. There was a great deal of family reunions Sunday night. I remember we had a piano, and someone came who played the violin and my father played the violin, and someone came and played the piano, and it was kind of fun.

MB: Do you remember any tension or issues between the Franco American community and the non, the -?

GB: The Irish community?

MB: Yeah.

GB: That was before my time, I think. Yes, there was a great deal of tension, you know, snowball fights in the middle of the bridge spanning the Androscoggin, the Irish who lived on Strawberry Hill, which is Bleachery Hill, versus the French kids. But it was like snowball fights, it was nothing destructive or as we saw in subsequent years through the Civil Rights riots. And then of course you had intermarriages that gradually started, and so that's a gone by era.

MB: Tell me about your primary and secondary school education?

GB: I went to primary school in the parochial schools, Catholic schools. Two of my high school years were in boarding school, Catholic, and I graduated from Lewiston High School.

MB: What were some of your experiences in school as far as did you, how did those open you up to opportunities, and how did that get you interested in what you did with the rest of your life?

GB: Some teachers impacted me, as they do all young people. I remember one history teacher particularly, nothing outstanding really.

MB: Do you remember his name?

GB: Her name.

MB: Her name.

GB: Miss Hamilton.

MB: What did you do after graduating from Lewiston High School?

GB: I went two years to, I enrolled at (*name*) College and after going I decided I didn't want to go back again, so I enrolled at the Auburn Maine School of Commerce, which was commercial school and I went there two years. Then I started taking courses at the University of Southern Maine after I was married. But I never got my degree.

MB: From any of the schools that you attended, you never got an official degree?

GB: I did from the commercial school, but not from USM. I still need, I don't know, thirty odd credits, whatever.

MB: To get a B.A. or?

GB: B.A.

MB: At what point in all of this did you become interested in politics, seriously interested?

GB: Well I was always interested reading about it, but it was only when I was, I'd been married several years in fact, I think I had both my kids, yes. I started being critical and my husband one day said, "Put your money where your mouth is and run." And I said, "All right, I will," and then the next thing I knew a friend of the family had circulated, unbeknownst to me, nomination papers. In those days one needed only twenty-five signatures to run for the House of Representatives. And she brought them in and I went in cold turkey. I had never attended a Democratic caucus or convention or anything.

MB: Wow. How did you decide that you wanted to work with the Democratic Party?

GB: Well, I was an enrolled Democrat, albeit a conservative Democrat. And it really, really answered some of my own personal philosophy on many issues, on labor issues. I felt comfortable being a Democrat.

MB: Can you elaborate on that a little, about how that impacted, how your views were consistent with theirs?

GB: Well, I figured that someone needs a just reward for the work they put in. That made me pro-labor. I remember after my first campaign, in the, one of the mill gates, I had never, as I said before, I went in cold turkey to the campaign, and I remember campaigning in front of the mill gate once and a gentleman walked by and he, I said "I'm so and so, I'm running for office, I'd appreciate your vote." And he said, "Remember one thing, young lady, once you're up there don't forget the man," or now today it would be the woman as well, "who works hard for a living and suddenly has the job pulled out from under them." Don't, you know. And that influenced me. And I often think of that, you know, when there are issues that you're not sure which way is the best. The leadership of any party will tell you, well this is the way the party wants us to go, or we want it to go. But it's not the way I think it should be done. How does it impact the people who send me here, who trust me, and I often go back to that elderly gentleman. I remember him swinging his black lunch box and smoking a corncob pipe, yeah.

MB: Wow, that's very vivid. What were some of the other ways that the Democratic party enforced what you wanted, and what were some of, you know, the things that, you went in, your first time going in like you said cold turkey, how did it enforce all the theorizing that, or all the philosophical (*unintelligible word*)?

GB: Well, sometimes I was disillusioned, as you would become I suspect with any party. Because I believe, I'm not partisan enough and I found, it's changed. You have leaders who have their own personal agendas which in your view, in my view or one's view, might conflict with what one thinks is for the betterment of the local community. So what a leader from Portland, or up north, or the east coast thinks they want us to do may be a conflict with what I think should be done. So in that respect, I've maintained a trace of independence, so that the party does not impact me as such. The basic philosophy, but quite often people will stray from the basic philosophy, so as a result you find liberal Republicans who are probably more liberal than some conservative Democrats.

MB: You mentioned that your husband had a great influence on you, your initial, initially running. How did you meet him first of all?

GB: I met him at school and then we started dating, and that's it.

MB: Which school?

GB: At the commercial school, he had just been, come out of the Army.

MB: And how did his political beliefs and so forth -?

GB: Paralleled mine.

MB: They did parallel yours quite a bit?

GB: As most Franco-Americans did.

MB: Can you give me what you would describe as a typical Franco-American?

GB: Franco-American politically, you mean?

MB: Yeah.

GB: Is a hard, works very hard for what they have. Now, I'm not talking of 1999, because things have changed economically. But in those days, the Franco, and they still are for that matter, don't misunderstand me, they worked very hard and wanted their money not wasted. They worked for very, for a pittance in the textile mills, and yet they managed to accumulate real estate wealth simply by hard work. So as a result, they were conservative, fiscally conservative. And they, most of them, that's why you've seen Republican candidates win in Lewiston, Bill Cohen, Olympia [Snowe], so that, I think that explains it a little bit without going in too deep.

MB: Can you tell me a little bit more about the Lewiston community as far as who were some of the major figures back in the time, not -

GB: My time, or prior to my time?

MB: Coming into your time. A little bit prior to it and then as you progressed into it.

GB: Well, with going back in the early days of City Hall, this is what you're talking about? The most famous name would be Louis Jalbert, Representative Louis Jalbert. There were mayors who were, years ago mayors were usually all French-Canadian or Americans of French Canadian descent I should say. I noticed on your list you've mentioned some names but you neglected to mention the first woman elected mayor, Lillian Caron.

MB: Can you tell me a little bit about her? I am not familiar with her.

GB: She was, became mayor, she was an alderman, alderwoman. I'm not sure if she might not have been the first alderwoman. And then she ran for mayor and won, was a very active mayor, was very honest and did a good job for the city.

MB: What was the progression of women coming into politics like in this area?

GB: It wasn't easy. The first time I ran, someone called my husband at work and said, "We're calling to tell you to tell your, the little woman, not to run." Because it had appeared in the paper on a Friday evening that I, my name had been mentioned that I might seek a seat in the house. In those days the election for the house was, there were multi-member districts, they were at large, I'm sorry, so that the six top vote getters in the primary, you could have fifteen, twenty candidates on the ballot, of the Democrat ballot or the Republican ballot, and the six top vote getters were placed on the fall ballot in the general election between the winners of the Republican primary.

So he was told to tell the little woman not to run, to stay home and "Cook with the kiddies," unquote. And his response was, and they called at his office, at work, his response was "Well you tell her yourself because I'm supporting her." So that was, now is that because they didn't want a woman? I had been told by a so-called self-styled leader that if I wanted to get involved in politics that I should join the Democratic county women's organization. And they were getting a fund raising card party ready, and I should join them and help them man the card tables' so to speak. That wasn't my thing, obviously, so I wanted to run.

So, to answer your question, yes, it was a little difficult. There had never been a woman in the legislature. I think that many, many years ago there had been a woman who had been appointed to fill an unexpired term, I'm not sure now. But elected, I was the first woman.

MB: What year was that?

GB: Seventy.

MB: And what year was Lillian Caron's?

GB: I'm not sure. I'm going to say the '60s, I'm not sure. Maybe early '70s. Don't quote me on that, I don't know.

MB: Did you feel that once you were in the legislature and once you kind of proved yourself to an extent in the campaign that, you know, as a woman you could do this, that you were then respected or disrespected by fellow house members?

GB: I think I never acted in any way that I would have been, shown a bad mark to my city, the people who sent me. So as a result, they re-elected me.

MB: Did the other people that you were working with listen to your ideas and-?

GB: In Augusta? Oh, I was very well received.

MB: Was Lewiston one of the last to have a female representative in the house?

GB: Perhaps some of the towns might, I don't, I can't answer that.

MB: Going back for a moment, you had mentioned Louis Jalbert as being a major political figure in this area. Can you tell me a bit about him?

GB: He served many terms.

MB: Were you ever directly involved with him in any way, or?

GB: You mean supporting legislation, or?

MB: Yeah, were you involved with him politically or -?

GB: No.

MB: No? What were his political views, how was he -?

GB: He was I'd say a, I don't know, I'd say he was a moderate.

MB: Democrat?

GB: Yes.

MB: And he served in the house or the senate?

GB: House.

MB: As a representative from Lewiston.

GB: Yes.

MB: He was obviously very popular, and you were very popular in this area as well, so it would seem logical to conclude that in some way the two of you were on the same wavelength. Would

that not be a logical conclusion?

GB: Political philosophy wise?

MB: Yeah.

GB: Yes, we both supported the working men and women, we both supported small business owners. Yeah.

MB: What were the differences between your and his style or belief?

GB: Oh, I don't know.

MB: You're not sure? You had mentioned that your husband had always said- had said to you, "Stop talking about it and do something about it." So, had you been following the political arena up to that point, and what were some of these, you know, beliefs that you were expressing that caused your husband to say that?

GB: Well, I felt that Lewiston deserved, I'm wording that very badly. It was a question of how monies were spent, that people sometimes may not have spent enough time reviewing proposed legislation, might have been too easily influenced in voting one way or another, and I would often comment and criticize that that wasn't the way it should be done.

MB: When you did get to the house, did you feel that you impacted a change on the way that monies were spent?

GB: Monies and other issues like absentee ballot counting, and, oh that was a big thing. I did not like the way some people solicited absentee ballots from people who were unable to vote, but suddenly voted. There were many issues that I felt, and I think yes, I contributed.

MB: What was the issue surrounding the absentee ballot?

GB: Well that's a very complicated issue, and it was political.

MB: Was that a large influence on the way elections -?

GB: Sometimes.

MB: Would you mind going into it, or?

GB: Yes.

MB: Getting back to Lewiston's community for a moment, when the mills closed what happened to the town economically, and how did that affect the Franco-American -?

GB: They closed gradually, and some other industries would pick up the slack. Many people

were getting along in years and some retired, many of them retired. There definitely was an impact, economic impact on the community, but it's, the empty mills have been, and I'm not talking of the current mill situation at Bates Mill now, but mills like where the Hill mill is, and the Androscoggin mill, and the Continental mill down by the river, were filled with small industry that employed twenty, forty, a hundred people. So now those are functioning very well, the three that I mentioned. It's my understanding they're full up with employers and employees.

MB: Before you ran for office, you were head of the board of trustees for the Lewiston Public Library.

GB: I was not the chairman.

MB: You were not.

GB: I was a member.

MB: Oh, you were a member of the board.

GB: I was an appointive member, yes.

MB: Can you tell me a little bit about that position and -?

GB: Well, it's become a more hands on approach now with the current board, but that was in the '60s I think, '66 maybe, '65, '66. We usually heard the report from the library director; we hired the library director, we reviewed the budget, policy issues relative to the library.

MB: What were some problems or issues that arose?

GB: I don't remember many problems in those days. The big issue was that way back then they were trying to get a new library constructed. And I remember we had allowed, I think it was twelve thousand, five hundred if I remember, and that was a great deal of money then, for a study to see whether or not it would be a viable option to building the library. But that never came to fruition, so, but then subsequently, as you know, they've renovated the building.

MB: As we had discussed briefly before, when you did decide to campaign, kind of I guess went in blind, how did you figure out how campaigning worked and how to be effective in that?

GB: Well, I had support from family, brother, husband, in-laws, and we planned our election campaign and it worked well.

MB: Had your brother or your husband or any of your in-laws ever had any experience in the past?

GB: No, but they were all involved with the general public and it was applying a lot of common sense. No gimmicks, no, you know, no mentioning the other people running, and it was just putting my name forward and meeting as many people as I could.

MB: How did your becoming involved impact your family life? You mentioned that you'd already had two children.

GB: Yes, my son was four at the time, he was younger than my daughter. It didn't impact because I was home every night. Now it would be a little more difficult because I serve for example on two committees and that takes me, I stay there a little longer during the day, but I only had one committee assignment the first time I was there. And you really get very busy only toward the end of the session, like April and May, in the first year of the two-year term. And there was always someone here when the children came home from school. I had a housekeeper then who came in every morning. She'd leave when I got home or my husband got home.

MB: We talked a little bit earlier as well about attitudes towards women, and I know that you're still quite involved, so how would you say that that has changed?

GB: Oh, a hundred percent. It's been a, more than a hundred and eighty degrees. The first term I think there were fourteen women out of a hundred and fifty-one house members, and there was one lady senator from Portland out of thirty-three in those days, senators. Today I think we're eleven in the senate, members, eleven women out of thirty-five senators. And in the house I think they're around the fifties, fifty-six, I forget exactly, but we were only fourteen then, my first term. So as you can see. And there were no women who chaired committees, but I recall that my second term in '72 or '74, there were two or three women who chaired committees.

MB: Did the change occur pretty rapidly from the time that you became involved?

GB: Yes it did, it became, it was a gradual, but I think there were more and more, as the general public realized that women could indeed make policy decisions and look carefully at their tax dollars that they remitted to us to spend. When women ran there wasn't this negative block, you know. So I think it's very important when you break into a new arena that you put your best foot forward. Now if women elected in those days had, you know, done some funny things or shenanigans or whatever, that might have set us back. But the women that were there, both Republican and Democrat, were grand ladies.

MB: In a newspaper article that I glanced at, you mention that a woman's voice was needed in the government, and I wanted to know what you meant by woman's voice. What could a woman bring?

GB: I think a woman can bring a little more sensitivity to particularly issues like childcare, education. Not that men are insensitive, but they don't view it the same way as a woman might. And I think that women proved that they could also handle budget issues. In fact a very dear friend of mine who was a colleague who chaired, was the house chairman of appropriations back in '78, I guess, or '80, '76, '78, which was unheard of, a woman did not chair the appropriations committee. So you break the barrier, but you have to do it carefully, you have to put your best foot forward and do it with dignity. And if you go up there and slam things around, that doesn't go with the general public.

MB: What feedback did you get from others?

GB: Other colleagues?

MB: Yeah, or other legislators.

GB: Feedback in terms of?

MB: In terms of the new issues that you were bringing forward and the new spin that you might have been putting on things as a woman?

GB: I was always, I've never been rebuffed, I truthfully cannot say that, by any member of the legislature outside of one or two who might have been angry that I got elected. But I was always very well received, everybody was always very helpful.

MB: Tell me a little bit about the function of state government in Maine?

GB: The function? Again in terms of it's impact on people, or the way it's set up?

MB: The set up briefly, and then how it works, like is it effective?

GB: I think we have an effective form of, well, all fifty states are the same, we all have a bicameral legislature except one, which is Tennessee, so you have the check and balance. If the house is going to pass a bill that they probably say, well we're going to vote for it, but the senate will kill it, so you have the arm of the senate that says, well you know, we can't afford that or it's not a bill that we'd support. So you have this balance and check, and I think that works well. Then of course you have the executive, which can have a veto power in any measure.

I think Maine has one of the well govern--, is one of the well-governed states. And there's always been a lot of decorum in the chambers. You're not allowed to use foul language; otherwise you get gaveled and asked to leave the chamber. Men generally are, sometimes they're a little lax though, I noticed last year in the house, but generally they have to wear a shirt and tie and jacket. So there is decorum. You're not allowed to leave your seat to go talk to somebody else while we're in session. You do it by means of sending a note through a page.

And as far as I think the legislature of the state of Maine is very responsive to the requests and the needs of the general population, i.e., education. We impacted it very positively last session in the spring by allocating much more money than even the governor wanted. We managed to do that, but the people had expressed a desire for this, and I think the state of Maine legislature is very responsive. It's a good government and a good legislature.

MB: What have been some ongoing issues that have faced the state for the past thirty years?

GB: The economy, low wages. You have a few industries that pay well, BIW, paper companies, companies in Portland, but the rank and file do not earn much, the wages aren't as high as they might be. So the economy I think in my view has been one of the priority points.

We have problems with health care, although again I think we're the avant-garde in this sphere compared to other states, as far as paying for drugs for example, for the elderly. We're one of the states that pays, gives the highest and to most people. In fact we have a higher income cap, so we've done well by that, but that's been a priority as well.

You know, too, if a particular issue impacts you, that's your priority. It could be the environment. But you have to on one hand say we've got to protect the environment, and Maine is very open to that because we have a pure air and when you go to the coast you can see the water, and most often you can see the bottom. But you have by the same token to think of the people who earn the living with the environment. So are we going to refuse to cut all trees and put all the people who work in the woods or the pulp and paper companies out of work? So it's a fine line.

MB: Do you think that as time has been going on the people have wanted less or more of the environmentally damaging professions to continue?

GB: I think generally it comes from the advocates of a particular group. Very seldom- in fact very, very seldom do I ever get calls from people who call me saying, "Well vote for this bill on the environment or vote against it," whatever. We usually hear from the advocates of the environmentalists, or those who might not feel that we need to have such stringent laws. We hear from the vested groups more than the general public. Now the general public will call you on education issues, they'll call you on the cost of drugs, issues that affect them, that impact them directly. But the environment is something that doesn't touch you particularly unless you earn your living in it.

MB: Have any specific issues been facing Lewiston?

GB: Well, in recent days I read that we've lost a great deal of our population, I think six thousand people. I- that's what I read in the paper. I remember in 1940, I looked it up the other day in one of my information books; the population of Lewiston in 1940 was forty-one thousand something. Now according to an article in the newspaper two weeks ago, it's about thirty-five seven or thirty-five six, something like that. They still continue to work here, in fact more and more people work here but they've moved into the suburbs, to Greene and Poland and New Gloucester.

MB: Interesting.

GB: So I can go to the towns and stop at a Mom and Pop store, and people will come in, and I know they were Lewiston residents, now they've moved.

MB: I'm going to have to switch sides.

End of Side A
Side B

MB: This is side two of the interview with Georgette Berube

GB: Berube.

MB: . . . Berube, on December 6th. We have been discussing a little bit about state politics and the function of the state government in Maine, and I wanted to ask you how, you had kind of mentioned that in your first campaign it was, the important part was getting your name out there and getting recognized and getting to know people. How, as you became known and had been elected, did campaigning change and become more difficult, easier?

GB: I don't think personally it's become more difficult. It's been more costly. My first campaign cost me three hundred and fifty dollars. Now it's become more costly because advertising costs are high, certainly. But it's basically the same thing. The thing that has changed, you used to go at the mill gates and the factory gates, shoe shop gates, because there were hundreds of people coming out of different shifts and I would go to all three shifts and greet the people as they came out or in to the work place. Now you can't do that because some of the mills are closed, so you have to do a lot of door-to-door, which I did not do my first campaign. I didn't do one door-to-door. Now, I've done door-to-door, you depend a lot on the lawn signs and, you know, the advertising, and addressing groups.

MB: What have been the major groups that have supported you consistently?

GB: I've always had labor support, the AFL-CIO was, generally always supported me. I, that's about the only group I've had. Small business groups have supported me. I've never appealed to any group in particular, "Please, please, please support me," never done that. I know one group that had interviewed me and interviewed my opponent in the senate campaign. And they elected to support him publicly, although we were of the same party, not because of my voting record but because he had been serving for their particular interests a little longer than I, on a particular committee. So I appealed to individual members of the group and it worked out very, very well. So, you can be endorsed by groups, what I'm trying to say, but that does not necessarily mean that that will be a door opener to winning an election. It doesn't hurt obviously, but you can overcome that.

MB: Do you feel that there are any major issues that were an issue at one time that have been pretty much resolved, and haven't been an ongoing problem but that are worth noting?

GB: But you know, issues come up that I say sometimes, well, or I'll tell a colleague, you know, "We heard that fifteen years ago." So issues don't disappear, they come back in a new form. Health issues we've always addressed, and yet they come back to the fore every year. So they always, education issues are always there with us.

MB: Why do you think that is?

GB: Because first of all, if it's something that depends on money, we'll never have enough money in all the coffers of the state to quiet the need. We gave a million-point-one more last year for the city of Lewiston, and it's not enough this year, they need more. So the issue will always be before us. And that's true with anything.

Right now one of the big issues confronting us in Maine though is the lack of, or the cost of nursing homes, long-term care for the elderly. That is a big, big issue. We have many nursing homes that are closing out because the state is not providing enough Medicaid reimbursement to pay for the people, so that's a big issue that we will have to address this year. In my view that's a priority, because you're talking of the health of people, the well-being and security.

MB: When you're in the state legislature, do you only deal with issues for Androscoggin County?

GB: No, no, the entire state. And it depends the committee you're assigned, to which you're assigned. For four years I chaired the state and local government committee, it was a committee that heard issues from a little town up north that wanted to secede from the county, or it could be issues that, broad based issues state wide, that impacted state wide. But you always have to keep in the back of your mind, how is that going to impact my city? You have some issues that are directly, that impact our area, but generally they're issues that are attractive or unattractive to the whole state of Maine. Transportation issues, health issues.

MB: How have some of those issues had a major event come forward, if you could tell me in as much detail as possible, you know, one or two major events that you remember dealing with that really had an impact in your time.

GB: The legislation, you mean?

MB: Yes.

GB: I think that last year or this year, I chair the education committee and I think that, because of that I was a little bit helpful in the city of Lewiston getting the million plus more than they had had the previous year. So that's one way that, I think that was very important. One of the important issues that we had, well they're, every issue is important. To me it might be a major issue, to you it might be something that's not important.

One of the issues that I remember is when we were dealing with the, whether the state of Maine should divest of their investments in companies that did business with Northern Ireland or South Africa, those were two separate bills. They were major issues, in fact people flew in from Northern Ireland on both sides of the issue. We had a labor man by the name of Paddy Devlon, was a magnificent speaker. And we had, and he, although he was a union man and a member of the Northern Ireland parliament, he did not favor us doing that because it would have disrupted those Catholics who were working in plants like Ford Motor Company. So it would have meant that we would have divested of, never, if we had Ford trucks at the state, we couldn't buy a Ford replacement part that had been made in Northern Ireland, you see, it was this sort of thing. Now, to many people they didn't know that bill was in existence, but it had an impact on our investments. I remember that as a very informative, very interesting public hearing that lasted like four or five hours.

MB: What was the outcome?

GB: The first year we defeated it, it came back the next year and we amended it and it passed.
(*Telephone interruption.*)

MB: You had mentioned one of the major events and discussed a little bit about what it was like on the floor. I also wanted to ask if you can remember the names of any representatives that you worked with that you felt you were particularly effective with or that you felt you were particularly contrasting with on any committees or -?

GB: I could name you one that I was contrasted with, but I won't name him, on the floor. I can't say that I was ever opposed by anybody. It was always, if I was, if I presented a bill or if I debated a bill to be heard in our committee and defending the bill or whatever, then obviously you don't get unanimous approval all the time. But it was always based on fact; it was never personality attacks or anything of the sort. So if people have disagreed with me, it's been on the issue of the item before us.

MB: How has the partisan differences worked out as far as Republican-Democrat?

GB: Sometimes there are a great deal of difference, animosity. I see it more now than in the past. Years ago we used to have some really strong debates during the morning and then we'd send a note to the Republican lady or vice versa, how about all having lunch together, and we'd go out to lunch and, you know, there was, it was just friendship, friendly. Today it's a little more, there's a little more separation. Sometimes there's a wall between both parties. I'm not partisan as I've said before, so it doesn't impact me or bother me. I feel there are good people on both sides of the aisle and you're entitled to your views and I'm entitled to mine. And hopefully if we discuss them intelligently we can come to a solution, that's my approach. That's why on the education committee that I chaired this year and next year as well, that we are, we come out most, more often than not with unanimous reports. There's some committees that have, most of their bills are divided reports, you know, it'll be nine to four or seven to six. I've served on a committee like that. But personally I have not been affected by it, I get along with, you know, the Republican.

MB: What was the purpose of the county committee on the environment?

GB: I read that question and I couldn't place that at all. I served on the state and local county government committee, but there was never such a thing as the county committee on environment.

MB: Okay, I had read it in a newspaper article and I had never heard of it either.

GB: Which proves you should never believe everything you read.

MB: This is a, this was to follow from our discussion of the county committee on the environment, but did Senator Muskie have any influence on environmental issues at the state level?

GB: At the state level? I'm not familiar, I did not know the senator, but I do know that he was instrumental. This was prior to my going to the legislature. This must have been in the late '60s. There was a place up north in Aroostook County called the Prestile River, and he wanted to downgrade the standards to allow a fellow by the name of Martin, not John L. Martin, but a developer who was going to grow some sugar beets, I think. And in order to get the permit to do whatever, they had to sort of downgrade the standards for that stream or that river. So in that respect he was, had an impact I guess on the environment in Maine. But I know he was known as the Clean Air and Clean [Water] something candidate but I'm not as familiar as I ought to be about the senator.

MB: I was going to go on to ask you about some of the influential people in the community and specifically discuss people, but I think that that might not be in the interest of time. Perhaps we -

GB: There are some interesting people. I can make a call and we can discuss the interesting people if there are any.

MB: Well I have a list and if I name them?

GB: Sure, go ahead.

MB: Okay, John Beliveau?

GB: Yeah, he served as mayor, he's now a judge.

MB: Did you know him at all?

GB: Yes, he's a nice fellow. He was mayor, it's an honorary position more or less.

MB: What about Bob Clifford?

GB: Was a very good mayor, he's also a judge. Bob is in the state supreme court, he served in the state senate and I worked well with him when I was there. A very good man.

MB: What about Roland Tanguay?

GB: Roland Tanguay was, served in the house of representatives for I don't know, two or three terms maybe, maybe four, I'm not sure. He was involved in a social club in Lewiston. He was very involved with the French, Americans of French-Canadian descent community.

MB: John Orestis?

GB: John Orestis is now president or CEO of a nursing home, or group. They run many nursing homes. He served as mayor and he was in the state legislature as well. As I say, being mayor of Lewiston is more or less an honorary position.

MB: You mentioned some bills coming up about nursing homes that have been up recently,

how has that, how has he been involved in that?

GB: He was involved two or three, two years ago when we had nursing, there have been nursing home bills cropping up all the time. Of course they look at it from the viewpoint of managing nursing homes, and you have to look at how it impacts the client who's interested in their care. Do they get the services they are paying for? What are the problems? Why are the nursing homes not having all the staff they should have? Like during the night they'll probably have one CNA for twenty patients. Well we're trying to get that reduced to one for every fifteen patients. So, they come from a different aspect than, you know, the supporters of the clients do. So again, you have to look at their problems and the problems facing the client.

MB: We discussed Louis Jalbert before. What about Bill Rocheleau?

GB: Bill Rocheleau also was an active mayor, he's a lawyer who's recently been ill. He was also a very strong supporter of the French speaking community.

MB: Robert Couturier?

GB: Robert Couturier is now judge of probate. He was the youngest mayor in the country. I think he was twenty-one or twenty-two perhaps when he was mayor. And when LBJ, President Johnson came to Lewiston for a visit, Lewiston had to assume a lot of the extra costs of law enforcement for protection and this sort of thing. And when the bill came to City Hall, Mr. Couturier, Mayor Couturier said, send it to Washington. That made headlines. He's a very activist Franco, French-Canadian, American of, I don't like the term Franco-American, American of French Canadian descent.

MB: Paul Dionne?

GB: Paul Dionne, I don't remember too much of his, he's now, he's a lawyer, he was mayor, a very likeable chap. He's now the director of the workers' comp board.

MB: Ernest Malenfant?

GB: Ernest Malenfant, you could write books about that man, was not well-educated. He was a gate tender for the railroad, and he ran by going door-to-door and climbing the four flights of stairs in Little Canada and going after votes. And I remember once he, on the radio, he had a radio announcement on a Sunday morning in French, and he said, and he made his own tape, and he said, "Tomorrow is election day. My opponents have got big Cadillac cars to pick you up to bring you to the polls. I don't have any money for that, so go and vote in their Cadillacs, but vote for me." He won, and he won against a man by the name of Lessard, Judge Lessard, who subsequently became a judge, he was a lawyer. That was a funny one.

MB: You had mentioned before that mayor is more like an honorary position.

GB: Yes.

MB: Has that always been true?

GB: Many, many years ago mayors- and I'm going back before the charter was changed, mayors had more power in the days of Mayor Wiseman, Mayor Paradis, those were way back in history. But mayors have, it's an honorary position. They have the power of appointment to some boards, which might mean something to some people, but the important thing is that they be a credit to their community because they are the PR person and a city is judged by the people it sends to the legislature, or elect to the mayor's office, so it's important in that respect.

MB: Bill Jacques?

GB: Bill Jacques was mayor. He was, served in the state senate, in the state house as well, was county commissioner for many, many years, and ran again last year and was defeated for another term.

MB: What about Alton Lessard?

GB: Alton Lessard is the gentleman who ran against Ernest Malenfant, was defeated by him.

MB: Did he ever have any other attempts?

GB: No.

MB: Georges Rancourt?

GB: Mr. Rancourt I never knew well. He was a nice man, he was, I think he served one term. I don't remember him well.

MB: What about Al Cote?

GB: Albert Cote was a, both a representative and a state senator. He was very much involved with the French speaking community as well. He was a good speaker, never used notes, I remember. And he served the people of Lewiston well, he was very pro-people, very pro-labor, but not in a militant sense. He was a good man.

MB: Can you name any other people in the Lewiston community that had a great influence on you or the community?

GB: I'm striking a blank.

MB: Okay, and who were some of, of these leaders, who were the ones that you worked most closely with?

GB: I worked with Mr. Couturier who had appointed me to the board of library trustees. I worked a little bit with Mayor Caron. And outside of that I didn't do much work cooperatively with the others that you mentioned.

MB: And can you tell me anything about the personalities of the people that you did work with, Couturier and Caron and what it was like to work with them?

GB: Mr. Couturier was easy to work with, as was the mayor. She was very outspoken, but she stuck to her guns, and she did a good job. I've never had any problems working with anyone.

MB: I wanted to ask you a little bit about how you decided to run for governor?

GB: I served six terms in the house, two years each, and back in '82 I decided that, some of us got together, we thought that it might be time for a woman to try. I made one bad mistake, I ran as a Democrat in the primary with no money. Had I run with, as an independent it would have given me a shot in the fall, bypassing the cost of a primary, and I would have a better chance. I might not have won, but I gave it a shot and I had many issues that I took issue with the then governor. But I lost, I got I think it was twenty-two percent of the vote only, in the primary, which is not. It was not an easy battle because a governor has the opportunity to appoint people to commissions. And I remember in Biddeford I had some people who had come out publicly for me, and the next thing I knew I got a call from two of them who said they had to withdraw their support, and subsequently they were, one was named to a commission in Augusta and the other one got another appointment. So those are the things you can do when you're an incumbent.

MB: How was that campaign different from the house of representative campaign?

GB: It was different because you had a huge territory to cover, the entire state of Maine, and Maine is a big state. I, the good thing is that it gave me an opportunity to visit Aroostook county that I had never visited, the St. John Valley, and the people were so friendly, so nice, and I met many new people who, some of who became friends down in the Biddeford-Saco area. So that was the good part, me knowing my state more. The difficult part was physically exhausting. When you're working in a small community and then you have the entire state. That was the difficult part.

MB: What were you hoping to achieve as governor that you couldn't achieve in the house?

GB: Well you have so much more say over legislation. You could push your program through with the help of your party more effectively than if you're one voice out of a hundred and fifty-one, or one voice out of thirty-five in the senate. If you're working from the perspective of the executive branch, you can give more service to the constituents, you can call your commissioner of human services and say how come constituent named so and so in such an area can't get his or her parent into a nursing home. You know, you could do things more; it's a little easier to do. You can put money where you feel it should go in the budget; at least suggest that it be spent in that fashion. And it would have been. I felt at the time that there weren't that many people in the then governor's office, in that branch of government.

MB: And lastly, just where did your career go after your -?

GB: I was out for two years because of that term, and the following year I decided to run against the incumbent in the state senate. And I won, and continued to win until I was term limited out two years ago. Then I had to forego it, and then I ran again and here I am.

MB: Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

GB: No, I think you've covered a lot of things.

MB: Thank you.

GB: You're welcome.

End of Interview