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Interview with Joe Biernacki (and Priscilla Biernacki Clark) by Meredith Gethin-Jones

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Biernacki, Joe
Clark, Priscilla (Biernacki) (also present)

Interviewer

Gethin-Jones, Meredith

Date

February 18, 1999

Place

Naugatuck, Connecticut

ID Number

MOH 065

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Biographical Note

Joseph Biernacki attended Bates College where he met Ed Muskie and they later became college roommates and lifelong friends, enjoying fishing and golfing. Their two families knew each other well over the years. Joe majored in economics and sociology and played baseball and football in college, graduating in 1936. He was active in democratic politics and was president of the Naugatuck, Connecticut Young Democrats Club from 1937 to 1939. He worked for the Uniroyal Chemical Company for most of his career. He was locally involved with the national Muskie campaigns of vice-president and president in 1968 and 1972 respectively.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: meeting Ed Muskie in the cafeteria at Bates College; the honeymoon story of the Biernackis' and the Muskies'; Muskie's marriage in Waterville, Maine; fishing and golfing with Ed Muskie; Muskie's sleeping habits in college; Ed Muskie playing a joke on his brother, Gene during college; Ed Muskie debating in Chase Hall; Muskie's temper; Ed Muskie's father in the tailoring business; playing cribbage with Ed Muskie; lack of laundry

facilities at Bates College; tea dances at Bates; Muskie introducing him to President Jimmy Carter; Carter's perceptions of Ed Muskie; the Muskie Archives dedication ceremony; Muskie attended Joe Biernacki's wedding; good characteristics of Muskie, such as, honesty, dependability, popularity at Bates; Bates College political leniency toward Republican party (along with the rest of Maine); and his shared Polish ancestry with Muskie.

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Transcript

Meredith Gethin-Jones: Okay, could you please give me your full name and spell it?

Joe Biernacki: Joseph, you have to spell that?

MG: Yes, please.

JB: J-L-S-B, how do you spell Joseph, . . .?

Priscilla Clark: J-O-S-E-P-H.

JB: P-H, all right.

PC: Biernacki.

JB: B-I-E-R-N-A-C-K-I.

MG: Thank you. Now, you and Ed Muskie were college roommates, correct?

JB: For a period of time, yes.

MG: How did you and Ed Muskie meet?

JB: It was in college at, I think probably it was at the, when we, when we . . .

PC: Where did you first meet Ed?

JB: That's what I'm trying to, trying . . .

PC: In a class?

JB: No, it was, it was at the eating place. We were, dorm, no . . .

PC: Cafeteria. Cafeteria?

JB: Well, where do you eat on campus?

PC: Cafeteria.

JB: Is it cafeteria?

MG: Yeah, I think it was in JB back then? In, or in Commons?

JB: Commons I guess was, yeah, Commons would be the name of the, a fine lady, yeah, I'm not good at this at all.

MG: Oh, no, it's fine.

JB: Miss, Miss Roberts was the dietician there, and she ran the whole shebang, and that's where I first met Ed. And this wasn't very long before, I had no classes with him, no, I had no classes with him at all, but it wasn't very long before we would meet at the eating place, you know, sit at the same tables and that type of thing. What else?

MG: Did you have similar friends? Did you meet him through friends?

JB: No, no, I just met him at the table.

MG: Okay, did you remain in close touch with Ed Muskie when he went off to Cornell Law School?

PC: Actually, would you want different things, like my father shared an incident with me when I went skiing yesterday. Remember yesterday in the car when you were, we were talking about you were going, you went skiing with Ed and what happened. You want incidents like that that he remembers?

MG: Oh, absolutely, I would . . .

PC: And different fun things that you did in college.

JB: Yeah, the only trou-, difficulty with me is picking the right words for the . . .

PC: That's okay, they're going to edit this, Dad.

JB: I'm just not any good at that any more.

MG: Oh, no, it's fine. I really just wanted to figure out how long you knew Ed Muskie for? I know you met him in college and I wanted to figure out how long it was since you knew him?

PC: They carried their relationship straight through almost until the time he died.

JB: Oh sure, yeah, yeah.

MG: Okay, great, then were you always very close with Ed Muskie?

JB: Very, quite close. I knew the entire family. We spent, I spent time there with his folks and we, of course we fished quite a bit together and . . .

PC: Why don't you share with them about your honeymoon and his honeymoon?

JB: Oh, that was an interesting affair. Should I, is it necessary to jump over, or . . .?

PC: You can, they're going to edit it, Dad. You can jump if you want.

JB: Okay. Anyway, this was, I met Bernice when I worked with the (*name*) Chemical Company at, that's where, and that's where she worked also. And oh probably a couple of years I think, about two years, she decided she, (*aside*) we decided to get married anyway, so I hadn't talked with Ed about this yet. But, I'll tell you what I'm going to do, we'll go up to Muskie, up to his home, I mean in Rumford, that's where he was, that's where his business was. So when we got there, we stopped at his office and found out that actually he and a group of, they were all businessmen in that area, Ed, oh, I think there were four or five, five of them I think, went, were going fishing. And they named the spot and where it was, and it was a lake close by. So I got the information and the directions, and, so Bern and I started for the, for the lake and had some problems finding it, but we did eventually and then had to walk for about a quarter mile from where we parked the car to the cabin that they were in. And we knocked at the door of the cabin, there was no answer, so, there was a little slip saying I could go right in. And on the table next

to the stove was a note stating that please pour water into the kettle that was on the, well, it wasn't a kettle, it was something that was perking on the stove, you know, for the evening meal, towards the evening meal. Part of it anyway. So, it was, oh maybe towards evening the group came in and I think there were five men and Ed Muskie, all coming in. And Ed was surprised with me, to see us two, and, he had met Bern before though, Bernice. So, where am I (*unintelligible word*)?

PC: So you were explaining how you were going on your honeymoon, I think.

JB: Oh yeah, so, anyway, so they had a lot of kidding and stuff going on in there, these, all these professional men had to have a real ball of having, kidding Bernice, you know, and, but it went, everything went on smoothly from then on. We had no problems and there was a room set aside for us and we were, the following day we left for home. Didn't, we didn't stay any longer than just that weekend, in the, yes. And to jump, to make this thing a little bit unusual is that, see so, in other words, Ed was on our honeymoon. So when Ed got married, it was about two years later, about two years I think, he was married in the town that we, he was, we just mentioned.

MG: Rumford?

JB: No, no.

PC: Rumford, Waterville?

JB: Waterville, yeah, Waterville, yeah. He got married in Waterville and then, but traveled up to a motel in Rumford and, so we followed right along. And they had a cottage, so we got a cottage right next to them, so we were on Ed's (*unintelligible phrase*), Jane, that is the name, yeah. Jane was, Jane and Bern would go off and whisper in the corner and they were, and, anyway, that's the way it worked out. In other words, Ed was on our honeymoon as we were on their honeymoon, and we always got a big charge out of that. It's a little different but not really (*unintelligible word*). So everything just turned out all right, fine.

MG: That's great. So . . .

JB: Go ahead, tell (*unintelligible phrase*).

MG: Oh, no, I was just going to ask, you went fishing with him a lot? Did you do that in college?

JB: Oh, yes. Oh yes. We fished . . .

MG: What did you have in common in college?

JB: Ed was a different, when, this in college, that happened and it's probably around somewhere in the archives now, an incident that happened while Ed and I were proctors, about the first, oh, somewhere on campus anyway. You know which one I'm talking about? No?

PC: A proctor in one of the dorms?

JB: Yeah, the dorm, I'm trying to think of the dorm. But anyway . . .

MG: Were you in Parker? I know that Parker was a male dorm for awhile and Rand was the female dorm.

JB: It was the dormitory anyway, seniors, and this was the, it was on a Friday night, yes, the Saturday was one of the big games we played with Bowdoin or the University of Vermont or, anyway, the, I told you I'd be like this, Prisc.

PC: That's all right. That's fine.

MG: That's fine. It's great.

JB: So, it got to be somewhere around nine or ten o'clock and things were very quiet. We had the entire football team stayed at this one, in one spot.

PC: Now, were you playing football then?

JB: Yes. So, a lot of noise and then a little more noise, and first thing you know, there's, they're yelling out and then there's pushing going on. So I, up, I wasn't in the same room as Ed, but I was in the same dorm, so I hopped up out of bed and got halfway, half dressed, and down I went to find out what all the noise was about, and there was three men involved in the pushing incident, and making, they were pretty well drunk, you know, and they were making a lot of commotion and that was a no-no for the, for, because of the important game we had the day before. So anyway, that went on for a little while, and I got down there and got into the middle of it, and I clobbered a couple of them with my fist actually, I don't, that's one of the, probably the only time I ever hit anybody that way. But anyway I did, and they, I recognized two of them, the hell raisers, but they had graduated the year before, and they were just out having a lot of fun and that's all it is. So, anyway, this thing was all subdued and everybody went on his way, after another half hour or so. The real punch line here is, the following morning, Ed Muskie was coming back from, from breakfast, and they met, oh, Rowe, remember a fellow named Rowe? He was a . . .

PC: Was he a classmate of yours?

JB: No, no, he was one of the, Rowe anyway, you put that down (*unintelligible phrase*).

MG: Rowe?

JB: Rowe, he was in the administrative office, and so they were passing, he says to Ed, quite a outbreak you had there in the, at the, in the, and he says, what was that. So he explained to Ed what took place, you know. And Ed says, I didn't hear anything. So he, Ed slept right through

the whole darn thing. So that's one on Ed Muskie, you know. But he did, he slept right through. He didn't, but that's good enough, he didn't have to be awakened, but that the way Ed did things. He didn't know fifty percent, if he was going to sleep, he was going to sleep. Do you think you got anything out of that with my humbling and fumbling and . . . ?

MG: Oh, yes, definitely. Definitely. Do you think that, so I guess Ed Muskie slept a lot when he needed it. Do you remember other things about him as your roommate?

JB: I remember one, we were on the way from, this would be we were going fishing up in Rumford, they've got lakes, beautiful lakes up there, and that's where Ed's father and mother lived. And we stopped to have lunch and that type of thing, and Ed bought them a (*unintelligible word*). We arrived, one of the first persons out of the house was Ed's brother. Do you remember his name? Well anyway, so, a hug and that type of thing, and we had met him before so, and then Ed says, I've got something for you. So he says, what. He says, oh, thanks Ed, and Ed had, in a little store he picked up a handful of dog biscuits and he put them in his pocket, so he said, try one of these. Gene, his name was, brother's name. So Gene chewed away at them, he says, hey, not bad, not bad. He says, what are they? They're Russian cookies. Oh, I'd like another one of those, so Ed gave him the five that he had. But Ed, it couldn't hurt him, he says.

PC: Did he ever tell him the truth?

JB: Oh, I think so, but I don't think he'd believe him anyway though, he liked the cookies. But that was another one of . . .

MG: Sounds like Ed was quite a character.

JB: Yeah, he liked to do things like that, he liked to, you know. Are we getting anywhere?

MG: Yeah, yeah, this is great. Whatever comes to mind. When you were at Bates with him, do you remember certain things about him, what he enjoyed, what his future aspirations were? Did you expect him to become who he became?

JB: Ed was on the debating team, you know, and he spent his senior year especially, I think, he spent many hours on the, traveling, you know, to Europe and all that type of thing. There was a group of, I don't know how many, maybe four or five, but Ed was one of them, and he enjoyed that so much. And he enjoyed the debates, the debates that would be, what's the main building as you walk up on the, the, . . .

MG: Chase?

JB: Chase Hall? Yeah, Chase, Chase. We would, they would have debates in there, practice sort of speak, you know, and of course we were all invited, anybody who wanted to come in, and it was terrific. And he would just, he was overpowering with his logic. One of the rebuttals that happened at a particular time, and Ed made these statements and the other team made contrary ones, and Ed says, you may be able to prove it, but I don't believe it. He says that just like that.

He meant it, and he was (*unintelligible word*) almost mad because, yeah. Ed had a bit of a temper.

MG: Really?

JB: Quite a bit, but he, it wasn't long lived. It was, he would, it would peter out very shortly after he'd lost his cool, so to speak.

PC: I remember him losing his cool, too.

JB: Is that right?

PC: When we were in Washington, and all the kids were together and we were really creating quite a ruckus, and he had, I don't know who he had for company downstairs, but it must have been someone important. And we were making noise and he just came up and let loose, and that was it. That was it. He was fine.

JB: In that particular spot, too, the same home I think it was, one of the children was supposedly fed and put to sleep and that thing. And they went to look for them, nobody was there, they all crawled, went out . . .

PC: Climbed out the window.

JB: . . . went out the kitchen window. Oh no, the bathroom window.

PC: Bathroom window, yeah.

JB: (*Unintelligible phrase*).

MG: When was this?

PC: This was, he was senator then.

JB: Yeah, he was senator then.

PC: And I was, I was in the seventh grade I think, and Kennedy was president then, and we had gone down a couple of times to visit him, but that was one of the times all the older kids, the four older ones, my brother and Ellen and Ned would go into the downstairs bathroom and just climb out the window. And didn't think we were going to get caught, but we did. And we heard everybody, we heard Ed's wrath then.

JB: But, one other thing that Ed's father used to get a big kick out of because, especially when a stranger would appear at the table and, that was one of the first times I was there having dinner with him one day, and the food was passed around and it all started with the father. You know, he would, as the dishes, and the little Gene was sitting next to his dad there and, across the way

from him, that's where he was. And he says, Dad, would you please pass the dish, and, it wasn't fish, it was some other, and the father looked at him and, never mind the fish, eat your dinner. Just like that, you know. Never mind the fish, eat your dinner. And he didn't bother passing it to them. Of course the other way around he did. You didn't think that was funny?

MG: No, no, it was great.

JB: Do you know what I mean? It wasn't fish anyway, it was something else. But it was, his father used that very liberally, and he got a big kick out of (*unintelligible phrase*) when he would do that. His mother was a grand lady. She was a city bred, city, born in the city, in New York state, not in Rumford. And, but her, when she met Ed's father, he decided Rumford would be the place for his, what did he do?

PC: He was a tailor.

MG: Tailor.

JB: Pardon?

PC: Tailor.

JB: A tailor, yeah, for his tailor bus-, tailoring business. And he was very good at it, and did very, very well. Ed was the best dressed, he had some terrific clothing, suits and stuff that were just great. Ed's father was born in Poland and he learned about the trade to some extent, but he had also learned that England is the place to migrate to, emigrate to, and so he did that, a young fellow, and got in, and learned the trade, and then from there he came over to America, the United States and that's when, apparently he, I lost the reason why he came, for some reason or other, he must have had relatives in the New York area, New York state area where he met his wife, or his future wife. Then she was a dandy person, though, great. They're both nice, very intelligent. And Ed, you heard, you saw his name, the Polish name versus Muskie and that came about at the, where you, you come in to the United States, what do you call that?

PC: Ellis Island?

JB: Ellis Island, yeah. He, they asked him what his name was and he pronounced it as, and, what was it, do you remember?

PC: I don't remember.

JB: Well, it's in there somewhere, but, so, they says, you know, how do you spell that? And he, well, didn't quite understand what they were talking about, so they put down Muskie, and that's how he got the name Muskie.

PC: How long were you . . .

JB: Marciszewski, that's right.

PC: How long were you roommates with Ed, Dad?

JB: Pardon?

PC: How long were you roommates with him?

JB: A couple of years, yeah.

PC: Your last two years?

JB: But we were in the same dorm, we were, we, we were responsible for what happened in the dormitories, but we didn't live in the same room. Roomed once across the room, across the . . .

PC: Did he ever go home and visit with you for vacations, like you went to his house, during school?

JB: Yes, yes. I'm not sure whether it was while we were in school. I think it was after, at least, I know we were on Prospect Street at the time. A couple of times, no this was after college, yeah. Because I remember the, a particular fish was in the sound at that time, it just came in, it was a, oh, I forget who it was, what it was, one of the salt water fish anyway. And so Ed said as soon as you, any time you get a, it's a good fishing opportunity to catch some fish that I never caught before. So I called him and he came down and spent a weekend down here, and we fished the sound and the fish was good, delicious. I don't know what it was, as far as I remember. I don't remember its name.

PC: I just always remember him coming through and visiting and playing cribbage. My father never played cribbage, but all my relatives played cribbage, so if he was going to come for a night or two, all the relatives would gather and they'd all play at these big cribbage games.

JB: Yeah, they did, at school, too, the cribbage was quite prominent. I never got, I didn't have time for that. I was too darned stupid, you know, had to, but anyway, the, after graduation, there was a club formed from past, of the . . .

PC: Cribbage players?

JB: Yeah, and they all met in the, in Massachusetts, what's the big . . .?

PC: Boston?

JB: Boston, for a number of years, just for, to play cribbage. And Ed, he would never miss that if he possibly could. But anyway, that's (*unintelligible word*).

MG: What were you busy with in college? You said that you were too busy for it, for cribbage.

You were involved in football, right?

JB: Yeah, football and . . .

PC: Did you play baseball in college?

JB: . . . baseball, yeah. Football and baseball. So it, that plus, I did some odd jobs for some people around, too, that the, in fact I worked in the dorm, in the kitchen in the dormitory, too. Preparing. So I was kind of tied up, I didn't, didn't have the chance for gallivanting. I was nowhere, I wasn't as smart as the rest either, as the others I mean.

MG: Did Ed used to come to your games, your football and baseball games?

JB: Yes, yes.

MG: So you did stuff together at college a lot?

JB: Right, yeah.

MG: Did you have some of the same friends in your last two years?

JB: Same what?

MG: Friends.

PC: Friends. Did you hang around with the same people?

JB: Well, the girls were, the girls were in the same dormitory, you know, up in . . .

MG: Rand?

JB: Yeah, that's right, up in that area, yeah. And Ed would, oh, he had, oh I can't even remember their names anyway, anyway so frequently we'd double date, you know. I didn't have a heck of a lot of money to double date (*unintelligible word*) anyway, but Ed had more than I had. That's when, that's when, his laundry, your soiled clothing you'd put in a suitcase type of thing and it would be shipped home. It would be laundered and come back to you.

PC: So you did it, did everybody do that?

JB: Yes, yeah, all but the, well yeah, I guess practically everybody. If you lived in town, why, you wouldn't have to I guess, but yeah. That was . . .

PC: So there was no laundry facilities?

JB: No, no, that was the way to do it. And it was fairly good, the service was pretty much on

the day we expected it would be there, it was quite good. And of course some goodies along with it in the bag, too. Sometimes a five-dollar bill. But, those were the good old days, you know. This is not a Muskie story, but during that period there would be, I had two or three good friends, girls, and I was a pretty good dancer, darn good in fact, they told me that, you know, and I was sought after in that respect. But I was invited, this was an afternoon, evening type of, what do you call those?

PC: Tea dances?

JB: Tea dances, yes, to, and I said, yeah I'd like to go, sure I would, but I don't have any proper attire for that thing, and while I was saying that I was thinking, yeah, I know who has, though. The fellow across the street, across the room, in the next room over had a brand new suit, I saw him, beautiful, so I asked him if I could borrow it.

MG: Was that Ed?

JB: No, no it wasn't Ed. No, I forget what his name now, but, so, this has nothing to do with Muskie, that's why I say, this, so it was, I think it started at three o'clock in the afternoon. Do they still do that type of thing?

MG: It's a little different. They have evening dances.

JB: But anyway, so the girl was, that was escorting me, came over to, over at the dorm looking for me, you know, and I, somebody notified me of the fact that she was downstairs, so I, from the second story, I was looking down, and I forget what the heck her name was but anyway, she says, Joe, we're going to be late. I said not a darn thing I can do about it. The, John is out skiing and he won't be, until he gets back, I can't get his suit. So she had to wait, she was, she had come in to the dorm and sat downstairs and waited. But anyway, when he got back I got his suit and went dancing.

MG: His name was John?

PC: Yeah, his, the person you borrowed the suit from was named John, Dad?

JB: Yes.

MG: Do you remember his last name?

JB: No.

MG: That's okay.

JB: I should. If I went through the . . .

PC: The yearbook?

JB: . . . the yearbook, I could find it, but, there are two brothers from Massachusetts, that I remember.

MG: Was this the same year that you roomed with Ed Muskie?

JB: No, no.

MG: No, different year, before that?

JB: Before that, yeah.

PC: So, I know we went to visit him when he was governor, we went up to the governor's mansion, and we went on vacations. Did you always keep in touch with him, with Ed and the family.

JB: Hmm.

PC: How often? I know, how often did you see them or keep in touch with them over the years? A couple times a year?

JB: More frequently than that, until the, until they, when they moved to Washington, D.C., chances of seeing, of my being able to see him at that time were not very good. He was all over the world (*unintelligible word*).

PC: You still managed to va-, you and Ma managed to vacation with them in Kennebunkport, though.

JB: That's right, oh yes, yes, every year. For many years anyway.

MG: Do you have memories from that? You said you did, you went there every year, to Kennebunk?

JB: Well I don't, by every year I mean the years that they were down there, too.

MG: Right.

JB: Yeah, yeah.

MG: Do you remember things from that? Do you remember things that Ed? (*Long pause*). That's okay.

JB: I just, a couple of things there that I'm trying to, that I thought were outstanding, but I can't recall the darn things right now.

MG: That's okay. Do you remember other things about your experiences with him that stand out? Actually, let me stop the tape and turn it over so that we get everything.

End of Side One

Side Two

JB: . . . but that's about . . .

PC: Because you were a couple of years older than Ed was. Because you started off in school, I forget where you started off, and then stopped for a little while, and then went to Bates.

JB: I went up to the University of Vermont.

PC: Then the scholarship fell through?

JB: Yes, yes. So I came back and worked down at, back down at the, my old job, and started at Bates the following year.

MG: So, did you start at Bates when you were a junior?

PC: Or did you go back as a freshman?

MG: Or did you go back as a freshman, or?

JB: Oh no, I didn't, didn't, there wasn't enough, well at the time at the University of Vermont wasn't significant.

MG: (*Tape stopped briefly*) . . . not at the University of Vermont very long?

JB: No, just a couple of weeks.

MG: Oh, I see, okay.

PC: So what happened? They just didn't have the money?

JB: They decided that they weren't going along with the program, didn't even (*unintelligible phrase*) for some reason or other, yeah, so a number of us were just sent home.

MG: And then Bates accepted you and . . .?

JB: The following year, yeah, yeah, yeah. And they were glad, even these days I get notes from men like Lindholm, you know Lindy do you? Lindholm? He was a, oh he was a . . .

PC: Was he in your class?

JB: No, he was a year ahead of me, but he had, he was in administration anyway. He still lives in that area, but you wouldn't, no reason why you'd know him anyway at this time, but at one time he was quite, very, he played football with me, too. Lindholm, Milt, Milton Lindholm.

PC: Did, was Ed on a scholarship do you know?

JB: Yes.

PC: On an academic one, or, did he play any sports?

JB: Academic pretty much. But he did, he was a, he was always, also in track, on the track, he used to . . .

PC: High jump?

MG: High jump.

JB: High jump without the pole. That's what he used to be, do that. And he was pretty good at it, too. But he didn't have, he didn't spend much time at it, but he was quite good. That's the only sport. He played some basketball, but that was pick up type of thing where we were just fooling around, but, he (*unintelligible word*) . . .

MG: You mentioned Lindholm. Did you also, do you remember John Donovan?

JB: No, I've seen his name in the . . .

MG: Right, he was in the class of 1940 at Bates.

JB: Nineteen forty?

MG: Forty, yeah, he . . .

JB: Yeah, see I was thirty-six, it would, I would have missed him.

MG: Right, but he became a political science professor at Bates College.

JB: Oh yes, I know. Where was he from.

MG: So I was just wondering . . . I don't know but he was the Maine Democratic state committee chairman. I was just wondering if you knew him or if you and Ed knew him.

JB: No, no I didn't know him. Ed could have, yeah.

MG: Did Ed, did Ed Muskie introduce you to people who he knew through political affiliation? Do you remember anyone?

JB: I don't . . .

PC: I'm sure that when you were, when we visited them, people with some political clout were introduced to you, but I don't know if . . .

JB: Yeah, that's right. I think what you're saying is probably accurate, but I don't know of any particular one that, at this point, oh yes, well I know one for sure. He introduced me to the president . . .

PC: Jimmy Carter.

JB: Jimmy Carter, we were at the . . .

PC: At the dedication of his archives.

JB: That's right, yeah, and we had quite a chat. I think he had, Ed went off talking to others and Carter and I, he, Carter just thought so much of Ed.

MG: Really.

JB: Yeah, he said, he should have been president rather than me, because you know that, all my problems, Ed would be the fellow that would solve most of them for me. He knew what was going on in the world all the time. So he, he was just so pleased that Ed was . . .

PC: His secretary of state.

JB: His secretary, yeah, yeah. So he was well considered in the Washington circles.

MG: Do you remember anything else about that dedication, the Muskie Archives dedication?

JB: It was crowded. The music was beautiful. I've never heard it on campus before, it was a different type of band that was hired for that event I guess. What was it, it was so great.

MG: Did you and Ed Muskie get a chance to talk about it at all, or was he very busy?

JB: Oh no, he, we, he was, who was, who came up with me?

PC: Bob, Bob drove you up and Father Saunders was there.

JB: That's right, too. Yeah, though Ed spent quite a bit of time with us, in the threesome, just explaining things as the . . .

MG: Like what?

JB: Explaining the various, how, I don't even recollect, I haven't, but there were some outstanding accomplishments that Ed had participated in. I guess one of the, he, it was, remember you heard him referred to as Mr. Clean, you remember that? Well, Mr. Clean was, he was in this, we had a, I wonder if, I had some old papers that I, . . . (*looking through papers*).

MG: So he was . . . ?

JB: But it had to do with environmental clean up type of thing. He headed that thing for the federal government.

MG: Right, when he was in Congress, I believe.

JB: That's right, yeah.

MG: He was a strong advocate of environmental protection, particularly in Maine.

JB: Here's a good one, the, I had this around for quite a while, at this, it comes from a different section, different paper than you would probably, although I don't know. I had that around for a long time and I thought I'd

MG: That's interesting, to read that.

JB: You can have that if you wish.

MG: Thank you, I'll read it. I just have a few more questions about his political life and your connection with him during that time. When he, when he first became politically involved, well actually, jumping ahead for a minute, Don mentioned to me that you were involved in the national campaign between 1968 and 1972. How were you involved in them?

JB: Well, I locally was involved.

MG: Right, right.

JB: But it didn't get far enough, it didn't materialize before Ed decided, remember his wife's, the incident with his wife in New Hampshire?

PC: She probably wasn't even born, Dad.

MG: Nope.

JB: Oh, you don't remember that?

PC: There was a, in Manchester, New Hampshire, that's just like the starting, the starting place for many a presidential hopeful, one of the, I think it was, I could be wrong, one of the editorials bad mouthed Jane, and he just . . .

MG: Oh, and he broke down. Yeah, I remember reading about that. Well, what did your friends and neighbors in this community, in the Naugatuck area, feel about Senator Muskie at that time, before he was out of the running? Do you remember what, what his sort of reputation was?

JB: I wasn't politically involved other than trying to get this thing organized for Ed, which fell through, so I, prior to that I had made a couple of, oh, I had been (*long pause*) Monday morning quarterbacking. I suppose I should have gotten involved in politics locally, but I didn't.

PC: But what did all your friends seem to think about Ed and his . . .?

JB: Oh, yeah, they thought he was great, yeah. Well, up through the area that we lived in, up through Prospect Street and all up in that area, the, they were all for Ed, there's no question about it. Because the, one of the Scully boys who, in fact he, yeah, he and I went off to Maine for fishing and met up with Ed Muskie and he was a, sort of a political power in this area, in that area, Union City area type of thing.

MG: Who was this? I'm sorry?

JB: Pardon?

MG: Who was this?

JB: Name was Scully.

MG: Scully?

PC: My guess is that all through the years you didn't really have a political connection with Ed, but just more of a friendship, a deep friendship.

JB: Exactly, yeah.

PC: That lasted throughout the years. And getting together wasn't political, as it was just enjoying one another's company.

JB: Exactly, yeah. The families, as they matured, then they got old enough so they could travel, that's what happened. Prisc and Peter, I mean Mark, Prisc and Mark are, and Bernice and myself, we spent a lot, quite a number of years in Maine, year after year that would be the, our vacation would be up in Maine, for that reason, right?

MG: Mrs. Clark, do you remember, what is your view of your parents' generation and your memories of Ed Muskie and his family?

PC: I just always, I never I guess growing up realized, though I knew he was governor and we

went to visit him in the governor's mansion and I knew he was senator, and we would go down, we would go through the Senate and we would just, I would, I have the best views of Washington any middle schooler could have, but I saw him, until I got into college and he was, that ill-fated attempt at his presiden-, run for presidency, I just saw him just a friend of the family's more than anything else. And enjoyed . . .

JB: And that's all there was, actually.

PC: Yeah, and enjoyed everybody's company and had a good time with them.

JB: Yeah, they, they'd spend, on their way between Washington and Maine, stop in here and frequently stay over and, I remember one day they came in and there was nobody home, they went over to Midge's across the street, remember, do you remember that one? Trying to find out where we went. Midge didn't know either, so, we missed them that time. But most of the other times we didn't, not.

PC: I know Ed came to my wedding.

MG: I heard about that.

JB: Yeah, Ed, did you? How'd you hear that?

MG: Oh, it was in one of the files.

JB: Is that right?

PC: Yeah, he flew in for the day. Jane couldn't make it, I think she was sick and so he flew in for the day.

JB: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, I, one of the most important, [the] most outstanding part of that particular trip was, we had a mayor . . .

PC: Rado (*sounds like*) who is a, was a schmoe, and he still is, and he still, he's a schmoe to the point of switching parties from Democrat, he was Democrat for twenty years . . .

PC: Seventy years.

JB: Or, right, seventy years, and then decided well, if, I think I'll switch over to the Republicans this time. Just like that. But anyway, what, at their mass, at the . . .

PC: My wedding?

JB: . . . your wedding, he came up and introduced himself to Ed, and then waited to be introduced. He says, I'm mayor of this town, you know.

PC: And he wasn't even invited to the wedding.

MG: Oh, no.

JB: He was a brazen guy. Oh, well.

MG: So how did, how do you think you've been affected by knowing Ed Muskie? I mean, do you feel like you're a representative of him because you know him on a personal level? Did you feel that you knew him on a per-, that because you knew him on a personal level, you represented him in some ways? Did people ask you a lot of questions about him? How did you respond to knowing him?

PC: Well, this is a relatively small community, and people, I mean it was pretty much general knowledge that he and my father were good friends, and being a small community and having a very small daily newspaper, a little, wasn't worth its weight in anything. I mean, there'd be, I mean, when Ed would come up, I mean there'd be notices, and then there'd be just, and there'd be allusions to the fact that they were friends and, right Dad? Am I?

JB: Pretty much, Prisc. I couldn't add anything to that. Being as stupid as I am.

PC: You're not stupid.

JB: Well, I sure, I'm glad this is not for national television (*unintelligible word*). Well, this is not, this is normal for me. I'm talking with Prisc, she'll ask me a question, sometimes it'll take me as long to give her the answer as it does you, you know.

MG: This is fine. It was great. How did you, how would you respond to questions that people would ask you about Ed Muskie, and, you know, what would be your normal reply if anyone, if someone said, well, you know, how did you know Ed Muskie and what was he like? What do you remember most about him as a person?

JB: I, I feel that Ed was, this has nothing to do with politics, though, it's just, he and I were just terrific friends. It seems like we, he was so bright, I just wonder how the heck he, he come down to my level most of the time, but he did, he did a tremendous job.

PC: Is there any characteristic that you could pick out that you most admired in him?

JB: Oh, he was a very honest person. You could depend on him for, if he said so that he would be there at that time, he would be there at that time. And he, I'm not sure, I thought that he was a pretty, quite a popular person at school, too.

MG: In college he was popular?

JB: In college, yeah.

MG: He had a lot of friends?

JB: Yes.

MG: Did he know people in a particular circle, like, I know that he was very much involved in the debate team, but did he know people from other circles of friends in particular? Like, did he know any of the football players that you were friends with?

JB: Well, we played golf quite frequently, and, oh yeah, he was, he knew all the football players, they all lived pretty much in the same, what do you call it?

MG: Dorm?

JB: Dorm, yeah. Yes, so that, yeah, he got to know everybody. And there were some courses that, I had a couple of courses with him, and others have also, so . . .

MG: Were there any professors that the two of you knew personally that you became close to?

JB: I, yeah, there are a couple but I'll be darned if I can remember their names. One was relatively young, I think he probably came in, oh, I'll be darned if I can remember his name now, he came in to, on campus, oh, maybe in our sophomore years or junior years type of thing. What the, I'll be darned if I can remember him. He might, well, no, he wouldn't be here now, of course not. But, yeah I had a few courses with Ed.

MG: Were those, you were an econ major and a sociology major, right?

JB: Hmm.

MG: So, so were they classes like that, or were they political science, because that's what . . .?

JB: That's right, that's what he was, political science.

MG: He was political science. So the classes that you had together were . . .?

JB: No, one of them was public speaking.

MG: Really?

JB: Yeah. (*Unintelligible phrase*) how well he did with that, tremendous. He did better than the professor, I think so anyway. The professor probably never thought so, but I forgot his name.

PC: That's all right.

JB: Yeah, oh, (*unintelligible phrase*), he was good, too, he was very good.

MG: Did Ed Muskie ever tell you that he wanted to pursue a career in public speaking or anything like that? Did he know if he would?

JB: No, in fact I don't think he even had politics in mind when he, actually I don't, law is the only thing that he was interested in and that, he steered toward that once he knew that he had the backing for it, financial, once he got that straightened out, then he was all set. And he just stayed as, I guess he was a good lawyer.

PC: Looking back though, Dad, do you think that with his expertise in debating and public speaking and his love of the law, politics almost seems like a natural for him?

JB: Yeah, I would say so. The only thing is, then it's a personality type of thing. You've got to get that, he came into a state of Maine that had been Republican, just black Republican, nothing else, no such thing as a Democratic. And within, oh, after he became a lawyer, I think maybe within three years, he was voted in as the, you know, you were there.

PC: Governor.

JB: The governor, you know? And then they, the party, and this, because of his, well anyway, he made the Democratic Party, which was, Republican, Democrat, they're all people, but the two have a (*unintelligible word*) something that didn't, practically didn't exist, become a very significant part of the political process in Maine. I think that was a terrific accomplishment.

MG: So Bates was very Republican when you attended?

JB: Bates? Oh, the entire state was, yeah. Sure. Not that it made a heck of a lot of difference to me what they were one way or another but, oh yeah, that was all Republican, yeah. The Democrats, they had a few would be politicians so to speak, but nothing significant. Nothing ever mattered, the Republicans would win. But Muskie, and what's wonderful about that is that, that was his first attempt also, you know? So he just sold himself to the people.

MG: As a person, what do you think made him so successful? What do you think appealed to the public about him that changed, you know, everyone voting Republican?

JB: This, read that now, that's just what I said.

MG: Read this article? "It's not just politicians who make history, but history that makes them, or consigns them to the second rank. So he did a more than credible job as Hubert Humphrey's running mate against Richard Nixon in the close fought election of 1968." So what were, on a personal level, what were characteristics that made him so appealing do you think? Or on an even more simple level, what made him popular in school? What do you think made him popular at Bates?

JB: Well, he was an easy person to meet.

MG: Really, he was very personable?

JB: Yeah, very personable. He had, if you meet him once, he'd remember. (*Unintelligible word*) terrific memory.

MG: Really.

JB: Just like mine. But that's true. He was, just had, well, say something, Prisc. Help me.

PC: Well I don't know. You said it before, and I think it holds true. His honesty.

JB: Oh yes, definitely.

PC: And his sense of fairness.

JB: Yeah, yeah, oh yes, he definitely was that. You remember his, the . . .

PC: And he had a sense of humor, and he had a, from what you would tell me, he had a sense of adventure. You had a good, a lot of laughs and good times together.

JB: Oh sure. Yes. Yes. You remember that incident in New Hampshire where they, the . . .

PC: We talked about that, where they talked, (*unintelligible word*) made mention about Jane?

JB: Yeah.

PC: Yeah, we spoke about that already.

JB: When, oh, today?

PC: Today.

JB: Did we? Yeah. Ed actually cried when he was objecting to that so-and-so in New Hampshire, you know, and they said that's the reason why he, and he just gave up on, as far as running for president was concerned, but, he had a great family. I think there were four sisters and one brother, and I sort of lost track of them over the years. His brother probably still lives in California, that's where he moved to, Gene, but, but we just, every summer for years head right up to the, and where'd we spend, the last ten or so, which lake was that, Prisc?

PC: Not the last ten. When I was young, we'd go up to China Lake.

JB: China, yeah, that's right, China Lake, yeah, yeah. That's . . .

PC: I don't know where it is, it's in Maine. I was little.

JB: Yeah, it's only a short distance from . . .

PC: Augusta?

JB: Augusta, or, yeah, the town that he was, no where . . .

PC: Waterville?

JB: Waterville, yeah, yeah. Waterville, where the, oh yeah, that's Waterville. Our son Peter, our son (*laughing*), Peter Clark is, he graduated from Colby and he's teaching now at . . .

PC: Brewster Academy.

JB: Brewster Academy in New Hampshire. Have you ever heard of Brewster Academy? That's all right, that's a, it's a terrific school anyway, but that, and he's enjoying it, and Prisc's daughter Sara, we can show them the picture here, no pictures, Prisc.

PC: She's, Dad, we're talking about Muskie here, not about my kids. She goes to Hood College, she's a sophomore.

JB: It's much easier for me to talk about the kids. But, not easier but just, it's, oh, and she's going to Ireland this . . .

PC: Summer.

JB: In the summer, yeah. She's down at . . .

PC: Hood.

JB: . . . Hood College. You ever heard of Hood?

MG: I've heard of it.

JB: Yeah, that's in Maryland.

PC: It's a women's school in Frederick, Maryland.

JB: She's really a dandy, prettiest thing you ever saw. I'm not comparing, I'm just make a statement. But she is, she's a dandy.

PC: Well, do you want to, do you have any other questions sort of to wrap it up or sum it up?

MG: Yeah, I was just going to ask, you and Senator Muskie had a sort of shared ethnic, ethnic and cultural heritage to my knowledge, and I wanted to know how that affected you two as

friends and as roommates and what sort of things you discussed and . . . ?

JB: Well, I, probably nothing in that regard because the, our parents didn't know one another, well, I guess Ed had met my mother, right? Yeah, he would have met her, but father had died.

PC: But just knowing that you were both Polish and your parents, respective parents had come from Poland, do you think that was a bond even if it was an unspoken bond that you might have been?

JB: It's possible but I don't think it's ever been, it was never mentioned.

PC: Did you share any cultural type of foods or enjoy them when you went to his house or he went to your house?

JB: No, just those dog biscuits. No, no, they, it was just good Yankee cooking, and Yankee, what the, no that wasn't, that was never a prominent subject I recall. No, I can't help you on that score.

MG: Is there anything else that you'd like to say that you remember about Muskie, or any other memories that you have that I didn't ask about, or anything significant that I missed out on?

PC: Have you said it all, Dad?

MG: Or Mrs. Clark, if there's anything that you'd like to add that you remember?

PC: No, I think my memories I've already shared mostly.

JB: I'm afraid I did, too. Not very well, but.

PC: That's all right.

JB: The, there was one incident in the, I don't whether I talked about this before or not, I think not. But it was in the, at the Commons, that was the name of the place that we'd eat, right? And Miss, there was a Miss Roberts I think her name, well, for years, she probably inherited it from, oh, her predecessor anyway and, the students as they came to eat would just come into the, into the room, and just filling the room with disorderly type of things you know, and the waiters would have trouble passing through, so Mrs. Roberts, Miss Roberts says one day that she's going to change all that, she's going to make all the, each, there are two entrances and the doors would be locked, closed on both entrances so that the, we had an accumulation of students in each one until (*unintelligible word*), that was it. And then each, as, very orderly, the head boy like me or Ed at each one of these would open the door and let six or whatever the number for the table to pass out, and then they would sit and then they (*unintelligible word*), and that was, that lasted pretty good, for about fifteen minutes. The, Ed had this door and I had this one, and first darn, I was a football player and not, I never messed around too much with small stuff, you know, and they knew it, so, so I had no problem. But Ed, over here, had, he started to give them the, what

he learned at public speaking, you know, that type of thing. First thing you know, they started to shove a little bit and further you know they're pushing a little bit harder, further you know they pushed Ed right out the, through the door into the dining room. So I said to my gang, stay right there now, I'll be right back, and I went over and rescued Ed and told the fellows get back behind that door and stay there until you're admitted, and they did, but the only thing (*unintelligible phrase*), but that became a rule though, from there on, that they would wait in the hallway. But I remember one of the write-ups on it in the school, it was Ed Muskie against the rest. He was the kind of guy that showed them what to do. And that was the least non cooperative that I've ever seen a group of kids to be.

MG: So you and Ed really looked out for each other?

JB: Hmm?

MG: So you looked out for Ed?

JB: Oh yes, we did that. One other thing there, lobsters, did you ever have lobster fights?

MG: Nope.

JB: We fill that, we had them up at Bates.

MG: You had lobster fights?

JB: Oh yes. There was a certain number of youngsters who didn't like lobsters, and that would be all that would be served for dinner. The first thing you know is, SLAM, you know, and they were all, oh, they were vicious, they were.

MG: Sounds like a lot of fun.

JB: And Mrs. Roberts, Miss Roberts wouldn't, she wouldn't come out of the kitchen, but she complained about it (*unintelligible word*). They were vicious.

MG: Well, it looks like I'm just about out of time, but thank you very much.

JB: Well, I'm sorry that I couldn't do a better job with it, but . . .

MG: No, you did a fine job.

JB: . . . I'm not prepared for it.

MG: No, it was fine.

JB: You sure?

MG: Everything I wanted to know. Thank you, though.

JB: Thank you.

End of Interview

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