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# Brannigan, Joe oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

# Interview with Joe Brannigan by Andrea L'Hommedieu

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

**Interviewee**
Brannigan, Joe

**Interviewer**
L'Hommedieu, Andrea

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**Place**
Portland, Maine

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## Biographical Note

Joseph Brannigan was born July 16, 1931 and raised in Topsham, Maine. He attended St. Dominic's High School, Georgetown University and served in the Navy during the Korean War. He trained at St. John's Seminary, and was ordained as a priest in 1963. He earned a master's degree at the University of Southern Maine and left the priesthood to become a counsellor, and then the executive director of Shalom House in 1975. He has also served as a Maine state Senator and Representative.

## Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of environmental protection; Vietnam War; Republican Party in Maine; Democratic Party in Maine; Maine Legislature; term limits; and the Maine Commission on Legal Needs.

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**Transcript**

**Andrea L'Hommedieu:** This is an interview with Mr. Joseph Brannigan at 400 Congress Street in Portland, Maine, on January the 17th, the year 2002. This is Andrea L'Hommedieu, and we are at Shalom House. Mr. Brannigan, could you start by saying your full name and spelling it?

**Joseph Brannigan:** Sure, my full name is Joseph C., Charles, Brannigan, B-r-a-n-n-i-g-a-n.

**AL:** And where and when were you born?

**JB:** I was born in Brunswick, but I was brought up in Topsham, Maine. And July 16th, 1931.

**AL:** And you grew up in Topsham?

**JB:** If I ever grew up, yes, I grew up in Topsham?

**AL:** What was the Topsham community like then?

**JB:** It was a small community next to Brunswick, and we depended almost entirely, mostly on Brunswick for fire department, we had a constable but no police. Well, and we had no high school, we had a, so we were very dependent in those days on Brunswick. We were somewhat a bedroom community to Bowdoin College. Later, the air base came in during the war, I was, you know, I was a, I don't know, ten, twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old during the Second World War. So, but it was a small town, divided with the French people up on the Topsham Heights,

and they were almost totally connected to Brunswick; they went to the Brunswick church, they went to the Brunswick St. John's church, St. John's school, they even had their own address out of Brunswick, it was.

So I lived near the village, across from the fairgrounds. My father ran the Felspar Mill down the street which kicked up dust that nobody would tolerate today. And I, there was a small group of us that kind of hung out together and one of those people, oddly enough, even though we've separated tremendously in our approaches to philosophy and politics, who lived just a few houses down the street, and he and I were inseparable for years. He's now in the legislature also, a representative from Gray, a very conservative Republican, as I was brought up, and a very, but now I'm a pretty liberal Democrat.

So it was a, it was a close knit town, I think. People behaved themselves. Somebody tipped over some gravestones once, it was just a tremor throughout the town. I mean, they couldn't believe that this would ever happen. And, I can't remember, but pursued the people who did it and, but it was that kind of innocent kind of place. I could walk to school, I could hear the school bell, and so, I don't know, it was, I guess it was a good place to grow up.

**AL:** What were your parents' names?

**JB:** I'm a junior, my father is the same name as mine, my mother's name was Fern, her maiden name was Pearl, and my father came originally from Lewiston. Irish, but not the Irish that we hear around Portland here where everybody's going back to Ireland looking for their roots. I think his father was adopted, his mother was a Malaney, so there was certainly Irish there but he, he came to Topsham early. He went from elementary school right into BLIS, so-called business college, and went to work for a self-made Quaker gentleman who ran Felspar Mill there and started one in Topsham in 1912. My father came there with him and worked there for fifty years. And, my mother was, he was Catholic but, you know, he had been, he was older, as I was when I got married, he was thirty-seven. My mother was from the Livermore, Livermore Falls, Turner, farm country, her father was a farmer from the time he was twelve. And, but she'd gone to normal school in Farmington and came to teach in a one-room school house in my area, in Topsham, and met my father and they got married the month of, almost the day of the crash that started in '29. And my father had invested in the stock market, being a single gentleman of some leisure and, but anyway, they, my mother was a, not religious when she came to know my father, but she became a convert to Catholicism, which was pretty much necessary in those days. And it really took, and she became a tremendously religious person, a person who has very strong, narrow convictions about everything.

And so my father became a Republican, even though his progenitors were Democrats, you know, and union people in Lewiston. But because of his relationship to this man that he eventually called Papa, he was certainly his mentor, he adopted his ways relative to politics and was a Republican, very active in my town, our town, involved in school negotiations with Brunswick which led to us being kicked out of Brunswick High School actually, because we wouldn't build a building for them, we, Topsham, and all my friends were bussed down to Morse High School. Myself and another fellow were offered the opportunity to go to a Catholic school, which we'd never been to, in Lewiston, St. Dominic's. I'm not sure why we chose to go. Maybe because we

wanted to drive our father's car between, every day to Lewiston. But it was a salvation for him and for me. I was barely passing and he had flunked his junior year. He became a doctor in Lisbon Falls, and I went on eventually to school and became a priest and all the things I've done since. So that was a great move for us, going to that school. Just kind of brought some seriousness into being, into learning. And so -

**AL:** Yes, so you've just mentioned you studied to be a priest.

**JB:** Yes.

**AL:** And did that come from your parents, your mother in particular and her religious convictions?

**JB:** I suppose it did. I took my, I took things very seriously, I suffered from seriousness over the years, so I took religion seriously. I took the fact that my mother was a very anti-drinking teetotaler, and I never had a drink 'til I was thirty-seven years old of any kind, other than sacramental wine. And I was in the engine room of a ship for four year. So I, but I got, after I got out of high school I worked in the woods, I worked carpentry, I worked a filling station, and a surveyor for Wright & Pierce. And then when the Korean War came along I enlisted in the Navy, and I was there for, in a ship for four years mainly out of Norfolk hauling refrigerated stores to the Caribbean area or Trinidad, Puerto Rico, and up to Newfoundland, and Bermuda.

And my mother did push me to be interested in reading, she's read since she was eight years old, she's ninety-five now, and with one eye in glaucoma, but as long as I can read, she, you know, so I did get interested. I began to be interested in being involved in politics at the time, but one thing, I went to Georgetown University after I got out of the Navy, and I, I actually went to Portland Junior College for six months because when I got out of the Navy I had to wait until the next fall, it was in January, I had to wait until the next fall to enter Georgetown and, the school of foreign service I went to, but it was there I felt I was called.

And so certainly her influence was major, my own taking seriously everything was involved. I was really turned on to be of service to people, and turned on to be in service to God and religion and the Catholic Church. So I'd done nothing but flunk Spanish and barely pass a French course, and so it didn't look like I could be a priest, but there was a special school in Boston for veterans like myself called St. Philip (*unintelligible word*), which was run by the Jesuits, and we took four years of Latin, two years of Greek, some English and some religion all in one year, high school subjects in Greek, but I got enough so that I could get by, and fortunately the church began not to use Latin very much after that. So I went to St. John's Seminary, was accepted the diocese here, Bishop Feeney. I don't think anybody ever figured out that I only had one year of college at Georgetown, which I did very well, by the way. And then the high school subjects, and then I was not going to go to some junior seminary, and I was sent to St. John's Seminary in Brighton in my, as a junior in philosopy, and I went there for years, graduate school, you know, all the theology, and I was ordained in 1963.

And I went, had my first, the first parish was Holy Cross in South Portland, which was a huge parish in those days, and had all of Cape Elizabeth. And then, after two or three years there, I

was transferred to Fairfield, a small parish in Fairfield, in the Waterville area. Wonderful people, wonderful place. But I was becoming more and more liberal, more and more radical; I moved from denying people absolution because they couldn't promise that they wouldn't use birth control, to, two or three years later, of not even being allowed to talk in a church because of my more liberal, and I marched with the (*unintelligible word*) church about marriage and so forth - And I marched with the Barrigans of Catonsville, the Catonsville Nine, and this was the end of the sixties and I caught that, you know, I caught that fever. And was transferred to Portland to be the first chaplain of the various colleges and universities, Portland-Gorham was just coming together as POGO U, and also at Westbrook College and SMT, C now, SMT, it was a technical school anyway. And then I, but I was beginning to be ready to do something else, so I left after a couple of years.

**AL:** And what did you go on to do at that point?

**JB:** I had, even though I'd had all this schooling I had no degrees. I had a degree in philosophy that wasn't recognized outside of Massachusetts, so I had all this graduate work but no degree. In those days they trained you just to be, prepared you just to be ordained. So I went, while I was at USM I was working toward a master's in counseling education, I'd done a lot of counseling and, with the people in Waterville, or Fairfield under the guidance of the people at the mental health center there. So I, so anyway, I got a master's degree which kind of legitimized my education. And, then I worked for a while in Western Maine Counseling, because I'd decided I could either be an actual therapist or I could be an executive director or something because that was the, that was the Model Cities days, the war on poverty, the Johnson era.

And, so - but I decided if I got a chance to actually do counseling, therapeutic work, I would do it. And I tried it, and I didn't like it very well for two reasons: one, I wasn't well enough, prepared, I didn't know my business well enough I didn't think, and I didn't like the back room nature of it. I'd been out front for years, loved preaching, I was good at being a priest, good at all of those kind of people stuff, and so I, I looked for something a little more public. The job came up of being executive director of Shalom House, Inc., a very small, two, three year old organization; it had one house. But it was the first and it still was the only place where adults with mental illness were either coming out of the hospital, or would have gone in the hospital had they not changed the philosophy of people not being in the hospital in those days. They were emptying out, there were eighteen hundred people in AMHI when I first visited there in 1956, and they're down to ninety today, and so many of those are forensic. And so anyway, I just, I got this job and I've been here ever since. But -

**AL:** And you started that when?

**JB:** I went there in 1975. It had been running since '72, we're just about to have our thirtieth anniversary, and I've been here twenty-seven almost years. I wouldn't have stayed all these years except that I mixed that with a political career, and it just gave my life a lot of interesting opportunity to do lots of things. And Shalom has grown and, because I've had good people. I've only, you know, I originally didn't intend to stay at Shalom, but when I got elected they, the board of directors and the staff, we only had five or six of us then, we're a hundred of us now,

wanted me to try to see if we could work it out together and we did, and we worked it out for sixteen years. And then I came back and worked here for six years more, and then last year I ran again and I was in the house for eight years and then in the senate for eight years. I knew exactly what the people wanted, that's what the term limits are nowadays, in those I just, the opportunity came to run for the senate and I did. And, so it's made a good mix in my life, and still does actually.

**AL:** Yeah. As a state legislator, does it give you the opportunity to bring the issues that Shalom House tries to meet within the state and the communities, does it give you a chance to keep those in the public forum?

**JB:** It does. It does. I was pretty conscious of, my first years, and still today to some degree, I'm really kind of conscious of conflict of interest, and I, not all legislators are, I mean, there's insurance men on the insurance committee, and teachers on the education committee, and I didn't want to go into human service stuff there anyway and I wanted to avoid any conflicts, so I went into business, bank, I was appointed to banking, and the business legislation committee, which dealt with banking insurance, and I was chair of that most of the time I was in the house, and so that gave me a whole new thing to learn which was pretty, just learning to be a legislator was tough but, so learning about banking insurance, regulation of different professions. But it was pretty, it was an exciting time, with demutualization of UNUM for example, we did that, rightly or wrongly. And interstate banking was a major issue that I worked on.

So it was, then when I went in the senate I chaired judiciary of all things. You really need to be a lawyer to be on judiciary, but neither, I was senate chair, the house chair wasn't either. And then I was appointed to Appropriations Committee and it, and I chaired some other committees at the same time, because I was not the chair of Appropriations in the beginning. So I chaired marine resources, economic development, housing and economic development. Then the terrible years came and we had terrible deficits, totaled a billion *(?)* dollars, out of a three and a half billion dollar budget in the end, and the senate chair decided he would be chair no longer, and so eventually I was appointed to be chair, and during those most difficult times, Appropriations. We got through it. And now I'm back with another deficit, so. I was the chair of transportation my last, I ran for leadership and I ran for president of the senate, didn't make it, so I, I was pretty burned out, and Shalom needed some attention, more than I could give up there, so that I got out. But I got back in again. My house seat opened up and I decided to run again.

**AL:** They say that people who start getting involved in politics sort of get a, it's sort of like acting, you don't want to quit, you want to keep trying. What's the feeling you -?

**JB:** Yeah, we catch the bug, I think. No, not everybody, some people get in there and they can't believe how bad it is, that they can't affect some, I remember a high ranking official of UNUM who got out and ran for the house, and he was, he could hardly stand it because it's a whole different approach than if you're a big executive of a big company. It's a, there's the compromise, the things that you have to go through as a democracy of hearing from everybody, hearing everything, and trying to balance, balance everything that comes around. It's the art of compromise, politics, it's a major task and it takes some ability to do that.

**AL:** You mentioned term limits a few minutes ago. What effect do you think, you've seen it pre term limits and post term limits; what's your take on term limits as being a positive or a negative thing for the state, and also what do your fellow legislators feel about it? If you have a sense of that.

**JB:** Yeah, I think I do. First of all, I don't think we needed term limits. We had a situation where we had entrenched leadership, and we needed term limits on the presiding officers. And, the irony is I think that Betty Noyce, who was not tremendously political but saw this, what she saw as a need to change the leadership in Augusta, put her money and effort behind term limits and, because of entrenched leadership, and now, ironically, it has led to very weakened leadership, no leadership at all in a sense because the people that are being elected to the presiding officer's chairs are lame ducks when they get elected because they've only, there's so little time for someone to grow in experience and grow in recognition and progression in leadership that they're all lame ducks. They get elected, but that's their last term. And it certainly, so leadership is much weakened by term limits. What we needed was, and we passed that too late, but term limits on the presiding offices. Because once the speaker and the president of the senate turn over, they turn over, the new people come in, everybody moves, they turn over chairs, because we had tremendous turnover, forty percent or more in the legislature every year before term limits.

Anyway, I would say that it has made a big difference, and that's the biggest I think, is the leadership. The memory isn't there, so, old chestnuts always came up before different issues, but at least people had memory of how they were handled or not handled before, and that's not, that is somewhat weakened. It gives more power to staff, it gives more power to the executive, because executive tends to stay there eight years, and their staff has been around and, but the others, the leaders are turning over every two years so it has made quite a change. People can become more influential more quickly, that's true, and so, if they're knowledgeable that's good, if they're not that's not so good. Coalitions have grown up, caucuses, they have the rural caucus, the women's caucus, in the house we have the freshmen caucus. These are groups of people who get together and try to make a difference, stick together, and I'm not so sure that's bad. And with entrenched strong leadership, those things were vastly discouraged, and - because those were pockets of power.

But, we're right now facing a deficit that is nowhere near as bad as it was before, but in some ways it's going to be harder, I think, to overcome a quarter of a million rather than a billion, in some ways, one of them being that before we had a very definite drawing of lines. There was us, the Democrats, with strong leadership in both house and the senate, and the Republicans, who had the governor and two or three strong people on Appropriations. And it was us and them, you could dicker, you could fight it out, you could talk it out, you could weep it out, because it was very bad. But it could, you knew where you were. Now we have an independent governor, we have Democrats and Republicans in the house, the senate is evenly divided, it's a very, and not strong leadership anyway. So, it's different, very different.

**AL:** Do you think that term limits will survive, or is it a passing fad or something?

**JB:** I would say that, no, I think the people have a tendency to want to, from Will Rogers and

way before and way after, you know, politicians, in a group, are considered, you know, pretty bad, jokes, pompous asses, whatever. But individuals, you know, I've heard, I remember I went to a conference once, they were talking about doctors and how bad they were, how gouging and how rude. But I remember saying, "Well not My doctor." And I think that's true about politicians, too. A lot of people might make some major statements, negative statements about politicians in general, but not Joe Brannigan, or not this one, or not that one, because they know, you know. Which is true of a lot of things, I think. Mental illness, too, once you get to know people who have it you have a whole different approach to it than you do that general, the axe murderer running down the street kind of thing.

So it's, I think there's attempts all the time to either raise the limit to twelve years, or to do away with it. I think there's a bill now to do away with it. By referendum, putting it out to referendum. So far it has not gone, I think there are several, enough legislators who don't want to be in favor of that. I don't know what they believe, some believe that eight years is enough. But, so, so far it has not passed, but I think it will continually be tried and maybe someday it would go out to the voters and they'd probably vote it down and keep it the way it is. Yeah. For me, the best thing would be to just allow presiding officers to stay through at least a two term of that office, so they might stay an extra two years or something. I don't know.

**AL:** You mentioned earlier that your father was politically involved in the community?

**JB:** If you can believe this, tax, he was the tax collector in Topsham for thirty-something years, and he was appointed to that position when the tax collector was called into the voluntary draft, the draft before the war. And taxes were paid in our house, and so everybody in the town of Topsham - there was about five thousand people then - they came to our house, to our back door, stood in our little mud room, anteroom there, and in our dining room where my father collected taxes. All of my growing up, from the time I was about ten, 'til I left. And my mother collected taxes when he was at work. He didn't have office hours because he didn't want to be there if he didn't want to be there, so he put a sign on the door if he wasn't there. And - we would be eating supper and people would be waiting to pay their excise tax, their property tax. They had to come to our house to get a driver's license application, trailer license application. It was amazing that, I can't quite imagine it now, but it was, it was just routine for us I guess, in those days. Yeah, so he ran for office every year, he was opposed only once I think in thirty years, and that was somebody from the Heights, from the area where the, more predominantly French. And he won by oh, it seems *(?)* over two hundred votes. Of course he went to bed at nine as usual, not knowing or caring.

He was, so yeah, he was political. He was also involved when there were discussions like the high school or things like that, he was often involved in groups that were making decisions about our town. And he was on the fair association, and he weighed horses at his, he had a big scale to weigh trucks filled with felspar so the big draft horses would be weighed there, growing up. So he was involved with the fair, and so my brother had followed that. But, you know, Topsham Fair was a big thing in those days.

**AL:** When do you -

**JB:** The whole school shut down for a whole week.

**AL:** The whole week.

**JB:** The whole week. Presumably because the traffic came by the John Cohen School, but I think a lot of it was everybody wanted to go to the fair, so the whole week was off. It was also hunting time in those days, so it was, people could take their kids hunting, or they could go. People still do it, in Fryeburg they still, Fryeburg Fair is a big enough thing so people take their vacations and everything, people, but Topsham isn't that way any more. It got moved into the middle of the summer and it's not like it used to be.

**AL:** When do you feel that you were, you knew that your father was well known and that he was involved in the community. When did you have a sense that you were interested in political issues?

**JB:** Well, my, when I was in the Navy my mother began to give me books to read, I began to read them. I was a so-called geeduck sailor, which is ice cream and candy and not going over and getting involved and getting liquored up and so forth, as they used to say in the old days, liquored up. Get drunk. And so I did start to read and I got involved with the, I got really interested in what was known as the Christopher movement, and this was a priest who was, who believed, and you have to remember in those days Catholics at least, and many others, believed that Communism was a scourge that was trying to overcome the world, and his philosophy was, there are about a million people in this country bent on doing evil under the Communist approach. And he was trying to get a million people to go out bent on doing good. Not just good people, but people bent on doing good, and going into those sensitive areas where people bent on doing evil are going. And one of those was government, and that really kind of motivated me at that time to, in the school of foreign service I was taking public administration which would not be the diplomatic and consular service, but, so that's where I was headed when I felt I was called to be a priest. And, and - but, so I, but then I got much more involved during the Vietnam War when I shifted from Republican to being a Democrat after Nixon bombed once too many times for me, it was a protest. So I got involved in that, in those days. I got pretty emotionally involved with the ending of the Vietnam War.

**AL:** Do you recall, I'm not sure exactly where you would have been in '54, you would have been about twenty-three years old? Do you -?

**JB:** I was in a ship in the Navy.

**AL:** That's when you were in the Navy.

**JB:** Yeah, and Joe McCarthy was a hero in my home, that's how conservative a home I came from.

**AL:** When you were, when you had that sense in your home, what was your feeling, were you still fairly conservative in your thinking then, too?

**JB:** Oh yes, yeah. But not a lot of thinking probably, but yes, I was conservative.

**AL:** Now, seeing that there was such a -

**JB:** And my whole family still is, and my friends still are, and - But I'm the only one who's really seen the light.

**AL:** Now, being a Mainer, and having one of Joe McCarthy's fiercest, you know, naysayers, Margaret Chase Smith, who was a Republican -

**JB:** Everybody was Republican in Maine in those days, until Muskie came along.

**AL:** Yes, yeah. What, did you have a sense of what your family thought of Margaret Chase Smith standing up to McCarthy?

**JB:** I don't really. I could just guess from, that they would have been somewhat conflicted, I guess. I don't remember, I don't remember. I wasn't living at home, again, I was in the Navy and I don't remember whether they reacted to that or how they reacted to that, but I would guess that they would have been somewhat concerned that she was on the wrong side of that one.

**AL:** And do you have any sense of what was going on in Maine politically when Muskie did put the Democrats on the map?

**JB:** I don't think I was that involved, or knew about the party systems that well. I certainly do now, and did shortly after. But I was aware when I came home on leave, and I don't know whether you want to get at this at this point, but I came home on leave and there was this tall man next door who was, there was a Ford Fairlane or something, I remember it was a green and white, kind of a sharp looking Ford that my next door neighbor was driving, Paul Hazelton. And he was, he'd lived, he hadn't lived there all the time I was growing up, but he, in fact he wasn't there when I was growing up, but he was a professor from Bowdoin who was driving Ed Muskie. So I got, I can't remember whether my parents had disparaging remarks. I think he was launching a kind of a campaign that was unusual in the sense of getting out among the people, that's the way I sensed it. That this going every day, going all the time to different places was not, I sense, and I'm not sure whether I'm right or wrong, that that was a bit of a different way to campaign. And that's how, I think, my thinking is that that's how he got elected, that's how he made the change, that people got to know him, and he certainly was a very impressive looking man, an impressive sounding man, and once he got out in kind of a more popular way he made the difference, got elected and began to make a huge difference in Maine.

When I was, when I was first campaigning, I had a lot of touch campaigns in the beginning, in the house, I would come across people that were Republicans, or they'd say yeah, but I haven't voted Republican for years, but I had to be a Republican when I was younger because that's the, they would mention two or three things: one, that that really, to make sure their job was safe, etcetera; politically, economically, it was best to be Republican, and in Maine if you wanted to make any difference by voting, you had to vote in the Republican primaries because that is the only place that action was relative to governor or senators or so forth. So, I was surprised at that,

and that would be in 1978, '79, there were people still registered Republicans who were, no intention of being a Republican, or acting as such. The (*unintelligible phrase*) they didn't, that didn't fit for them. But that's how rock (*unintelligible word*) the state was prior to Ed Muskie's election.

**AL:** You mentioned Paul Hazelton, when did you get to know him, meet him?

**JB:** Yeah. Well, I think they moved in next door probably while I was in the legislature. I didn't know him and his wife very well at that time, because I was just a kid anyway, I mean I, but I got to know him more, after. I never, I lived at home only in the summers after I got out of the Navy, when I was in the seminary, and I worked the paper mill, and I worked painting, and I worked here and there. But, so I got to know him some. He had a son and two daughters, son is retarded, suffers from a, has a handicap of mental retardation, and they did well by him. He's still around, has his own place over in Brunswick, works as a janitor. Paul is now dead, his wife is very good to my wife, I'm getting mothers and wives mixed up here, very terrible, my mother is, lives at that home still in the summer and shoulder seasons of fall and spring to get her garden in. She stays with my sister, she's ninety-five, and she stays with my sister in New Hampshire during the winter, but so Jane Hazelton is very solicitous of my mother, and vice versa because Jane's had some health problems. But Paul was a slow kind of talking gentleman who was very, you always felt he was very, was an English teacher as I remember, and, was he an English teacher? I think he -

**AL:** I'm thinking government, history or government.

**JB:** Probably. Anyway, he always impressed me as being erudite and well read and very, so I didn't know him well but I remember going to his funeral and, I've done that, this has happened many times in my life, including yesterday with Senator [Albert "Jim"] Abrahamson's funeral, but you just say, "Geez, I wished I knew that person better, I wished I had taken the opportunities I had to know them better," because it was, his memorial service actually, I went to at Bowdoin, was very impressive. And, but he was one of that gang, the gang that, mainly from Bates also, but who were the, you know, really catapulted Ed Muskie and the Democrats, because it wasn't just him, of course. Don Nicoll, and Judge Coffin, I saw Judge Coffin the other day in a restaurant and he said, "Joe," he said, "how are you?" I said, "I'm good." He said, "well I know you're good. Are you well?" He's a wonderful, wonderful man. And so -

**AL:** It's funny you say that because Don Nicoll has said that to me on so many occasions.

**JB:** Ah, so it must be, it comes with that bunch. And John Donovan, John? Donovan?

**AL:** Yes.

**JB:** His daughter, Carrie, worked here at Shalom in the eighties as a social worker, she was a, what we now would call our clinical director in our much expanded organization. A wonderful woman, and so I got to know him some.

**AL:** What was he like?

**JB:** He was a, these guys were very outgoing, very likeable people, I felt, the people I did know. I mean, I know Judge Coffin only because he was very friendly with the Donovans and, at Carrie's wedding, at her mother's - his father's funeral, at her mother's last birthday party, we got invited to those things and he was always, his poetry, I mean, these people are so erudite, you know, it's, but very down to earth, too. And so, again, I didn't know people well but I went to their funerals and thought, geez, I wished I could have known them better, you know.

**AL:** Did you ever meet Dick McMahon?

**JB:** I don't think so, unless he's a leg-, was a legislator from that time.

**AL:** No, he was the, he was in the early years of Muskie and did a lot of driving and campaign work.

**JB:** I see, no, I guess, no, I don't think so. No, I was gone from here in the, you know, I was in the Navy 'til '55, I was in the seminary, which is like gone, although I was home in the summers but, until '63. So there's a whole time there when I wasn't, I wasn't around much, didn't know much what's going on. Music wise or other things; I missed a whole era of various cultural and uncultural things, yeah.

**AL:** When did you first have some very solid impressions of Senator Muskie, or recollections?

**JB:** Gosh, I don't know. I think it just kind of came, you know. I -

**AL:** Your feelings of the Vietnam War you talked about very briefly, did you have a sense of Senator Muskie's views and stands on the Vietnam issues?

**JB:** No. I don't remember, I don't remember that. I kind of came to that late, because I came to the university in '70, and of course '69 was a great year. I had been, I had been in Washington for a couple of marches, and Kingsville, but no, I don't. I don't know why I wasn't in tune with, I just don't, I don't remember, I, pretty hard to remember anybody that was prominent that were in politics. So, no, I didn't.

**AL:** I'm going to flip the tape and we'll start on side B.

*End of Side A*
*Side B*

**AL:** We are now on Side B of the interview with Mr. Joseph Brannigan, and you were talking about, we were starting to talk about Senator Muskie and when you first, give me a sort of sense of when you first met him, or really, I mean, did you really first meet him on the Commission on Legal Needs?

**JB:** I'm not sure whether I had, my memory is vague, not because of his lack of impression but because of my lack of memory I have, so I, it almost, like it kind of was just there. And I don't

remember the sequence of events, but I've, so I'm not sure where I first met him. What year was that, do you know? The -?

**AL:** Nineteen eighties.

**JB:** Nineteen eighty?

**AL:** Eighties.

**JB:** Eighties, okay. Because I don't remember when we did that. I remember once being involved with him when he was helping one of his kids move, and he was, he and his, he and Jane and, that he was a very important person, and he was a very down-to-earth guy helping out and running out to get an extension cord or something and helping move furniture. I thought he was very congenial and down-to-earth. Probably that, I remember being on that group with him and his dedication and leadership. He could very easily stir peop-, stir up a group to do something. And to - And I, he did address the joint convention of the legislature more than once while I was there, but the one I remember was I think one of his birthdays. It was later years, and they had a reception for him. I'm not sure whether that's when they hung his picture in the rotunda or not, but I remember he was, kind of a reception in the, he was, it was better for him to sit at that time, he was older. And of course with his height it was always better for him to sit for most of us, but, and I remember just talking to him briefly. But I never really had any intense time or opportunity with him, other than kind of those things.

**AL:** Do you have recollections of what you feel sort of the long lasting benefits of the commission are?

**JB:** I'm assuming that it's not long, because I'm assuming that what we started there has grown and continued. I knew the executive director for a while, and she's retired with her judge, who was her husband, or her husband who was a judge. And then I haven't followed that initiative of late, so I don't. But I believe that it has supplied and helped in the whole pro bono work and working with people who need lawyers. I remember one of the, and I'm not sure that, I think it was Senator Muskie who said, you know, there are only, that two people, the two classes of people that really need lawyers are the very rich and the very poor, and the people in between don't want to have any more to do with lawyers than they can help. But the poor needed to protect their rights, and the rich needed to protect their money, and that was a, I've always thought of that in dealing with the judiciary committee or others that, how important that was. I just see Ed Muskie as a, you know, just as a hero in the sense of bringing the Democratic party into, which I think is very important, the balance if not the predominance for many years here, and what he did with the Clean Water Act and the air, and the environmental things that he did in Congress. And it was too bad that he got sidetracked in his ability to become a presidential candidate, I think that was just too bad, it was, because I think he would have won if he had been able to keep going, persevere. And so, but, but certainly his legacy I think is well known and well preserved, and I haven't seen much of, I don't know, I think Jane and some of his loyal followers I've seen from time to time. But I don't have any other -

**AL:** I have another question.

**JB:** Okay.

**AL:** Your time in the state legislature, when you first started and in later years, did you ever sort of go under the wing of someone as a mentor, or, I'm trying to get a sense if there were people who went back a lot farther than you in the legislature who you learned from.

**JB:** Well, it would be different from who you learned from and who you might have been a mentor of. Certainly I was under the guidance of John Martin all the time I was there, for sixteen years. He became the Speaker of the House just a little while before I came there. Of course he came when there was, there were hardly any Democrats at all, and so his style, his leadership, his, had, and so he was still, even though as I was in the senate and Charlie Pray was the president of the senate, John still held strong, he held sway over Democratic approaches. And, so when we were, so certainly he, he was a major influence, and he's back now in the senate, I'm in the house, and he's, pretty strange to see him in the senate, but, at a meeting I went to a few nights ago, my being on Appropriations, he being on human service committee, he still has that ability to stir things up and make things, I think, happen. So even though there were things you could say about John that were, that were derogatory, I, on the whole, always was glad that he was there and he could be counted on to make, because things in the legislative process and the democratic process, it's very hard to bring things together. And sometimes you have to kind of push and pull and twist and turn, and John was very capable of that.

Early, Jim Tierney, who was, became, who was, when I went in, was the majority leader in the house and later became AG, and then gubernatorial candidate, lost, and I helped to get him back in as AG after that, it was a very close vote, I spoke dramatically about, and he won by one or two votes so it may have helped. So, Jim came from Topsham, his mother, from Brunswick rather, and a very, his mother was a real character, Agnes Tierney. But, so even though I was older than all these people, and that's been kind of the story of my life, I've always been somewhat retarded in my development, but I've always been older than these young people, but I've learned from them and their, so I'd say those are two people that had influence on my early years in politics. They were good years. It's been a good life so far.

**AL:** Are there questions that I haven't asked you that I should in order to get the whole story?

**JB:** I don't think so. I, as you can see, I didn't, this is kind of centered on Ed Muskie, this is your job, and I regret to some degree that I didn't know him better, but I certainly was glad that I knew him some and that, and the things he did – his name still is magic, George Mitchell, what he did for George Mitchell was very important, and I can just imagine that scene when he flew into Brunswick and met with Brennan, God, he must have, Brennan must have hated that. But, you know, he pretty much made sure that George was his successor, and we made sure of that afterward in the voters, but, so that's a great legacy. And so, I was glad I was on the fringes of that, and had been in the middle of other things. So, no, I don't think so, I think you've heard it all.

**AL:** Thank you very much.

**JB:** You're welcome.

*End of Interview*