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## Burns, Fern (Campbell) oral history interview

Don Nicoll

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## **Interview with Fern (Campbell) Burns by Don Nicoll**

*Summary Sheet and Transcript*

### **Interviewee**

Burns, Fern (Campbell)

### **Interviewer**

Nicoll, Don

### **Date**

June 11, 1999

### **Place**

Falmouth, Maine

### **ID Number**

MOH 113

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### **Biographical Note**

Fern Alice Burns was born in Portland, Maine on September 20, 1944. She grew up on a farm in West Buxton. Burns attended school with deaf children because her mother was an accountant for the deaf school in Portland. They later moved to Augusta where she and her brother attended high school. After high school she attended Boston University for one year and in 1963 she moved to Washington to work for Stanley R. Tupper, who was like a godfather to her. She ended up working for Congressman George M. Walhauser, and was then hired by George Mitchell as a case worker at Muskie's office in January 1965. In April 1971, Fern left Muskie's office to go back to school and work for the U.S. Postal Service and with the Universal Postal Union (UPU). She got her degree from the University of Maryland in 1982. Fern worked on the 1968 campaign doing speech production and traveling a lot for Muskie.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Interview includes discussions of: international careers with the U.S. Postal Service; Congressman Walhauser; Chip Stockford; Water Pollution Subcommittee; Intergovernmental Relations (IGR) Subcommittee; Muskie jokes; impact of the Vietnam War on Washington, DC; 1968 campaign; draft card burning; Watts in L.A.; Model Cities; Universal Postal Union (UPU); Virginia Pitt; and Muskie's contributions.

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## **Transcript**

**Don Nicoll:** It is Friday, June 11th, 1999. This is Don Nicoll conducting an interview with Fern Burns. And we are in the galley, I guess it's. . . .

**Fern Burns:** It's the main salon, the main salon of the main cabin.

**DN:** In the cabin of Grunengeist, G-R-U with an umlaut-N-E-N-G-E-I-S-T, from Annapolis, Maryland, but it's moored at the Portland Yacht Club in Falmouth, Maine. Fern, could you give me your full name and your date of birth and place of birth, and then tell us about the major professional and education events in your life?

**FB:** Certainly. Welcome aboard.

**DN:** Thank you.

**FB:** Fern Alice Burns is my name, and I was born in Portland, Maine September 20, 1944. So as we speak that makes me 54 years old. My early years were spent on a farm in West Buxton. My grandparents on my maternal, my maternal grandparents were Swedish descendants. He, they were born in Sweden. My paternal grandparents were English, some Irish there also. My father and mother were divorced when I was eighteen months old and my brother was just born, so my mother raised us. She was an accountant first for the deaf school in Portland. And so I went to school with the deaf children.

**DN:** Was it on Mackworth Island at the time?

**FB:** No, it wasn't, it was on High Street, before they moved to Mackworth Island. And mother got her CPA and eventually took a job as an accountant for the Department of Sea and Shore Fisheries. And we moved to Augusta, and that's where I graduated high school. My brother did also. We, for a time there, there was a man named Stanley R. Tupper and he was Congress-, he was a commissioner of Sea and Shore Fisheries, and then he became a congressman, a liberal Democrat. And he was like a godfather to me, gave me my first bride's doll, etc. And after graduation from high school I went to Boston University partially on a scholarship and partially on half a shoestring, and I finished one year there. It became apparent, even though mother was working two jobs at the time and I was working at school, that I wasn't going to be able to continue on. And Stan Tupper said, well, he had a young woman on his staff that was taking maternity leave for the summer and why didn't I come to Washington and work for the summer? And perhaps I could find, go to school nights, you know, find a permanent job, give me a little feel for what was going on in Washington at the time.

**DN:** Now this was 1961?

**FB:** It was '62.

**DN:** Sixty-two.

**FB:** Right, the summer of '62. Wait a minute, no, I graduated in '62. It was the summer of '63 because the weekend we arrived in Washington was the march on Washington, Martin Luther King, and "I Had a Dream." And I worked there, and I then went on to work for Congressman George M. Wallhauser who was from Suburban Essex in New Jersey, and he was sixty-two and as it turned out, I worked there for a year and he was retiring. And I became friends with some women in the Muskie office. And I was interviewed by a man named Chip Stockford and

George Mitchell, and George Mitchell hired me to become a case worker. So I started in the Muskie office in January of '65 and that was, we can discuss that whole period later.

It was certainly a very exciting time in my life. And I, although took one or two courses at night, I became entirely wrapped up in, in the career in politics and in what was going on in the nation at the time. So I didn't go to school full-time until I left the Muskie office in April of '71. And I went to work in a, as a marketing specialist in the postal service. And, then I went back to school and I had several wonderful opportunities, and most of my career was in the international field of the U.S. Postal Service. It is a, the universal postal union, the UPU is a specialized agency of the United Nations. And it had headquarters in Bern, Switzerland, and so I would spend three weeks in the spring and three weeks in the fall in Bern. And I ended up managing a staff of ten people in international business, negotiating agreements both bi-lateral and multi-lateral. And then I had another staff of ten contractors that were used in tracking mail.

At one point in my career, I was put by the postmaster general on a venture team to get the postal service into electronic mail. And it was a venture with COMSAT and the Postal Service, whereby we were to convince seven nations to participate in this experiment, satellite mail. And so we toured Europe and found we could get three Europeans; we went to the Middle East and we got Iran and Saudi to participate, and we went to South America and we got three countries in South America to participate. However, technology caught up and exceeded us, and regulatory issues prohibited us from offering electronic mail as a business offering in the Postal Service. The telephone lines were digitized, fax machines became an everyday thing, so it was not a successful program. And domestically we had to get out of it because of regulations. So anyway, I did manage to get my degree from the University of Maryland, and. . . .

**DN:** When did you get your degree by the way?

**FB:** It was in '82. And, but in the meantime, I found I had a facility with languages and so I ended up taking intensive training in Spanish and German and French, and was able to negotiate agreements in those languages and had a very exciting career, one that certainly I fell into. And I think. . . .

**DN:** But you were ready.

**FB:** Maybe, then, maybe that's it. Then in 1992 they offered an early out in the Postal Service, and I had been through a congress in the Postal Service and we were getting ready to go into another congress in Korea. There's a congress in the UPU situation every five years. And I wasn't sure that I wanted to go through that because I realized, (at the time I was unmarried and had been for about eight years), and I just realized that I was again getting caught up in working all the time and that perhaps I should step back and pour a little tea into my own cup, as it were.

And so I started to study boat surveying, and I studied with a naval architect. And since I had owned boats all, all, most of my adult life, I'd owned sailboats, I had taken diesel courses. And I continued to take those diesel courses in order to become proficient in diesel mechanicking. And then I met George and took a leap of faith and said I will take this early out from the Postal Service and whatever comes along from here on will come along. And I was blessed both by

finding my current husband and by finding other opportunities to continue that which I have enjoyed: sailing, traveling internationally, (I still have many, many international friends), and I've taken a couple of contracts to do international work, so, that's. . . .

**DN:** That's, it's turned out to be quite an exciting and varied career.

**FB:** It has been.

**DN:** Now, your mother, when she worked for the Sea and Shore Fisheries Department, did she work directly for Stan Tupper?

**FB:** Yes, first for Stan Tupper, and then for Ron Green.

**DN:** Who were both commissioners of the department.

**FB:** That's right.

**DN:** When you, when you worked in Congressman Tupper's office, what were your responsibilities?

**FB:** It was a summer job. I took care of visitors' tours, I worked on his mailing list- just typical summer intern kinds of things.

**DN:** Was it what you expected to do when you went there?

**FB:** No, certainly not. But I learned, I learned a lot doing it. Stan was a very outgoing, vivacious kind of person, and they used to say he was more a Democrat than he was a Republican. At the time, I was nonpolitical. I really didn't know whether I was a Republican or a Democrat. That changed.

**DN:** Now your mother had been working as a civil servant in Maine.

**FB:** Yes.

**DN:** Did she have any political leanings that you were aware of?

**FB:** Yes, she was a Republican and she always remained a Republican. Although I think that, in, once I got actively involved in politics she, she was able to understand a second point of view. I'll put it that way.

**DN:** Now you worked in Congressman Wallhauser's, was it. . . .?

**FB:** Yes.

**DN:** . . . . office? Were your duties there similar to what you'd done for Congressman Tupper, or. . . .?

**FB:** No. I started working on cases at that point. The, on the Hill, as you know, what one does is you take letters from constituents who are having problems, either with the military or grants or loans or whatever it might be, and you work the case by referring the letter to appropriate executive agency and finding out a way in which you can help the individual constituent.

**DN:** Were, do you remember what the major cases were in those days?

**FB:** A lot of veterans' cases of course. There's some, you know, early outs requested, transfers. We had small businesses that requested loans. There were, oh, bizarre things later on: someone who might have died abroad and needed help through the State Department to get the body back, and people who wanted jobs, of course, and help from the congressman or the senator to get a job.

**DN:** Now was Congressman Wallhauser very different from Congressman Tupper?

**FB:** Yes, he was. He was, he was sixty-two when I went to work for him, and he was very soft-spoken. He was more interested in what he could do for Suburban Essex, New Jersey. And of course that is a very highly populated area so there are different kinds of problems there than there were in Stan Tupper's office. Stan knew people by first name throughout the whole state, and that wasn't the case with George Wallhauser. He was a well-respected man, and he was a Republican.

**DN:** Was his brand of Republicanism quite different from Stan Tupper's, or?

**FB:** Yes, it was. He was very methodic in the way he looked at issues, whereas Stan had a way of. . . . I'm not sure how to explain Stan's philosophy. It depended on how he was feeling that day, I think. I think he just really, it was more of a, he, an emotional response to the issues as opposed to a methodical legislative response.

**DN:** Can you remember some events or incidents involving Stan Tupper and major issues?

**FB:** Let me see. Well, I really, I know that, of course that that year was such a, that was so busy, was so, you know, with the march on Washington and all of that. But I know that Stan was very close to Nelson Rockefeller. And Stan didn't drink alcohol. And I remember one time where Stan and his wife Esther and I were driving back to Maine and we stopped in New York and spent the night and visited with the Rockefellers. And Stan was of course a very social being, but he watered all their plants with his alcohol, the drinks that they were, you know, giving him. And, he, it just, I, it just made me, made, amused me greatly because I knew what he was doing. And I was trying to, yeah, I was very impressed with all the issues that were going on and the conversation and all this. And he would just sort of duck behind a plant and dump out his drink.

**DN:** Did you know his father?

**FB:** Yes, yes, and he was a Democrat. . . . Asa. He was a big Democrat.

**DN:** Were he and Stan alike at all?

**FB:** Hmm, they looked alike, yeah, they looked alike. And, but I'm, I'm not su-, I think they fought a lot. They didn't, you know, do that well until later years when, you go through that period I'm sure with parents at some point where you're estranged. But, because of the politics they were estranged.

**DN:** You got the feeling that Asa really didn't approve of Stan being a Republican even though he was a re-, a liberal Republican?

**FB:** It wasn't, it wasn't good enough. Of course there were issues of redistricting at the time. So, you know, Stan was considering changing sides and becoming an independent and, or being a Democrat itself. But I think at that time, if I remember correctly, he got the opportunity to be ambassador to the Expo in Montreal, and so that took him out of it for a while.

**DN:** Now while you were working for Congressman Wallhauser, you said you got to know some of the staff people in Senator Muskie's office.

**FB:** Yes.

**DN:** Who were some of the women that you knew?

**FB:** There was Nancy Ezold [O'Mara], was one, and Virginia Pitt was another. And then there was Diane, and I don't remember her last name.

**DN:** I'm afraid I can't help there either.

**FB:** I'm sure if I looked in my files I could find the name. But they, I had moved to the Hill to a little efficiency apartment that was within two blocks of the Senate and I knew them. And they said there may be some openings coming up in the Muskie office. And so I just waited because, although I was applying for jobs in the executive also, this opportunity came for me to interview in the Muskie office. And I was happy to drop my other interests, because I thought a senator from Maine, that would keep me connected to Maine. And of course Muskie had such a great reputation.

**DN:** What was your impression of him from a distance before you went to work in the office?

**FB:** Before I went to work I was, I was, it's strange to say but I felt really proud that I was a Maine, Mainiac because anyone I spoke with about Muskie always said he's a fine man, he has integrity and he's doing a good job. And so, but I was a little bit frightened of him because he was such a big man, and he had such a deep voice. And so I was nervous about him, going to work there.

**DN:** Now you were first interviewed when you went to apply for the job by Chip Stockford?



**FB:** That's right.

**DN:** And what was Chip like?

**FB:** Chip was an easygoing kind of guy. He was a big man, too, tall man. He was very personable, put me at ease. He was very serious about the things that had to be done in the office and laid that out pretty easily for me. But I liked Chip. I thought he was, I thought he was pleasant.

**DN:** And he in turn referred you to George Mitchell?

**FB:** That's right. And I interviewed with George Mitchell. And he was a very serious man and it seemed to me as if he had a vision or an idea of where he wanted to go and how he wanted to get there.

**DN:** You're speaking of him personally?

**FB:** Well, as he, I . . .

**DN:** Or of the office?

**FB:** Of the office. Of what he, how he saw the office operating and what improvements he saw in the, that could occur. And he was very clear about what he wanted and of course in who would work for the senator. And I think he understood also probably what the senator wanted. So I was offered a job.

**DN:** As a case worker, you said.

**FB:** As a case worker, right. And I started there in January of '65.

**DN:** And what, what kinds of cases were you assigned to at that time?

**FB:** Veterans' cases, military cases, and there were some, some others: State Department. . . . But I gradually worked into other things like, well the, there were, the small business loans, those kinds of things, and issues that were Maine related, town related. Oh, there were, there was also the big issue at that time of the post-masters. And that was a very political job, and of course that gave me my first insight into the Postal Service before I went there. But those were the big plums, the big political plums, and there was a lot of scrambling for postmasterships. And then there were appointments to the Service Academics. That was another issue, young men who wanted to be appointed either to the Air Force Academy or the Naval Academy or West Point. And I handled those.

**DN:** What were, you mentioned that George Mitchell had a very clear vision of what the office should be and what, how people should perform. Do you remember some of the specifics of his vision for the office and responsibilities of staff members?

**FB:** Well, I remember that at the time, the senator of course was chairman of the Air and Water Pollution Subcommittee, and he was chairman of the Intergovernmental Relations Subcommittee, and he had staffs on those subcommittees that worked on legislation. But these issues also affected the senator's Maine staff because they would affect, well, just our response to letters for instance or our response to our own constituents. George felt that, that the staff should be familiar with what was going on in those committees because it made it easier for us to respond to Maine constituents about the issues. I think he felt that we shouldn't get, we shouldn't get too involved in those separate staffs, but we needed to be able to work well with them. And then there was the issue of keeping the senator on his schedule and the whole speech production and remarks that. . . . This is way, way before the '68 campaign, but just keeping all those issues moving. And he felt that when it came to the senator and his schedule and remarks that everyone should be there to help. It wasn't just, I mean, if you were a case worker that you didn't have a narrow line. And you, when it came time to jump in and help then, then everybody was, should be doing that.

**DN:** Did, were you encouraged to forward ideas or concerns from Maine constituents that related to the legislation that might influence legislation?

**FB:** Yes, yes, certainly we were. The legislation of the Air and Water Pollution side of course, since that first major piece of legislation that was passed in '63. After that of course there was, there were, each year, you know, '65, '66, '67, and it was either Clean Air this year or Clean Water the next year. But those issues were, they were prevalent; they were in the forefront of the day, of the times, of the '60s. I mean, there was Ralph Nader and, you know, environment had really become a popular issue. So it wasn't, even though it may have been initially when Ed took over those jobs, it wasn't a quiet legislative issue. They were prevalent.

**DN:** Did you have many dealings with other members of the staff, and do you remember some of them and what they were like?

**FB:** Yes, well of course Gayle Cory who has left us was the senator's personal secretary for a long time. And Gayle kept a lot of balls in the air, kept the senator on time and was able to keep, to interact with, you know, everybody throughout the Hill. She was a real, a real character. I considered her a character, I thought, she was a protector of the senator. And she married a man who was one of the hunchbacks of Notre Dame, the football team?

**DN:** No, that was Joanne Amnott [Hoffmann], who married Nordy Hoffmann.

**FB:** Oh, that was Joanne. Okay, I got that confused, okay.

**DN:** Yeah, one of the, he was one of the seven mules.

**FB:** That's what I was thinking. Yes, I remember that. Then we had, we had a number of people who weren't from Maine on the staff. I remember Oriental young woman that came to us from the World Bank who worked on the staff. I remember in the summer time some interns that came. I think Cy Vance's daughter was. . . .

**DN:** Elsie.

**FB:** . . . . you know, was on the staff for a time. I remember a young woman whom I just discovered two days ago went to school with my husband, Sue Nicholas.

**DN:** Oh, my.

**FB:** They went to school in Puerto Rico together. And I was looking over a list of staff people and George said, "Sue Nicholas, no, no." I said, "She was from Puerto Rico." And years later I find out that George went to school with her. I don't know where she is now.

**DN:** It's a small world. I think she's somewhere in the mid-south, last I heard. I think it was either Kentucky or Tennessee.

**FB:** That's interesting. And I remember Jane Fenderson [Cabot] of course. She was from Wellesley I thought. Was she from Wellesley?

**DN:** No, she went to, oh, I'm drawing a blank at the moment. Out in the Amherst area. It's terrible, but no matter. She came from Saco originally.

**FB:** Oh, okay.

**DN:** And went to school, came to us because her uncle whom you may remember, Paul Hazelton?

**FB:** Yes, that's. . . .

**DN:** Was her uncle.

**FB:** Right.

**DN:** Paul was a faculty member at Bowdoin and had been Governor Muskie's campaign manager in 1956.

**FB:** That's right, the senator. . . .

**DN:** Mount Holyoke was the. . . .

**FB:** Mount Holyoke. Okay, that's where she was from.

**DN:** Did you have many encounters with the senator?

**FB:** Yes, as a matter of fact. I wasn't in and out of his office; I certainly wouldn't say that. But I think we were all sort of involved in the senator and his family in some way or another, Jane and the five children. I remember the senator as a shy man. And I remember however that he was very direct, quite philosophical and I would say spiritual in a way. He had a, what I thought

was a vision for the generations that come after us. He was always concerned that those in power should do what we could to ensure future generations had peace and an environmentally safe world in which to live.

He, he did have a sense of humor. And I know, there was a great prankster in the, who was executive director or staff director of the Air and Water Pollution Subcommittee. His name was Leon Billings, and he was full of tricks. And whenever we'd have a get-together in the office, whether it be a birthday party or a celebration for passage of some legislation, Leon would always come with a poem. And, you know, I have a poem or two in my files. . . .

**DN:** Ah, that Leon wrote?

**FB:** That Leon wrote. During the campaign of course, we traveled with the senator, all the staff. And we got to see him in a lot of different situations that we normally hadn't seen him in because we were in the staff, in the office working. This, in the campaign, we saw him interacting in crowds and giving speeches.

**DN:** Now are you referring to the Maine reelection campaigns, or the '68 campaign or both?

**FB:** Both of them, yes.

**DN:** And the '70 to '72 period.

**FB:** Yes, yes. Some things that impressed me, and of course when I went to work for the senator I was twenty years old and I was, I was pretty naïve. But I was really impressed with, and enamored by, the whole political situation of the '60s, I mean, the demonstrations against Vietnam, for instance.

**DN:** How did the two great issues or the reactions to the issues of civil rights and Vietnam affect you as an individual?

**FB:** Well, on the issue of civil rights, I had never seen a black person until my junior year in high school and my mother and brother and I drove to Florida. And then when I went to Boston University, I saw a few more blacks. And when I came to Washington and arrived on the weekend that was Martin Luther King's march on Washington, naturally I started to think about these things. I need to get a, if we could stop it. . . .

**DN:** We're restarting the interview with Fern Burns. You were talking about the effect of the march on Washington on you.

**FB:** Yes. It was overwhelming to see those many hundred thousand people in Washington and to be there and hear the speech, and all of a sudden have some part of your being awakened to the fact that there were issues, civil rights issues, that I had never been aware of living in the good old state of Maine. I wasn't prejudiced. I had no prejudice because I, I had never encountered either, minorities. And I became at that time I think a real Democrat because I started to believe in the issue of civil rights. And unfortunately, the civil rights movement was a

slow one. And although in perhaps from '65 to '75 or whatever some progress was made, it wasn't that much. It was just a lot of awareness, I think, created by the activities. I didn't, the other issue of Vietnam for instance, I knew the senator had been to Vietnam. And he, I think, watched the elections. But he was there before. I can't quite remember the dates there.

**DN:** He went for two trips. One was observation and the other was the trip with Senator Mansfield when they did a fact-finding tour for the President.

**FB:** That's right.

**DN:** And then later, around '66 I think, somewhere in there.

**FB:** And, at the time my, I was married in late '65, in September of '65. And my husband was an airborne Army man in the 101st, but he got out of the Army and he didn't go to Vietnam. And he followed me to Washington. By that time I was, he was a Maine boy. He was from Augusta, Maine, and, the son of parents who owned a gas station in Augusta. And he came to Washington to work. But as the, as the issue of Vietnam built up, I, for instance I remember in the '68 campaign when, when draft card burners would stand and, you know, in front of the senator while he was making a speech and burn the card right in front of him. And the senator [was] pointing at him and saying, "You chose to burn your draft card, therefore you chose to break the law, and you're choosing to pay the penalty of what that means when you break the law."

And for me, I was confused by that at the time, because I thought, the senator's trying to, believes we should get out of this. But sh-, I mean, he still believed that we had to work within the system. And that sort of woke me up. Whatever system there is, you may disagree with it, but either you work to change the system or you live by the system. And that, I know that later on of course, being what it may, hindsight being best, there are many, many Americans who feel we had no business there at all. We were there, and we were there for quite a period of time, and we lost many people there. But I think we needed to support what was going on at the time. We needed to support the troops, or get them out of there. And I think it was probably difficult for those who were there to see the demonstrations that were going on.

**DN:** I'm going to suggest that we pause here while we turn the tape over.

**FB:** Okay.

*End of Side A*  
*Side B*

**DN:** This is the second side of the tape in our interview of June 11th, 1999 with Fern Burns, and we have just talked about the Vietnam War and its impact. And now, Fern, I'd like to turn to the question of the 1968 campaign. And, what did you do during that campaign?

**FB:** Oh, well, I was involved in speech production and actually we rotated, the staff rotated going on the trail. Some, some weeks part of the staff would go, and the next week the other part

of the staff would go. And we would normally set out on Monday morning and it was like three airport stops a day; the third one you spent the night. And you came back in Friday night or Saturday morning, and you had Sunday to wash your clothes and either go out again, or go back to the office and work. But it was mostly speech production.

**DN:** Do you remember what it was like on the plane? In fact, what was the plane like?

**FB:** Well, it was an Eastern plane I believe, and we had equipment bolted down in order to type. I mean, sometimes we were typing at the last minute, landing, and reproducing copies for press, because there was also a press plane that was flying, and for the gathering. There was always a motorcade that, from the airport to the speech, or if the airport was at the speech, if the speech was at the airport then it was, we just stayed there. But once we landed, they plugged in communication lines and off we went.

**DN:** What were you using for typewriters?

**FB:** Oh, God, they were executive, I guess they were called executive manual typewriters. And they had spacing that, for instance a 't' would have three spaces and a 'w' had five spaces, so it was difficult to adjust. . . .

**DN:** Especially when you correct it.

**FB:** . . . . and correct and all of that. But we'd have a speech copy that was always in capital letters, all capital letters that the senator could read from, and was triple spaced, I believe. Then there was a press copy that was upper and lower case. And so there were, the production of these two items were ongoing continually. And I, as a young person again, I was so enamored with the Secret Service. I just thought that they were so professional, they did their job, they, they protected the senator and his family and they were efficient in terms of getting us moving in and out of busses and motorcades. And, I just thought they were great. Of course they were all handsome young men, also.

**DN:** Yes, they were very attractive as I recall to the young women on the campaign trail. You, do you remember some of the people who were directly involved in the campaign? And on the plane?

**FB:** Well, of course I know you were involved in the campaign. George Mitchell was involved in the campaign. There was a whole press corps involved. Mary Hoyt I remember was involved, and I think she was more involved in the senator's wife's schedule.

**DN:** She was her press secretary.

**FB:** Her press secretary. There was a man named Bob Shepherd, but I'm not sure exactly whether he was traveling with the press. He may have been traveling with the press.

**DN:** Well he was the press secretary.

**FB:** Press secretary, so he must have been traveling with them.

**DN:** Do you remember Paul Brontas?

**FB:** Paul Brontas.

**DN:** Who was sort of manager of the plane in terms of the office operation and the care of the equipment?

**FB:** Yes, now I do, that you mention him. Yes, I do remember Paul.

**DN:** And Peter Kyros, Jr.?

**FB:** Yes, I remember Peter Kyros, Jr. Where is Peter Kyros?

**DN:** He's in Maine now. He's back in Maine. And Paul is back practicing law in Boston.

**FB:** Oh, I see.

**DN:** Do you, what was the, what was the campaign like? You've mentioned the schedule, but what did it feel like to be part of that campaign from August to November?

**FB:** It was exciting, absolutely exciting. It, well of course it took us all around the country. And we felt as if we were part, I felt as if I was part of a team, an important team. And I, here was, you know, our senator from Maine, this rural state of Maine, connected with a presidential campaign. And, people were excited. The crowd seemed excited to me. The, the issues I thought were just so, how do I, (how do I say this?), the issues were so out there. They, perhaps in later years people have become apathetic when it comes to politics. But during the '60s there were so many important issues and it seemed as though the entire country was involved, or had an opinion about those issues, much more so than I've seen at any time since. And I don't know whether it's because of civil rights and Vietnam, environmental, Ralph Nader, activists; there were so many activists. I just haven't seen that period again in my own lifetime since, and maybe it's because I've gotten out of politics, for one thing. I'm not right there in the midst of it any more. Or maybe it's because Americans in general have tuned out.

**DN:** Do you remember any specific dramatic events or, or undramatic events that impressed you during '68?

**FB:** Oh, well, I remember of course the draft card burning, of course. And I remember in Los Angeles when we went into the, (what was it called?) that area of L.A. that. . . .

**DN:** Oh, Watts.

**FB:** Watts. And we had some athletes with us at the time, some really. . . .

**DN:** Rafer Johnson, I think, and Rosie Greer.

**FB:** Rosie Greer, yeah, right. And that impressed me because I, you know, was a small town person and didn't, didn't understand the magnitude of Los Angeles and the Watts region and all of that. I remember the senator's jokes.

**DN:** Can you repeat any of them?

**FB:** Well one joke he used to tell, and he told this in every Texas stop, was about the Texas rancher and the Maine farmer. Do you know that joke?

**DN:** Uh-huh, tell us.

**FB:** Okay, well, he would say that a Texas rancher came to visit a Maine farmer and the Maine farmer was showing him around. And he said, "I want you to look and see my property. It runs down there by the creek, all the way back by that stand of trees, and back by the river over there. All that property is mine." And the Texas rancher said, "Well, I want you to know if you come visit me on my ranch in Texas, you can, I can get in my car and drive all day long and not reach the boundaries of my property in Texas." And then the Maine farmer said, "Ayah, I had a car like that once."

**DN:** The senator would approve of your telling. Do you remember any of his other jokes?

**FB:** He used to tell a joke about the lobster body but I can't quite remember that one.

**DN:** Now how did you feel at the end of the '68 campaign when the senator and Vice President Humphrey didn't win?

**FB:** Oh, that was sad. Of course we all went back to Waterville to wait for the election campaign results. And it was really hard to believe that we weren't going to win. At least in my view, there was no question but we would win. I knew it might be close, but it was a real disappointment. And to think back, and I just happened to think about this a week or so ago, if we had won, I probably would have been out of a job. Because, of course the senator would have gone on to establish his office as Vice President and someone else would have been appointed to finish his term and maybe not want to keep the current staff. And I, I hadn't even thought about that at the time. It never. . . .

**DN:** What makes you think you wouldn't have gone into the Vice President's office?

**FB:** Well, at that time of course I, of course I, although I had the experience of work, I didn't have education. I hadn't finished my schooling and I always felt as if that would hold me back and that I needed to get on and do that, to get my education.

**DN:** So did you start your renewal of studies in '69, or later?

**FB:** No, it was later than that. It was after, of course after the campaign we settled back into issues and became involved in, well, the senator was reaching out more, certainly to develop his



foreign policy expertise. Because he wasn't known in foreign issues; he was mostly known for his domestic expertise. And I sort of got caught up again in that.

**DN:** Did your responsibilities change much starting in '69?

**FB:** Yes. I, I'm, I got into other issues like Model Cities and, you know, some intergovernmental relations work. And, and we had some younger people come on board. And so I sort of, you know, was managing a little group of people there, of women that. . . .

**DN:** So you became a supervisor of part of the staff.

**FB:** Yes. And it, yeah, it was rewarding but I still, and I would, I would have gone on if, if I hadn't somehow come to the realization that I really did need to take some time to get on with my life. Because I knew that the senator was going to be running another campaign, and the issue was did I want to stay as a staffer. And I had looked around Washington at the time and I saw women who stayed in those staff jobs for fifty years. And they were totally devoted to the person, the senator, the congressman or whatever, and they sort of gave up their own lives to do that. And I may have done that but circumstances occurred that made me think about it.

**DN:** What made, were those circumstances?

**FB:** Well, I went in '69 to Europe, my first trip abroad. And as a young person. . . .

**DN:** This was a vacation trip?

**FB:** A vacation trip. And as a young person, I had always said I was going to be an interpreter. And of course the. . . .

**DN:** Had you taken languages in high school?

**FB:** Yes, yes, I took Latin and Spanish in high school, and then, and in college. And, but I had never, I didn't go back to it once I got to Washington; I got sidetracked by everything, the politics. And when I did go there, I somehow felt connected with some of the countries I visited. And I felt as if I needed to renew that; I needed to take a look at really what I wanted to do. And was it, did I want to be an interpreter? And I knew I wasn't going to do that in the Senate. And so when my immediate boss left, and it was in April of '71, and there had already been that Reston, editorial by James Reston in the *New York Times* about Muskie looking around and broadening his base. There had been the Chappaquiddick issue with Ted Kennedy and he had pulled out of the possible presidential campaign. And some Kennedy's supporters I think even, Averell Harriman and some of those, were supporting Muskie and advising Muskie. And I, I knew at the time that we were in for another long haul and I needed to make a choice.

And I made a choice to leave and go with the U.S. Postal Service at that time and I went into the international field. I never became an interpreter, but I did get, I did have an international career. And there were times for instance that I thought back about what I learned and experienced in the Muskie office and I said, "I was so blessed as a young person to ha-, be right in the center of

all that and have all that experience.” And I was at a UPU, a Universal Postal Union congress in 1989 and we were sitting with the East Germans and the West Germans when the wall came down. And I remember thinking about early ‘71 when the senator was in Germany and one of the things they were talking about was normalizing relations between Eastern and Western Europe and about what to do with West Berlin. And I was thinking, you know, “How many years has it taken us to get to this point?” And were they, were Ed Muskie and the people that were with him on that trip, were they visionary? You know, I just, I, a lot of times I’ve been connected with the issues from those early ‘60 years in, in later times.

**DN:** I want to ask you about things you learned and some more observations on that. But before we leave this time, who was your supervisor who left in ‘71?

**FB:** John Whitelaw. He left and he went to the Smithsonian and worked with Mike Collins to build the Air and Space Museum. And of course that was another issue of that period, the landing on the moon. And, and then when was it that, it was in ‘71 I think, or, when Maine had its 150th reunion of statehood, anniversary of. . . .

**DN:** That was in ‘70, I think ‘70. . . .

**FB:** Seventy, of statehood, and I think we had an astronaut speak at those celebrations as a matter of fact. We were reaching out, you know, to the moon as well as to, to our own, our own people, ethnically.

**DN:** Now, you enjoyed the 1968 campaign obviously, and you referred to the upcoming presidential of ‘72 as the long haul that you knew was coming. Was the mood in the Muskie office different in that ‘69, ‘70, ‘71 period from what you’d experienced in ‘68, or was it the same and simply more pressured and, the time when you were looking at different opportunities?

**FB:** There was a lot more pressure because there was a lot more work. I mean, the senator had more visibility, so he was no longer just representing the state of Maine. Anyone who had seen him during the ‘68 campaign felt they had access to the senator, and so the work really increased. And there were a lot of staff changes and expansion. And of course then the office, they had been in the office on L Street. And I can’t remember exactly how the responsibilities, but that was an issue of trying to, to understand the roles that both offices were playing, one campaigning and the other legislative or normal constituent issues. So, and there were a lot of personalities that didn’t know Maine, didn’t understand Maine, that were trying to get caught up on just who the senator was, you know, and what he came from. So the pressure was there.

**DN:** As you look back on your years on Senator Muskie’s staff, what, what stands out in your mind of what you learned and what impressed you? You’ve alluded for example to the 1971 trip to Europe and the Middle East and the Soviet Union and the recognition you had in ‘89 when you were in Korea. What were some of the other things that strike you in terms of how it affected you when you look back?

**FB:** Well, I became very political because prior to working in Muskie’s office I really wasn’t political, even when I was working with Stan Tupper and George Wallhauser. It really didn’t

mean anything to me. But when I was in the senator's office, I understood what it meant to be a liberal Democrat. I understood that you supported liberal issues. I also understood that there was a way in which to negotiate an end, a resolution to a problem. And that came through watching people like yourself and the senator work through the issues, and taking into effect, into consideration that we're all out there and we all have different goals, but maybe some of our goals are similar. And if we can just find that common meeting ground then we can achieve some forward progress. It might not always be in the exact direction we want it ourselves, but it, we are moving forward. And the whole negotiating process that goes on on Capitol Hill, whether it be legislation or whatever issue it is, it is a negotiated settlement. And in later life, for me to manage a staff of ten people who are negotiating, I always felt as if I learned that first basic negotiating skill in the Muskie office, not because I had to do it in the Muskie office, I certainly didn't have to do that, but because I watched the people like yourself and the senator and George Mitchell and Leon Billings or whoever, do that.

I know that at one point, however, there was a little trickery going on. Because as I remember, someone stole a bill from one side of the House and brought it to the senator's committee. I can't exactly remember which legislation this was. But it was done because we were afraid that the bill wasn't going to be referred to that committee. That's just something that happened to come to mind.

More, but, back to discuss negotiating: it really, it, the whole office, led by the senator, took a reasoned approach to getting various pieces of legislation through. I mean, the supplemental rental legislation, and the Model Cities legislation. I know Mansfield was ever so grateful that the senator was there pushing that legislation through. And it was the style of the office to negotiate the issues. And I just, I thought that was a wonderful process.

**DN:** You, you went on and had really quite a successful career after you left the senator's office. And you did so after feeling apparently that you didn't have sufficient education to, well, you even questioned in retrospect whether you would have had a job had he won in '68. But I'm interested in knowing whether as a result of your experience over those years in this office, you came out with greater self-confidence, less self-confidence or about the same as when you went in?

**FB:** Of the office?

**DN:** About yourself.

**FB:** I, I think that I ended up having more self-confidence. I, I, I'm a shy individual normally, but I think one gains confidence by doing. And a lot of times I felt I was in over my head, absolutely, and nervous about the task ahead, whether it be leading a committee or a conference or whatever it might be. [I] felt that going in, and then to receive accolades afterwards, of "That was a really good job," that increased my confidence. I think that I was, I learned to look at, from the Muskie office, from the experience there, I learned to look at the whole picture and to remember bits and pieces here and to be able to pull something together as a whole. I don't know whether it was osmosis or not. It, it was watching skilled people at work.

**DN:** Were you given jobs to do and then allowed to do them, or did you get micro-managed?

**FB:** Well, the, I think mostly I was given jobs to do. I don't think there was a lot of micro-managing. At certain stress periods there would be because of, you know, the need. But I didn't feel that way.

**DN:** Did you, as you observed your colleagues, particularly the clerical staff and the case work staff, generally were they given responsibilities and left to do their jobs?

**FB:** I think so, once they knew their jobs, because I didn't see a lot of overseeing. I think they had the, the assignments and they were, they were pretty comfortable. Once they became comfortable they didn't need a lot of supervision.

**DN:** Are there any other things that you remember about the office or the people there that stand out? You spoke earlier for example about, or you mentioned, Virginia Pitts.

**FB:** Oh yes, Virginia.

**DN:** What was Virginia like and what was. . . .?

**FB:** Virginia was a veteran herself and she was a real character. Heavy smoker, kind of gruff and, but a real, real gem of a person. When my husband, during the '68 campaign he became ill, and he passed out, (I guess he had connected with Virginia at some point), but he passed out and Virginia got him into a veterans' hospital in Washington. And that was one trauma for me because it was only I think three or four days before election. And Virginia called me when we landed somewhere, I don't even remember where we were, and they plugged in the plane and she told me what was going on. And she was, she had some problems, but she was a fiercely dedicated person and kind, kind person also.

At the time the senator and Jane, I remember called me forward in the plane and said, "We understand what's going on with your husband and we would like to help you in any way we can. If you'd like to go back to Washington now, we'll arrange it. If you want to come with us to Waterville for the election, we'd love to have you do that also." And so I chose, I chose to go to Waterville and spend that election evening with those who had worked together for the campaign after talking with the doctors and all. And my husband was eventually moved to Togus and treated as an outpatient, so.

**DN:** The, you mentioned involvement with the Muskie family earlier, and you've just given an example of an interaction between the senator and Mrs. [Jane Gray] Muskie and you when you had a problem. What were some of the other interactions with the family?

**FB:** Oh, there was always something, you know. I felt almost sometimes as if we were babysitting the family. Steve, (*is the light? I can turn this down*).

**DN:** Oh, no, this is fine.

**FB:** Steve [Stephen O. Muskie] was an aspiring young photographer at the time, that was the oldest son I remember, and from time to time he was along with us. Jane often had issues that she needed taken care of and a staff member would do that for her, whatever it might be. She, of course, had a lot of responsibilities herself: I mean, five children and being the senator's wife and spokesperson for him. So we all felt as if it was her right to call upon the staff to help out. I remember one time, since I lived right on Capitol Hill just two blocks from the Senate, that Gayle Cory, the senator's personal secretary, called me and said, "Fern, you have to take the senator's trousers back to your apartment and press them." I said, "What?" I mean, this man was, you know, six-foot-four or whatever, and those trousers, I didn't think I could even carry. They were so big, tall, long. I said, "Okay." Evidently he was flying in and he had something put on his calendar and these pair of trousers needed to be pressed. So that was just one of those other duties as assigned.

**DN:** As you think about Senator Muskie, what stands out in your mind as his major contribution as a public figure?

**FB:** If, if we talked about issues during my time there, it had to be in the environment. But if we talk about him as a person and, during the campaign, I think one of his contributions was he really did unify a lot of people in the nation behind issues that he supported. I, he became such a public figure, he became a trusted figure, and he gave politics a really good name because of his integrity. Everyone remarked about his Lincolnesque stature and all of that. But I guess, I sort of, when I left I didn't, I didn't see the Ed Muskie who was Secretary of State, so I can't comment on those issues and what he may have contributed in that area. I saw him in the earlier years with air and water pollution, and for Maine the Passamaquoddy hydroelectric power plant project, and the FDIC, the banking issues, the intergovernmental relations, Model Cities. He had that experience of being a governor, so the governors knew him and respected him. And he had the experience in the Senate, so he had an understanding of how intergovernmental workings should be. His major, I, I can't, I can't say. I can't pick out one thing and say "That was Ed Muskie," except for the environment.

**DN:** And the building of trust, and you mentioned the ability to negotiate, bring people together.

**FB:** He was what I consider a statesman. And I, there are many politicians around, and there are very few statesmen. I mean, I can't, I can't name one to you today and maybe that's, that is sad. But perhaps if I were still in politics I could. Leaders, I mean, leaders of countries back then, Anwar Sadat, I mean, leaders have a vision. They have an ability to negotiate; they have an ability to be trusted by the people. He would have been, I do believe, been a great President. Ed Muskie would have been a good President. And I'm sorry circumstances were that he was never President, because I think he could have instilled a lot of confidence when it was needed.

**DN:** Thank you very much, Fern.

**FB:** You're Welcome.

*End of Interview*