11-10-1999

Dionne, Paul oral history interview

Brian O'Doherty

Interview with Paul Dionne by Brian O'Doherty

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Dionne, Paul

Interviewer
O'Doherty, Brian

Date
November 10, 1999

Place
Lewiston, Maine

ID Number
MOH 133

Biographical Note

Paul Dionne was born in Lewiston, Maine in 1942. He attended Lewiston St. Peters, Lewiston High School, Kents Hill prep school for one year in 1960, and Providence College. He was a 2nd lieutenant in the army. He was at Fort Knox from 1967-69, and then Fort Gordon in Georgia. He then spent one year in Vietnam, receiving a Bronze Star. He went to Maine Law, graduating in 1972. He was on the finance board and later mayor of Lewiston from 1979-82. He then practiced litigation law and some criminal law for two years. He began his own firm in 1987. At the time of this interview he was Executive Director of the Worker's Compensation Board.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: 1980-81 Secretary of State; Vietnam War; Democratic Party in Maine; transportation grant for Lewiston, Maine; Nestle; Angeline (Paul Dionne's mother) instrumental in formation of seamstress union; Lewiston/Auburn campus of USM; economic transitions in Lewiston with downfall of Bates Mill; Lewiston-Auburn Economic Growth Council; Maine government shutdown in 1993 over workers' compensation disputes; National League of Cities; Roland "Rollo" Landry; Louis Jalbert; Paul Couture; and Hal Gosselin.

Indexed Names

Beliveau, John
Boisvert, Romeo
Bonenfant, Robert
Bonneau, John
Brennan, Joseph E.
Brezhnev, Leonid Ilyich, 1906-1982
Caron, Lillian
Carter, Jimmy, 1924-
Clifford, Robert
Cohen, William S.
Couture, Faust
Couture, Paul
Croteau, Norm
Day, Charlie
Delahanty, Tom II
Dionne, Angeline (Bois)
Dionne, Armand
Dionne, Paul
Glassman, Harry
Gosselin, Hal
Gosselin, Lucien B.
Gosselin, Paul
Gretzky, Wayne
Hathaway, Bill
Hemingway, Ernest, 1899-1961
Jalbert, Louis
Johnson, Billy
Landry, Roland
Lebel, Lucien
Malenfant, Ernest
McCarthy, Joseph, 1908-1957
McKernan, John
Mitchell, George J. (George John), 1933-
Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996
Orestis, John
Rabasco, Ed
Rancourt, Georges
Raymond, Larry
Whittemore, R. Peter

Transcript

Brian O'Doherty: All right, we are here with Paul Dionne on November 9th [*sic* 10th] , 1999, and if Mr. Dionne would please spell his name.

Paul Dionne: My name is Paul Dionne, D-I-O-N-N-E.

BO: And what is your date of birth and town of city?

PD: My date of birth is 9-27-42, and I was born in Lewiston, Maine.

BO: My name is Brian O'Doherty and I'll be interviewing Paul Dionne today. Tell me a little about your family and background, particularly your parents, siblings, where they grew up and what not.

PD: I'm originally from Lewiston, Maine as I stated a few seconds ago. My parents are Franco-Americans. Neither one of them had gotten much of a formal education, but were driven in ensuring that both of their children got a formal education. So from the very beginning there was an aspiration by both myself and my sister that was instilled in us by our parents that we were going to get an education beyond the high school level through college, and beyond that if possible. It was a very sports-minded family, and as a result we were engaged in all kinds of sports activities here in the Lewiston-Auburn area.

I went to a parochial school here in Lewiston and then went to Lewiston High School where I played hockey and baseball. Following four years of high school, I went to Kents Hill prep school for a year in an attempt to sharpen my study habits, which I hadn't particularly worked hard on in high school, did well in prep school, went to Providence College for four years, and after I graduated from Providence College, that was the Vietnam era. I was commissioned as second lieutenant, spent a year in the United States both at Fort Knox and Fort Gordon, Georgia, then went to Vietnam for a year, returned to Lewiston and went to law school, got married, and started practicing law in the Lewiston-Auburn area. In 1979 I became mayor of Lewiston and was mayor for four years.

BO: Talk about an abridged biography, my God. All right, let's go back. We're going to back track a little bit. I'm curious to know your sister's name, as well as your parents' names.

PD: Sure, my sister's name is Rachel, her married name is Merrill, M-E-R-R-I-L-L. My father's name was Armand Dionne and my mother's maiden name was Angeline Bois, B-O-I-S.

BO: Fantastic. And what were their occupations, your parents' occupations?

PD: My mom was a seamstress and my dad was a barber.

BO: And their political, social and religious views? Obviously, I'm assuming you're a Catholic.

PD: I am a Catholic. And their views? They were brought up in the Catholic faith and they brought up my sister and I in the Catholic faith. And it was a fairly religious household in that we participated in all of the religious holidays. I went to church on Sundays, things of that nature, but not overly religious.

BO: And what were their political beliefs?

PD: They both had very liberal Democratic beliefs. As a matter of fact, my mom was quite instrumental in the seamstress shop she was working in. She was quite instrumental in getting a union organization set up here in the Lewiston-Auburn area. So she was somewhat of an activist.

BO: What, tell me more about that.

PD: Well, I, there's very little to tell except the fact that she thought the conditions were sub-par, and she worked hard to organize her fellow workers to discuss the matters with union leaders. And I think it was the seamstress union or, I don't recall the union. She died when I was only about eighteen years old, but I can remember that she was fairly active in getting a union into the shop that she was working at.

BO: And what was Lewiston like back then, like socially, economically when you were growing up?

PD: It was a nice area to grow up in because there were a lot of kids my age in the neighborhood and we were extremely sports-minded. And it was always easy to pick up a game, whether it was a hockey game, whether it was a baseball game, football game, basketball, what have you. So the nice thing about it was that there were a lot of kids who were athletically inclined and who were willing to, at the drop of a hat, get involved in some sort of an athletic competition. So my childhood was a wonderful one, in that I had two loving parents and a wonderful sister, and a lot of friends in the area who had similar likings insofar as our activities were concerned.

BO: And do you remember the city of Lewiston itself, like downtown Lewiston, how was that economically?

PD: The downtown area was a very bustling area when I was growing up. We'll say during my first, oh, my first recollections are pretty vivid ones. When I was three or four years old we'd go down to, we'd go to the downtown area during the Christmas season and there were always a lot of lights, a lot of festivities. Santa Claus was coming in. All of the stores had Christmas-type activities going on. So the downtown area was a very bustling area right up until the time I got to high school, and then we could start seeing the gradual decline in the downtown area. A few of the malls started sprouting up on the outskirts and was taking business away from the downtown area. We could see some of the shops and some of the stores closing. I don't think there was any real fear or real concern at that time. I think everybody thought that was just, quote-unquote, "progress".

BO: Right, right. And when did you graduate high school?

PD: I graduated from high school in 1960.

BO: And where did you attend elementary school, you said a parochial school?

PD: Yes, I went to St. Peter's parochial school here in Lewiston, right.

BO: And, did you have any political tendencies in high school or before?

PD: I really don't think I developed political tendencies until I got to college. My concerns in high school, as I mentioned earlier, were having a good time socially and participating athletically. And then when I got to prep school, I started being a more serious student. And in college, because of an injury, I was unable to pursue sports in college. So I got involved in other things, a few political organizations, things of that nature, and kind of enjoyed that. And I think that's where it first started to develop. I always knew that if I came back to Lewiston I wanted to get involved somehow to help the community, to do something for the community. But I don't know if that was any type of political calling, I just thought that I wanted to get involved. That was, I guess, partly the way we were brought up, you know, to get involved and do things and be a part of the community.

BO: And when you were in high school, did you associate yourself with the Democratic Party, Republican Party, and independents?

PD: I had very few political inclinations in high school.

BO: Really?

PD: Right.

BO: You didn't have any affiliation at all?

PD: Well, the only affiliations were, you know, Sunday talks with my dad and my mom and my uncles and my aunts, stuff like that about what was going on in the time. In the '50s, there was a lot of talk about McCarthy and McCarthyism, and there was a lot of discussion about that on Sunday gatherings. So, you know, I'd listen in but not really get involved in much of the discussion.

BO: How did they feel about McCarthyism?

PD: It was funny because my parents had a great opposition to what was going on, but a few of my uncles thought it was the right thing to do. So the debates would get pretty heated.

BO: A good Thanksgiving dinner I could see.

PD: That's right.

BO: Oh, my, yeah. All right, and, you said you became more politically active at University of Connecticut, or at . . . .

PD: Providence College, Providence.

BO: . . . . Providence College, pardon me, Providence College. And you said that a particular injury spurred that on. Do you think that the injury activated your political tendencies or do you think you found something new to do because you couldn't play a sport?

PD: Yeah, I think so. I went to Providence College both to get a good education, and I thought at the time to play hockey at the Division I level, and I got injured quite seriously between, before my freshman year, the summer of my freshman year. And as a result, couldn't try out for the freshman hockey team. And after losing a year I figured well, maybe, you know, I ought to just play intramural sports and get involved in the college and college-type activities. And then I started realizing that there was a whole lot more to life than just athletics and got involved in a number of things; student government, things of that nature, and enjoyed that quite a bit.

BO: And what, I mean you were, you said you started as a freshman because you were going as a freshman student. Did you enter school looking for political organizations, or did you just sort of look around every single club and then found . . . . ?

PD: I had no inclination to get involved in any political organization when I first went to school. I went there to study, to enjoy myself, to broaden my outlook, and it just so happened that, I think it was second semester of freshman year, somebody asked me to run for the student congress. And I ran for student congress and got elected and got involved in that organization, and did that for the next three or four ye-, four years while I was in college.

BO: What were your studies academically?

PD: I was a history major, and had a minor in English.

BO: Did you always have a historical interest?

PD: I think so, yeah. Those were my favorite subjects in high school, and I had another history course in prep school that I enjoyed tremendously. And when I got to Providence College I felt that I wanted to get a major in history. And also at that point in time I started thinking about going to law school and talked to a few of the professors and they said, you know, if you're going to go to law school that maybe history or English was a good background to have.

BO: So did law school, I mean you said you liked history at first, but did, was law school more of a catalyst to provide, to give you a, sort of a boost to become a history major?

PD: I don't think so. I think, I think I started studying history first, and then as I went on through my college years became more interested in going to law school. So I think I was considering law school seriously probably the end of my sophomore year and my junior year.

BO: How did you first get started on history, I mean, they didn't have a history channel back, you know, when, so . . . .

PD: Right, just did a lot of reading. Even though I wasn't studying too hard in high school, I was doing a lot of reading. I was reading a lot of novels; I was reading a lot of historical novels. My parents always made books available to us. They also encouraged us to get, to go to the library, things of that nature.

BO: Any favorite childhood authors?

PD: In high school I started reading Hemingway and Hemingway was probably my favorite author both in high school and college. But he romanticized things an awful lot, and he romanticized war, and my experience in Vietnam kind of turned me off to Hemingway because, you know, there's not much to glorify in war. And as a result of that I kind of stopped reading Hemingway, but more recently I've gone back to some of his books and read them. And he's just a fun author to read and he's written some wonderful books, and I guess my proclivity towards Hemingway is still fairly strong, even though I don't agree with his philosophy on war.

BO: So, what year did you enter UConn Law School?

PD: I didn't go to UConn Law School, I went to University of Maine Law School.

BO: Oh, U Maine?

PD: Right, and that's when I got back from the service, so I was at the law school from '69 to '72.

BO: Okay. How has Lewiston changed since the 1960s, besides economically? Because we've gone over economics and how suburban sprawl has changed the downtown district. But how has Lewiston changed otherwise?

PD: The economic factor I think is the basic factor that really drove everything for a number of years in the Lewiston-Auburn area. The mills closed, as a result there was greater unemployment, as a result a lot of people left the Lewiston-Auburn area. And there were very few opportunities for young people who were either high school or college graduates. So, as a result of the poor economic environment, there were other things that suffered, too; social activities, cultural activities, things of that nature. So, as a result, Lewiston suffered a dearth of those types of activities for a period of a few decades. Then there was a revitalization. People started being more concerned about the culture, the cultural type things. People wanted to make this area a good place in which to raise children and hopefully have them come back to. So I think the mind set started changing, you know, maybe twenty or twenty five years ago. So I

think the economic factors drove the Lewiston-Auburn to some of its depths in regard to cultural, social type activities, but it's also driving Lewiston back in regard to those areas insofar as the development and the enhancement of those types of things now.

See, there's always been, there's never been a real emphasis in the Lewiston-Auburn area for further education. And I think a lot of the local families started to develop that type of mind set, that more education was required once a lot of the jobs started to leave the Lewiston-Auburn area because there were very few opportunities. So people started to realize that with education comes opportunities. And there was more talk about sending their kids to school, you know, beyond the high school level, and there was more interest in the kids as a result of pursuing their education.

One of the things that I found was a real tragedy when I came back to Lewiston is that there are very few educational opportunities for people who had to work, or who didn't have the financial wherewithal to go to college. So, as a result of that, during my second term in office I got the idea that Lewiston had been neglected by the university system and we started, I started discussing that with some of my city councilors and some of the city officials. And, as a result of those conversations, I went to talk to the governor, who was Brennan at the time, and I said, "Hey, Lewiston's really been overlooked in regard to the university system, and it's the one place in Maine that probably needs a community college more than any other place because the education level is lower in Lewiston. Fewer high school graduates go to college from Lewiston than any of the other metropolitan areas." And he thought there was something to the idea. So as a result, he set up an appointment to meet with the chancellor. And I met with the chancellor at the time and the chancellor was really turned off by the idea, and he kind of rejected it out-of-hand. Well, on the way back home we stopped and we called the governor's office and he wasn't in, and when we reached Lewiston there was a call waiting for us and he wanted to know how the meeting had gone, and I said to the governor, I said, "Joe, we didn't get a very warm reception at the chancellor's office," and I told him what had happened. And he says, "Paul, I don't think the chancellor understood you, I think he'll give you a call tomorrow and get back to you." And within a day I had a call from the chancellor. And the chancellor called me back to his office and he says, "You know, that's not such a bad idea that you suggested." It just so happened that the university was going through its budgetary process with the legislature at the time and they needed the governor's support, so I'm sure the governor put a little bit of pressure on the chancellor for him to take a second look. And the rest is history.

As a result of that, we got our legislative delegation aboard, they worked real hard in Augusta. Local officials and state officials worked real hard to make that a reality, and the Lewiston campus came to the Lewiston-Auburn area, which is now the Lewiston-Auburn College. And it's given so many people an opportunity to get an education where they otherwise would not have; People who work, people who are a little older than the traditional college students, people who all of a sudden had a yearning to get more education, people who had young families who would not otherwise have an opportunity. So it's been a real boon for the Lewiston-Auburn area. And, you know, as a result hundreds of people are getting college degrees, whereas, mainly from this area, whereas they would never have had the opportunity to do that. So, that also has an effect on other aspects on life in the Lewiston-Auburn area, you know, people who do get an

education want more educational opportunities, want more cultural opportunities, want more social opportunities. And as a result they push their communities to getting that type of activity or bring about those types of institutions.

BO: Do you feel that jobs requiring a college education followed suit with the new college in the area?

PD: Well what happened is, there were a number of jobs that were suited for people who had college degrees, but oftentimes the people from this area didn't qualify for them, so they were going outside of this area to recruit people. Now our, the people from this community, are filling those jobs. And then slowly there was the attraction to a number of, or there was economic development which provided the types of jobs that required, you know, a college degree, and I think that kind of followed suit. And as a result a lot of things are happening now in this, the Lewiston-Auburn area.

One of the real mainstays, too, to the Lewiston-Auburn economy, have been Bates College, St. Mary's Hospital, and Central Maine Medical Center. Those are three fine institutions that provide wonderful jobs for people. And as a result, for example, there are twelve thou-, we employ twelve hundred people at Central Maine Medical Center. I think there's something like eight hundred or nine hundred people employed at St. Mary's, and there's a host of people from the community who are employed here at Bates. Those are all good, clean, well paying jobs, oftentimes requiring a good education. And those three institutions have been kind of a mainstay, and not too many people think of those educations as providing, you know, economic stimulus, a stimulant for this area. But they have, and they've been the real mainstay through all these years.

BO: When did St. Mary's actually become a larger hospital which would employed a great deal of people?

PD: St. Mary's has always been a fairly large hospital. And I think, I think it was in the, around the turn of the century anyway, that they created St. Mary's, and shortly thereafter Central Maine Medical Center. And the two of them have developed over a period of about fifty years to be good-sized community hospitals for the state of Maine. And then about fifteen or twenty years ago they both developed into medical centers, and there's always been a lot of competition between the two of them, and a lot of people have thought that, you know, there ought to be a merger. And then St. Mary's got to a certain level and then Central Maine Medical Center, and I'm a little biased because I'm on the board over there, but Central Maine Medical Center developed other areas of care. You know, such as the helicopter service, tertiary care type, tertiary type care, which is only offered in the bigger hospitals, and now has made application to the state to allow it to become, to do heart surgery, which is probably the summit so far as hospitals can go, or medical centers can go.

BO: And as opposed to now, and as opposed to the 1950s and '60s, you said they were a little smaller hospitals. What were some other areas of development that are now larger organizations that were just fledgling companies, or fledgling businesses back in the '50s and '60s?

PD: Geiger Brothers. You've heard of Geiger Brothers, they put out the Farmer's Almanac. And they have an international business, and the Farmer's Almanac is distributed nation wide, I mean, excuse me, internationally, worldwide. And they also have a number of sub businesses that I think have markets throughout North America, if not internationally. So, Geiger Brothers has experienced an awful lot of growth; Pioneer Plastics, Tambrands.

But a couple of the nice things that Lewiston-Auburn has done is to develop industrial parks. And all through the industrial parks, the first two, the one in Lewiston and the one in Auburn, have been very successful. And Lewiston has a new industrial park, and Auburn has expanded its industrial park, and you see a lot of activity there. So, I think the concept, insofar as industrial and commercial development, was as important as, you know, any single institution. And both of the cities had pretty good concept as to what it wanted to do in order to bring industry to the communities.

BO: What were the majority of the employers back in the '50s and '60s?

PD: The mills and the shoe shops, you know, aside from the two hospitals and Bates College. And those were the main employers. That was where, you know, a large percentage of this population was employed. And Lewiston-Auburn grew up around the mills.

BO: And you said your mother was instrumental in organizing a union, I'm assuming there was some sort of employer abuse when it came to employees and pay and what not, if she went through all the trouble to organize . . . .

PD: It, you know, it wasn't as much direct employee abuse. It was the conditions, you know; summer months poor ventilation, few windows, things of that nature. Crowded conditions, things like that.

BO: All right, we're going back a little bit to, back to your family and your personal experiences. And I'm just going to ask you, who in your family or outside of your family really influenced you when you were young? Either, you said your family encouraged you to be educationally sound and they really encouraged you to become motivated to go to college and receive a higher education. But besides that, who in your family, friends, if there were any, encouraged you to do other things in your life? For instance sports, or anything for that matter.

PD: Well, my mom and my dad were my primary inspiration, but as I indicated earlier, I had some wonderful friends growing up. And even though at the time we didn't aspire to go to college for the sake of getting an education, I think we all felt that we wanted to go to college at least to pursue some sort of athletic career, or pursue something beyond the high school level. And as a result, most of my friends, a large percentage of my friends, went on to college or got involved in businesses in which they did very well. So, I think there was a lot of motivation amongst the group. Group members would encourage others, you know, to compete well, to strive for higher goals, things of that nature.

I had some wonderful teachers at Lewiston High School and some wonderful coaches who always indicated to me that they thought I had the ability to go on beyond high school and that, you know, I ought to be taking college courses and things of that nature in high school, which I did, and which I enjoyed. So, I would say some of the coaches, some of the teachers that I had.

Local businessmen in the area were always interested, you know, if you'd go into the downtown area and buy clothes. There were two clothing stores, LeBlancs and Benoit's, and most of the people in there were very friendly towards the high school kids and things like that. And always willing to discuss things and talk about the community, and further education, and sports and stuff like that. So it was, you know, by and large a very supportive community, whether you got the support from your family, whether you got it from your friends, or whether you got it from people that you'd get to know as a result of frequenting their businesses.

BO: So would you say it was a small town community in a big city? Small town atmosphere?

PD: I, it was, it was a big city for Maine, certainly a small city relatively speaking. But yeah, a small town atmosphere where, you know, people were concerned about other people.

BO: When people got in trouble, how would employers or just regular ordinary people deal with that, would they go to the police first, or call the parents, or . . . .?

PD: It was always the parents. I mean, you know, even if the police picked you up for, you know, some minor violation or something like that, they'd take you home, they'd take you to your dad's shop. The parents, you know, at least the parents that I knew, my parents and the parents of my friends, were pretty strict disciplinarians. So, if you were caught messing up, you'd pay the penalty.

BO: All right, moving on a little bit in life, I'm going to ask you if you're married, and if so when did you meet your wife?

PD: I met my wife when I returned from Vietnam, and we were married about a year and a half after we met, and I was in law school at the time. It was my second year in law school, and we got married 1970. So, right after my first year in law school, and we've been married ever since. I have two daughters. One is in Lewiston and one is in Colorado right now, home visiting for a month.

BO: All right. You were awarded the Bronze Star for service in Vietnam. Is there anything you'd like to share about your perspectives on the war, at all?

PD: Well, as you know from your readings I'm sure, it was a very contentious period in the United States at that time primarily because of the war. And there was two schools of thought, one that you should be there and one that you shouldn't be there. And initially I was of the school of thought that you should be there. You know, you had to serve your country. I was still influenced by Hemingway to a certain degree that war was a romantic thing. And as a result I got a commission, was commissioned as a second lieutenant, and went to Vietnam. Shortly after

I got there, I realized that we really shouldn't be there. It was a very small country, it was very uneducated country, and the people really didn't understand why a country the size of the United States was there fighting what they viewed as kind of a nationalistic thing, or a revolutionary or civil type war. And as, and the longer I remained in Vietnam the more convinced I became.

I got assigned to a Vietnamese unit. It was a Vietnamese army cav unit, and there were a hundred soldiers in this unit and just two Americans. And as a result of that experience, not only was I fighting side by side with the Vietnamese, but when we weren't fighting I got to understand them, got to understand their culture, got to understand what they had gone through historically, and just could not understand why the United States was involved in the war. So I became of the school of thought that we were there, it was wrong for us to be there, and even though I served honorably and patriotically, I still have mixed feelings. Not about, you know, the war itself, which I do, but about the policies involving the war.

BO: Which is pretty progressive looking back now, very progressive. Would you say your views were consistent with Ed Muskie's during the time, if you . . . .?

PD: I don't know what Ed Muskie's views were on the war at the time. Certainly he was part of the established government in Washington, and I would think that he was probably supportive of the war, and I would think that he probably had some of the traditional feelings that I had, that if your country called, you had to serve.

BO: And what were your years of service?

PD: I had two years of service and they were from 1967 to 1969.

BO: At which time you went to U Maine Law, when you returned home?

PD: Yeah, when I got, when I returned home it was the middle of the year, so I couldn't get to the University of Maine that year. So I taught school for a few months and enjoyed life, and got myself back in shape emotionally, and then went to law school the next year.

BO: You taught school, and was this in history?

PD: No, no, I was just looking for a job when I got back so that I could save up some money to go to law school. And there was a teacher, there was a job opening at the junior high school, and it was a health teacher. It was a combination health teacher/gym teacher, so I took that job for a year. Soft job.

BO: Soft job.

PD: Fun job.

BO: Would you, this is just out of curiosity, if you ever, if you didn't injure yourself, did you want to become a Wayne Greztky?

PD: I never had the talent to do that. You know, I was a good athlete and could probably play, could probably have played hockey for a couple years at Providence, but I don't think my career would have taken me beyond that.

BO: Did you ever coach hockey when you were at the middle school?

PD: I did not coach hockey when I was at the middle school, no.

BO: All right, so when you got to U Maine Law, was there any particular type of law that you were interested in, (*unintelligible phrase*)?

PD: Litigation, litigation, I knew I wanted to be a trial lawyer.

BO: Okay, and were there any type of organizations or activities that you were involved in immediately when you entered, or did you decide to take some time off?

PD: No. In law school I kind of dedicated myself to my studies. There was a good intramural sports program that I participated in, a bunch of my friends participated in. And we'd play football in the fall and we'd play softball in the spring, and then I'd play hockey in some of the leagues here in Lewiston in the winter months. And so it was my studies, sports, and a little socializing.

BO: Do you have any recollections or anecdotes that you, that may indicate the nature of your law school years that come to mind?

PD: There was one anecdote that one of my professors, the one that I most admired. His name was Harry Glassman, and he had worked for a large San Francisco law firm and was a very successful litigator, and had litigated some big cases. And then early on in his life he sustained a heart attack and was told that he had to get away from, you know, the stress filled environment of trial law. As a result he came to the University of Maine as a professor, and was probably one of the best and most brilliant professors at the University of Maine at the time. If I didn't mention his name, his name was Harry Glassman, and he was a very intimidating professor until you got to know him. He later became a judge and served on the Maine Supreme Court, so he's had an outstanding legal career. But he told us, you know, he says this is what law school's going to be like for all of you. He says, "The first year we scare you to death, the second year we work you to death, and the third year we bore you to death." And that always stayed with me and it was. It was a truism because that's exactly the way law school was, and if you talk to anybody going to law school now they still have that same feeling.

BO: And you decided to stick with litigation and trial law?

PD: Yeah, when I got out of law school, came back to Lewiston. I knew I wanted to work in Lewiston at the time, and was hired by one of the Lewiston firms and practiced law for twenty years, most of which was litigation.

BO: What were some of your cases, (*unintelligible word*) cases?

PD: Car accident cases, a lot of car accident cases. For the first few years I did both. You could work for the district attorney's office, it was called the county attorney's office at the time. You could do that and still be in private practice, as long as you didn't practice criminal law. So I had quite a few good criminal cases that I prosecuted, and then defended criminals after that. A lot of car accident type cases, a lot of workers' compensation type cases, a couple airplane crashes that I was involved with, things of that nature. So it was, it was a very interesting and fun-filled, but very stressful career.

Law practice is the, being a lawyer is in itself stressful, and as a result, you know, you've got to take care of yourself. You've got to keep sharp, you've got to find ways to eliminate the stress. So I did that for about twenty-one years, twenty, twenty-one years, and enjoyed it.

BO: When you first stepped foot on U Maine Law School, did you expect your legal career to be as it is now?

PD: Well, you know, one of the things that I really anticipated, and that was fulfilled, was the fact that I wanted to do a blend of things. I didn't want to just practice law, I also wanted to be involved in the community. And it was that vocation that allowed me to do those types of things, because I practiced law and I was mayor for four years. Prior to that time I had been involved in some other government activities, I was on the finance board, I served as the city's corporation counsel, the city's attorney, then became mayor for four years. So there was a period of about eight or nine years that my law practice gave me the flexibility so that I could be involved in that type of thing. And then once I got involved politically, I had two young daughters, and the law practice and politics was taking an awful lot of my time. And as a result I couldn't spend the quality time that I wanted to with my daughters, so that's when I decided that my political career had to end and I concentrated on practicing law and doing things with the family. And that worked out great too because again I had that flexibility, I could, you know, coach my daughters, I could participate in all their activities, I could attend all of their activities, things of that nature. So that worked out very well.

BO: Tell me about the history of your involvement as a law partner at Marshall, Raymond, Beliveau, Dionne, and Bonneau.

PD: Yeah, that was a fun law firm to be in because there were a lot of different personalities. John [G.] Marshall, who was kind of the elder statesman at the time, I think he was in his seventies or eighties and had been mayor of Auburn back in the '20s or '30s, always had great anecdotes, great stories. So he'd come in once or twice a week and get some exposure from him. And Larry Raymond, who was a very successful attorney at the time, shared, you know, his knowledge of the law with me. But I got close to John Beliveau, who is now a district court judge, and Tom Delahanty who's now a superior court judge. And John Bonneau, who are more my age than the other two individuals I mentioned. And we developed a very nice relationship professionally and personally, so that it was a fun place to practice law. Then we hired, I think I

became a partner after three or four years; the practice bloomed pretty fast, and as a result I became a partner. And then we hired some associates that I really enjoyed working with, or that I had working for me, which was pretty good at the time, you know, because you could finally delegate. And so it worked out well, the chemistry was pretty good, but then John Beliveau left the practice, Tom Delahanty left the practice. They went on to be judges, and I felt at that point in time that I wanted to start my own law firm. So Norm Croteau and I set out and we set up our own law firm. And then Paul Gosselin joined us shortly after that, and Edward Rabasco. So we had a four-person law firm within a pretty short period of time that was pretty successful, and that worked out well for us.

BO: On that note I'm going to stop and flip the tape to side B so we don't miss any information.

End of Side A, Tape One
Side B, Tape One

BO: We are now on side B interviewing Paul Dionne on November 9th, 1999, interviewing with Brian O'Doherty. We were just talking about your involvement with your new law firm and how you became a partner with Marshall, Raymond, Beliveau, Dionne and Bonneau, and I just want to recap your partnership in four years, and that's pretty unheard of when you talk about the legal profession. What were some of their reasons for giving you partnership in such a quick time?

PD: Well, it helped that I was a hometown person in that, you know, I had a lot of contacts, a lot of friends. And as a result my very first year in the law practice was a very busy one, in that all of my friends were coming and my associates were coming to have me handle their cases. And what I couldn't handle I'd pass on, you know, to the more senior attorneys. So it really didn't take me a long time to develop a law practice that was kind of self-subsistence, subsistent, so I think my partners realized that my law practice had potential. And, you know, most law firms are bottom-line oriented, and if you can carry the load, then you can be a partner.

BO: And when you decided to start your own practice, how did that differ regarding stress management, in just the logistics, how did you handle that?

PD: Well, I could always handle stress pretty well because I always could juggle a lot of balls, you know, whether I was practicing law and doing my political career, or whether I was practicing law and getting involved in some other community activities. I could handle the stress pretty well because I had a lot of outlets. I play racquetball, I run, I get involved with family things, things of that nature. So I think it wasn't a matter of stress that led me from the old firm to the new firm, it was a matter of dynamics, personal dynamics more than anything else. I've always been of the philosophy that you've got to feel comfortable where you work and you've got to enjoy your work, and at that point in my life it just wasn't the challenge that it had been before. So I figured, you know, starting my own firm might be a new challenge for me, so that was the main reason.

BO: To put it mildly, that was a new challenge. Were your attorney friends politically involved,

were they politically charged?

PD: They were not politically involved insofar as elected office is concerned, but most of them were involved in the community, were appointed to, you know, either governmental boards on the local level or the state level, or were involved in the hospitals or the library, or things of that nature.

BO: And as a lawyer, how would you characterize your political views, was it more conservative as opposed to when you were in college, or was it more liberal?

PD: Oh, my views were always pretty liberal, both in college and as an attorney.

BO: And just to categorize them, how did you feel about taxes, how did you feel about, during that time period I think the amendment for everyone, Equal Rights Amendment, was being proposed. What were some of your personal views, as well as political views, on some of those larger issues?

PD: Always favored, you know, the human element, whether it was civil rights, human rights, the women's cause, things of that nature. I always felt that those had to be expanded, at least to the level where, you know, those groups were equal or on a par with everybody else. So those were basically my ideas in regard to the human element. Insofar as government, I always felt that government had to do as much for people, especially those that couldn't help themselves. So, you know, insofar as those types of programs, I'd always kind of support those programs.

BO: And would your, would you say your friends, your attorney friends had similar views?

PD: I think they were probably a little more conservative. The older ones were a little more conservative. I think the people like John Bonneau and Paul Gosselin and myself were probably of an equal mindset.

BO: And did that ever get in the way of your work?

PD: Ver-, the philosophy never got in the way of the work. The involvement in extracurricular activities, politics and things of that nature was always a concern because if you're out of the office you're not earning money. The comeback to that was, well, you know, we're generating a lot of PR for the firm, and as a result we're generating clients and that makes up for it. So, you know, there were always two, those two mind sets that conflicted.

BO: And when you first started your own practice, what year was that?

PD: Let's see, I think that was about 1987, '86, '87.

BO: So when did you begin your service with the Marshall, Raymond, Beliveau firm?

PD: When I graduated from law school in 1972.

BO: So it was a long time?

PD: Yeah.

BO: So you became involved in politics, did you start out as running for mayor?

PD: That was my first run at elected office, yes.

BO: And what were some of your platforms? What was your platform as a mayoral candidate?

PD: Well, at the time it was mainly economic development because the cities were kind of in a doldrum economically, and the big push was economic development and education. So those were two of the big planks in the platform.

BO: Did you mention the Lewiston-Auburn College while you were running?

PD: Not at that point in time. That idea didn't come up until the end of my first term, beginning of my second term.

BO: And how did you propose economic development?

PD: Well, basically at the time there was a fledgling organization called the Lewiston-Auburn Economic-, Lewiston, Lewiston Development Council and the goal, and Auburn also had a development council. But it was limited in regard to its effectiveness. And Lucien Gosselin, who later became the city administrator, had an idea that we ought to combine our efforts, Lewiston and Auburn, and start marketing the communities, as opposed to having all kinds of in-fighting in regard to who's going to get the economic development. And his theory was that if we had some sort of a joint growth council we could make things work better for the Lewiston-Auburn area, economically. And that bore fruit. We organized the Lewiston-Auburn Economic Growth Council, and it worked in conjunction with the Lewiston Development Corporation and the Auburn Development Corporation. And as a result, we were able to stir up some economic development in this area, both internally and from the outside. So the concept was a good one and the concept lives on today. As a matter of fact, it's largely because of Lewiston Economic Growth Council that we got that big postal service, got the postal service to locate in Lewiston-Auburn area. And, you know, Lewiston-Auburn was in a fight with Portland for that, and Portland's a great magnet, and for Lewiston-Auburn to have wrestled that away from Portland is a real coup.

BO: Did, when did L.L. Bean first open up its operation center in Lewiston?

PD: That was in the '80s and again, that came as a result of the cooperation between the communities. There were a couple of local businessmen, Billy Johnson, Damien Patenelli, I think Charles Day, bought the vacated Peck's building, did some minor renovations, and then shopped it around. And they were able to market it to L.L. Bean's. And as a result that vacant

building, which incidentally was one of those real active buildings in the '50s, you know, that all the kids would go to. It was a big department store and all the families would shop at [it]. And that was really sad when it closed its door because that was kind of a hallmark of the success of the downtown. And when it closed its doors it became just the opposite; it was a mark of the downtown's failure. So when L.L. Bean came to Lewiston, you know, that helped to rejuvenate the Lewiston downtown.

Right about the same time, or maybe just a little before that, there was a building that was right across the street from that that had been a kind of a landmark in Lewiston for a number of years. And there was a big fire there and people thought, you know, that they were just going to have to raze the building and put a parking lot there, which would have been, you know, very unsightly at the head of Lisbon Street. One of the local developers, Bates College graduate by the name of Steve Griswold, bought the place, rehabilitated it, and now it's a lovely building that houses businesses on the first and second floor I think, and then elderly housing on the next three floors. So, you know, those types of little things were happening in the downtown, but the rest of the downtown was still kind of deteriorating.

BO: Did you ever have a secret plot to merge the two cities?

PD: There's been a lot of talk about merging the two cities, and I think, you know, that would be a very, very difficult thing to do. But I think you can do the thing, the next best thing to merger, and that is to have a cooperative effort by both communities in all areas that, where there's a fit. For example, you know, you can purchase goods, which Lewiston-Auburn does, together, which results in a discount in regard to the cost of the goods. You can get involved in joint projects such as the Lewiston-Auburn Airpark, which is an industrial park developed by both of the communities. You can have cooperative efforts between the fire departments, the police departments, the public works departments, which both of the communities do. And then you can market yourself as one community, which they're doing now. So a legal merger, probably not in the cards, but a merger insofar as activities are concerned, certainly in the cards, and something that's worked out well for Lewiston-Auburn.

BO: Did you have a similar vision when you were mayor?

PD: We had a wonderful relationship with Auburn. [R.] Peter Whittemore was the mayor of Auburn at the time, and Peter and I almost overnight developed a wonderful relationship. And we were asked to speak at a lot of the activities, and either Peter would speak first and take a few jabs at me, and then I'd take a few jabs at him, and we'd go back and forth. But the goal was always to bring the communities closer together, and they dubbed it the Peter and Paul Show. And as a result we were able to do a lot of things with the communities and bring the communities closer together.

BO: Now, becoming mayor, you have to have a lot of motivation, you have to have a lot of political ties. Who were some of your political friends and allies when you were running for that position?

PD: Well, the previous mayor, Lil Caron, who was the first woman mayor in Lewiston, might have been the first woman mayor in the Lewiston-Auburn area. I had been hired by her to serve as the corporation council for the city of Lewiston, so I had some ties there. I knew most of the city councilors. You know, most of them were Lewiston residents and I knew them, either they were fathers of friends of mine or people I'd run into along the way. So, even though I wasn't entrenched politically, I had a pretty good base being, you know, from the community. Also, I had a pretty good base of supporters so that I knew that politically we could run a good race.

BO: And who spoke at your first inauguration?

PD: Well, it was kind of neat because Ed Muskie spoke at the inauguration. And he was of course the feature speaker. He was a United States Senator, And Joe Brennan also spoke at the inauguration, and I've got some clips in regard to that if you want to review them or take copies of that. But Ed Muskie did two things at the first inauguration. And, you know, he was such a powerful man in Washington at the time that when he came, when he decided that he was going to come to the inauguration which was a few weeks before the inauguration. I think he hurried the process a little bit and came to Lewiston bearing gifts.

There was a seven [***sic*** six] hundred thousand dollar grant to build a transit station on the main street that was in the process at the time, that Lewiston knew very little about, but that Ed Muskie was kind of quarter backing in Washington, D.C. And the day he showed up for the inauguration he announced to me, and then subsequently the press, that he was bringing a grant of seven [***sic*** six] hundred thousand dollars to Lewiston to help it out with its transit depot on the main street. And the background, very quickly, was that there were some problems in regard to the Greyhound Busses coming in and out of Lewiston because the transit facility was just obsolete and we had to do something, but the city didn't have the money to do it with. And Ed Muskie worked hard to get the grant and came to Lewiston that day with seven [***sic*** six] hundred thousand dollars for the city of Lewiston.

The other thing he did was just enthralled everybody and got some play in the newspaper the next day. As you know, he's a very good impromptu speaker, and he came to the inauguration, which was the formal inauguration at the auditorium here at the junior high school. And following that we had an inaugural party. It was just jam packed with people, and he was supposed to just come up and say a few words and congratulate me on being elected, and all of that stuff. Well, he went off on a thirty or forty minute speech, and he just captivated the audience. He talked about all of the world issues and he talked about oil prices I think it was, and how, you know, that would impact our economy. He projected out into the future as to what things would be like in the year 2000, things of that nature. And you could have heard a pin drop, you know. He was just, he just captivated the audience, enthralled them. And when he finished forty minutes later, everybody just jumped up and gave him a standing ovation. But he was that type of person. And I'm sure we'll get into more of that and I'll have some other stories to tell. But he was just a marvelous speaker and a captivating speaker.

BO: Well, all right, I'm a little curious to know about your work as the executive director of the worker's compensation board. What was your involvement in the board like, and when did you

become involved, and how did you have that connection?

PD: Well, as I mentioned to you earlier in the interview, part of my law practice was workers' compensation. And workers' compensation in the late '80s, early '90s was probably the major problem facing the state of Maine. Costs, premium costs had skyrocketed. Benefits were out of control. Insurance companies were leaving the state, employers were closing their doors because it was just too costly. In 1992 the legislature brought about, the legislature and the governor, brought about reforms that were initiated in 1993. And at that point in time the situation was so bad that workers' comp was the major problem facing the state of Maine. The government was closed down as a result of this issue because the governor and the legislature were at loggerheads. The governor indicated that he would take drastic measures, close down state government for a few days, had different types of programs that were affecting the employees . . .

BO: And which governor was this?

PD: That was McKernan. McKernan was pushing for the reforms. And as a result, the reforms were enacted, and they've been very successful. At that point in time there was only one insurance carrier left in the state of Maine writing workers' compensation. And what the reforms did is they set up a mutual insurance company, which was a creation of the state that would provide workers comp insurance, and they stabilized what was going on in the comp community in that they lowered benefits. So, there were efforts to get attorneys out of the system because they feared that that was very costly, and a number of other things, which they did, which helped stabilize things. As a result, the cost of workers' compensation has in the past seven years gone down about fifty percent. There are now a hundred and sixty, a hundred and forty five or forty-six companies who are licensed to underwrite workers comp in the state of Maine. They've all come back and more, and the employer community has benefited greatly from all of that. The employees have suffered as a result because, you know, fewer benefits, things of that nature, no cost of living increases. But those are things that, you know, hopefully the legislature and the governor will start, those are issues which the governor and the legislature will start addressing.

Well, I had been involved in comp and I felt that it was that time in my life for me to get involved in other things, so I went to work for the comp system as a hearing officer, soon became the deputy director, and shortly thereafter became the executive director. So at this point in time I'm the executive director for the workers' compensation for the state of Maine. There are five regional offices; Caribou, Portland, Lewiston, Augusta and Bangor, and one central office in Augusta, none in Kennebunk.

BO: Shucks, let me tell you.

PD: So if you get injured at work in Kennebunk, you've got to come up to Portland.

BO: What was your tenure, as executive director? What were your years in service?

PD: I'm still the executive director.

BO: You still are?

PD: Right, still the executive director. I've been the executive director for the past three and a half years now.

BO: Sounds like you've been pretty successful, I'd say.

PD: It's worked out very well.

BO: All right, we're going back to your mayoral candidacy, as well as your being mayor, and I'm a little curious as to your involvement in the National League of Cities. And just, you could start from the beginning.

PD: Yeah, the National League of Cities is the organization, the national organization, that represents cities large and small in regard to its lobbying efforts, national policy efforts, things of that nature. So it's a very influential organization insofar as towns and cities are concerned. When I went to my first National League of Cities meetings, meeting, I thought that it was a very active organization, and the type of organization that I would like to get involved with, so I got appointed to their finance committee. They call it the finance administration, it was a fair committee, finance administration, intergovernmental relations committee, and as a result got to serve with a group of other mayors and elected officials on one of the standing committees. And that got to be, that was a very interesting experience in that that organization helped to set policy and helped to lobby for the implementation of that policy in Washington. So, you know, there were a lot of trips to Washington, there were a lot of meetings with other mayors, which proved to be I think very important to me because I got a sense as to what was going on in other communities. I got a sense as to what programs were being, were effective in other communities. I got a sense from other mayors and elected officials as to how they dealt with problems. So I think it was as beneficial for me as anything else.

BO: And what were some of the, who were some of your friends, mayoral friends?

PD: Let's see, there was Joe Walsh who was governor, I think he was Warwick and Newport at the time, from Rhode Island. He later ran for governor, and was defeated I think in a very close race. There was a city councilor from Philadelphia I think it was, and I forget her name right now but she was, she represented close to a million people in her ward or district or council. And I'd say to her, you know, I'd say, you know, you represent as a many people in your district as the governor of Maine does in the state of Maine. And it was kind of an interesting thing because the discussions after the meetings over a cup of coffee were always pretty interesting because we'd sit around and some of the big city mayors or the city councilors would say, well, I've got a payroll, I get paid about seventy thousand dollars a year, I've got a staff of thirty people, I've got all kinds of fringe benefits. And, you know, it'd go around the table. And they were all, you know, pretty well paid at the time. And they'd say, well Paul, what do you make? And I'd say, well, thirty-two. And they'd say, geez, that's not bad for a small city mayor, you know, and they all assumed it was thirty-two thousand, but it was thirty-two hundred.

BO: Whew, you obviously weren't in it for that money.

PD: No, not the money at all.

BO: Good grief. What were some of the controversies or disagreements, or, issues that you guys came together on as a league.

PD: Well the big thing then was getting grants from the Federal Government. And, at one point in time, you know, there were just a whole host of grants; enterprise zone grants, HUD grants, UDAG grants. They all had their acronyms and if you want to know what they are I'll tell you. But anyway there were, the point I'm trying to make is there were a lot of grants, there was a lot of money coming from Washington to the cities to help, you know, urban blight, urban development, things of that nature. And the big thing for this organization was to maintain the level of funding. Well, what happened when things started getting tough for the Federal Government and there were major budget problems, they started cutting back on the grants. As a result, our lobbying efforts were upgraded and there was a whole lot more lobbying in regard to getting, you know, those types of grants, or maintaining the funding level of those types of grants. We were fortunate that we had some very influential people in Congress at the time, you know, Ed Muskie being one of them, Bill Cohen who was very well respected being another. And they were extremely helpful to us because if we'd run into problems in regard to specific grants or some of the general grants, then we could always go to them and they were extremely helpful in helping us process the grants.

BO: And were there any concerns in the NLC regarding general revenue sharing?

PD: Yeah, that was, that was one of the big issues, too.

BO: Do you mind expanding on that?

PD: That was, you know, more or less the same as the grant process. These grants, or the policies or the types of fundings, would go through different evolutions and as a result when there was a lot of money in Washington the cities could expect a lot of money. When the money started to dry up then the cities would get less money, and the general revenue stuff was just about the same type of stuff. You know, where initially, and I think they converted, and I'm not entirely sure of that so I can't speak authoritatively in regard to it, but I think that was just a method of, a new method of processing most of the monies that went to the communities.

BO: All right, moving on just a little bit further in your time and life, I just wanted to know when you first came in contact with Ed Muskie.

PD: I had met him on a number of occasions very informally at fundraisers when he was campaigning, things of that nature. So it was, you know, "Hello senator, how are you," and "Hello," and I'm sure he didn't know my name as he didn't know many of the names of the people that were in attendance. But it was all, you know, part of the political process.

Our law firm was involved, you know, with most of the major candidates and most of the time, you know, we were supporting people like Muskie and Hathaway at the time. Some of us supported Bill Cohen even though he was a Republican and a Bowdoin grad, you know, it's got to be kind of tough for you. But, you know, that type of involvement, very informal.

But I got to know him quite well after I became mayor. He was present for the inauguration, so I got to spend the evening with him then. He was wonderful in regard to coming back to Lewiston and participating in various activities. We had a downtown opening at one point in time, he attended that, We would, he would usually attend some of the political, he would always, you know, attend, you know, the major political events in the Lewiston-Auburn area, I got to know him then. When we went to Washington we'd usually stop in in his office and tell him, you know, what types of grants that we were putting in for, and that we'd like his assistance on that, so I'd get to see him at that point in time. So, you know, there were always probably a dozen or so occasions during the course of a year where I'd get to meet him, and we'd talk about either politics or local government or national government or sometimes, you know, just talk about personal life. So that's the period of time that I got to know him, the four years that I was mayor.

BO: And you said earlier in the interview you had some interesting stories you wanted to share, and this is the time we want to really, really capitalize on some of those stories that you shared with Ed Muskie. Wherever you want to start.

PD: Yeah, well let's kind of start with the inauguration because, you know, that was such a highlight, that was such a great event and he was such a big part of it. And one of the things that I wanted to mention to you is the fact that he did come to Lewiston that day with a seven [***sic*** six] hundred thousand dollar grant. And so not only was the inauguration a great thing for me, and not only was his presence a great thing for me and those people who were participating, the seven [***sic*** six] hundred thousand dollars was a wonderful thing for the community. And that's the type of thing that he could do because he was just, just so influential.

Then, he was also very accommodating. As I mentioned to you, during the course of the year there were al-, there would always be activities that we would like the dignitaries to attend, our congressional delegation. And most of the time when we sent him an invitation he would either show up personally or send one of his key representatives. He was very accommodating in regard to that. And when he was there, he was always, you know, the hit of the show because everybody was so enthused about having Ed Muskie there in the first place. And then he would just enthrall everybody when he gave a speech, whether it was prepared or impromptu, and most of his speeches were impromptu because he was so darned good at it.

And then he was always accessible. If we needed help it was easy to pick up the phone and he would always get back to us. It was easy for us to go down to Washington and set up a meeting with him, and he would always welcome us with open arms. And I think he particularly enjoyed people from his home state coming to him and asking for his assistance and he was always more than willing to help out.

When he became Secretary of State, this is just one incident about how accommodating he was to people from Maine, not only elected officials, but other officials. I was in Washington and he was Secretary of State at the time, and the controversy was going on with Iran with the prisoners and all of that stuff. And he was hotly engaged in that as you well know. And my friend who was with me at the time said, "Look, let's give Ed Muskie a call, and we'll just tell him we're in Washington and wish him our best." So he did. And Ed Muskie in turn invited us over to the, to his office. So off we went, and we showed up that morning, and you know, there had to be a hundred newspaper reporters in the foyer just waiting for him to come down to make a comment as to the progress of the talks. But we told one of the officials there that, who we were, and he said, "Yeah, we'll bring you right up, and we were ushered up to his office and his secretary said he'd be right with us. Within a few minutes he was with us, gave us a tour of the office, shot the breeze with us for at least fifteen minutes, and then told his secretary to give us a tour of the State Building after that. And this is while the world was waiting on Ed Muskie, the press corps was waiting for Ed Muskie, he took fifteen minutes to half an hour out of his time to just greet us, welcome us to Washington and give us a tour of his office, and told his secretary to give us a tour of the State House. And, you know, that's just the type of person he was.

BO: That's incredible.

PD: Yeah, it really was, I mean, I was amazed. And all we wanted to do that day was, you know, wish him good luck. And at that point in time he was probably happy to see a few faces from Maine because as you know, you know, that was such, such a hot issue, and the world was waiting, you know, on him and a few other world leaders to make decisions.

BO: Now, did you (*unintelligible word*). . . .

PD: And the election was going on at the time, too, you know, with, Carter was, no. Carter was out at the time I think. I think the election had taken place. But in any event, that whole host of activities, international, world-wide activities going on, he took the time to see us. It was kind of nice.

BO: Definitely nice. He's definitely a character. Did he ever invite you to any of the, any political events, personal events that you can recall?

PD: Well, when was it? The local political events, you know, everybody would get invited to those. His, his, events, you know, at home, at his home, I was never invited to. But there was one time when the mayors from, oh, about two hundred mayors were invited to attend a White House gathering, and at that time the SALT Treaty, SALT conferences were going on. The secretary of state was Breshnev, not Breshnev, it'll come to me, and he was giving the presentation and the president was going to address the mayors. And I got an invitation to attend. You know, Lewiston's a relatively small community so I really had not expected it, but later found out that Ed Muskie had a little something to do with it. So I got invited to the White House, I got briefed on the SALT conferences, and to this day I still don't know, you know, why mayors were being briefed on that. I think it was a political thing as much as anything else, or a PR thing. But it was kind of a neat thing to go to the White House that morning and get my

name checked out, and get searched, and get invited in, and then spend a couple hours in the White House.

BO: Were there any issues that Muskie brought up during his campaigns that you would agree or disagree with politically?

PD: I think, I think politically Ed Muskie and myself were always on the same wavelength. He was, you know, a liberal Democrat and my philosophy was that of a liberal Democrat, so I agreed with him. But what I think I enjoyed the most was not necessarily his political philosophy but was the power of his personality. He got so much done just through the power of his personality, not necessarily you know his political views or his political background. He was, he had that extremely strong personality and when you were in his presence, there was absolutely no doubt as to who was the center of authority or who was the center of attention, who was the center of things. But he had a charming way of doing all of this. He just endeared himself to people, even though, you know, he could be very, very demanding of people, you knew that he was doing it for a purpose.

BO: Do you ever recall any events, which would illustrate his ability to demand and be charismatic at the same time?

PD: He was always charismatic, and certainly he never demonstrated his temper in front of a political group or a local group, that I can recall. But, you know, his temper is kind of legendary, so we all heard. And, you know, maybe, maybe you know, when somebody's reputation precedes him or her, then people are less willing to take on a confrontation with that person.

BO: Big time, yes. What would you say some of Muskie's weaknesses are, or were?

PD: Yeah. I think his, oh, probably his only weakness, the only one that I could perceive is that he was sometimes so willing to be accommodating that he would take away from probably more important matters. But then again, you know, he had the skill to handle a lot of things at the same time, and I think in the grand scheme of things he realized that local contacts as well as state contacts were very important. So when, maybe when I thought that he was coming to Lewiston on what would possibly be for a national leader a relatively frivolous excursion, that in the grand scheme of things for Ed Muskie, it meant that he had to maintain his political base at the local level. But I would think that, that was, you know, the only weakness that I could perceive.

You know, he was just so intelligent, he was so forceful, he had the personality, the leadership qualities of a great leader. So in my brief contact with him, I perceived very few weaknesses. And then again, you know, you look up to people like this and sometimes it's a little harder to find a weakness in a person that you admire than it is in a person that you don't have that admiration for. So I really don't think I was looking for weaknesses. I was, I think influenced more by the force of his personality than any weaknesses that he might have had, and certainly any weaknesses that he might have had were covered up by the force of that personality.

BO: And, what do you think some of Muskie's personal as well as political contributions were to Maine? Not at the large level, because you've talked about how he's helped the cities, and how he's helped political people across the state, and how he's been so accommodating. But in what ways has he helped Maine on another level, or a different level?

PD: It's almost a spiritual one, you know. He brought a new, he engendered a new spirit to Maine politics. He brought the Democrats to the forefront through his leadership and example. I think he just rekindled a certain enthusiasm in Maine that was probably required at the time, you know. He brought, I really think he infused Maine and maybe the country with a spirit. And that's kind of an intangible thing, but you know, it's something that's uplifting, it's something that helps people think in a positive, enthusiastic way. I think he was able to do those things as well as anybody that I've ever known.

BO: All right, this is a perfect stopping point to change tapes, so I'm going to take this opportunity to do that.

PD: Terrific.

End of Side B, Tape One
Side A, Tape Two

BO: . . . . [Paul] Dionne and Brian O'Doherty interviewing on November 9th, 1999. I have a problem with that every time I start a tape. And this is tape two, side A, and we were speaking about Mr. Dionne's experiences with Ed Muskie and how Ed Muskie influenced Maine politics. I stopped you mid-thought, is there anything you'd care to add to what you were saying about rekindling the Democratic spirit and what not?

PD: Yeah, and not only the Democratic spirit, but you know, the spirit of people throughout the state of Maine. There are very few people that you'll meet in a lifetime that can have that type of influence on people. And Ed Muskie had it on people throughout the state of Maine. And whether or not you were of his political persuasion, I think you understood that this was a great man and a great leader, and would do a lot of great things for both the state of Maine and for our country, which eventually he did. But he had, he engendered that spirit, he had a way of doing it. And I think that was, that was certainly one of the large contributions which he left to the state of Maine.

BO: Do you remember any stories that he used to tell, any particular jokes that were characteristic of him?

PD: He had a lot of off-color jokes off the record. So he told me those jokes off the record, so I'm sorry I can't pass those on to you. You know, but you know, that type of stuff. He was a colorful character and he lived life, and he lived life enthusiastically. And, you know, as the pictures I see here, you can tell that, you know, he's an enthusiastic individual. So, he did the same in his dialogue with people, one on one. You know, he was enthusiastic, he wasn't afraid to tell a colorful story, but he understood that, you know, that was meant for whomever he was

talking with at that time and, you know, not for publication. So yeah, he had a lot of colorful stories. And certainly when he was, when he was speaking to an audience his speeches and his comments were just colored with some very interesting anecdotes.

BO: I'm dying to know some colorful stories, but I know they're off the record. Can you just give a basic, a basic background of some of the stories, I mean, can you just give a structural form and not the particular story? But, you can add a lot of insight into the personality of Ed Muskie I think only a few people can offer, and it's very important that we, if we can just get a little insight as to the characteristics of the stories?

PD: Yeah, yeah, and you know, I really don't recall any of the particular stories. You know, I just know that some of them were interesting and certainly a little off-color and not the type of stories that you'd tell before an audience. You know, that type of thing. If I was sitting down with a couple of my friends having a couple of beers, I would probably be a little looser in my conversation than I am with you right now, or in another type setting, and you know, I think it was that type of stuff. And certainly I don't want you to get the impression that these jokes were belittling of people or things of that nature. They're just something to provoke a little bit of laughter. That's, I think that was just the spirit of the individual.

BO: Good humor jokes.

PD: Good humor, right.

BO: Exactly, that's excellent. Do you have any impressions of Ed Muskie after he left the Senate and the Secretary of State office?

PD: Yeah, I got to see him. I was in Washington, and I was not there in my capacity as mayor, and he was working for one of the big law firms at the time. And we gave him a call and just told him we were in town, and he immediately invited us to his office. And off we went, ushered into his law office, and he showed us his law office and, you know, it was a very neat Washington law office with windows overlooking some of the historic buildings. And he sat and he chatted with us for about forty-five minutes to an hour, and he told us about, he represented, or his firm represented I think it was Nestle Tea at the time, and, or Nestle Chocolates. And he'd just been to Europe and he had been engaged in either discussions or negotiations in Europe and had been to some of Europe's finest places. He'd been to Paris, and I think he might even have been to Rome. And he told us about that experience, you know, how he enjoyed Europe and how he enjoyed Paris and whatever other cities that he'd gone to, but that it had been pretty intense. Whether it was contract negotiations or what, I don't remember. But it had been pretty intense, but he did have some time to visit and how much he enjoyed that. And I think at that point of his life, there were probably ambivalent feelings in that he was no longer I think at the center of power, but that he was having an enjoyable, comfortable life, and that he was earning a lot of money. I think a lot more money than he had earned as a public servant, and it was kind of a just reward for him. I don't know if that's where he wanted to be at that point in his life, but certainly it was a just reward for him, and he seemed to be enjoying it.

BO: Did he ever speak about his presidential bid or vice presidential bid in any respect, as in a joking manner or even in a serious tone, do you ever recall him referring to that?

PD: Never to me, no, no. I wish he would have because, you know, those were interesting times in his life. But no, he never mentioned that, and never talked about the incident in Manchester.

BO: How did you, because you were in law school during his presidential, or his reelection to the Senate and, 1972 is when he ran for president, the nomination. Did you, you were obviously following politics to some extent at that time, right? How did you feel about his presidential bid, were you a supporter?

PD: Yeah, no, it was very exciting to me because he was a native of Maine, and even then he was a legend. And he was not, he had not only brought himself to the forefront, but in so doing he had brought Maine to the forefront. And it provided a great example, a role model, for most of us at the time that, you know, somebody from the small state of Maine can really aspire even to the presidency. So I was pretty excited about it.

BO: Were your friends the same?

PD: Yeah, most of my friends were. I think it was a pretty exciting time. Ed Muskie always did very, very well in Democratic Lewiston. And, you know, if there was political talk about anybody in the households, it was usually Ed Muskie just because he had done so much, he had accomplished so much personally, and had done so much for the state of Maine. So most of my friends felt the same way I did. It was pretty exciting to have Ed Muskie running for president of the United States.

BO: Did you know of any Muskie Republicans while at law school? Or for that matter any time?

PD: You know, it never, I just know there were a whole lot of Muskie supporters and never really broke it down as to whether or not, you know, they were Republicans or Democrats. But I'm sure that the few Republicans that were from the Lewiston-Auburn area, from the Lewiston area, had a high regard for Ed Muskie, for his accomplishments and for his achievements.

BO: Would you mind, I have a few people here that actually have passed on and so we cannot interview them. And I was wondering if you could please give us your impressions of these people to some degree?

PD: Yeah, yeah, if I know them, sure.

BO: We're going to start with Lucien Lebel.

PD: Don't know him.

BO: Okay, Paul Couture?

PD: Yeah, right.

BO: Personality, his influence?

PD: Rough, gruff personality, very influential in what they call "Little Canada" part of Lewiston. Been a city councilor, been a state legislator. I'm sure always a strong supporter of Ed Muskie, but from divergent backgrounds. I think Paul Couture probably was an individual who did not have much formal education. Ed Muskie, I think his roots were from either a poor middle class family and worked his way through college and all of that stuff. So I'm sure, you know, they enjoyed a lot of the same experiences in their childhood in that they had to struggle for what they got. And Paul Couture was a fighter, he was a struggler, he was one of my city councilors during my second term.

BO: Okay, that was good. Robert Bonenfant.

PD: He was a sheriff, very nice man. I think that's the one you're referring to, very pleasant man. He died shortly after I think I started practicing law in Lewiston, and I think he was still the sheriff at the time. I knew his kids, he had two daughters, maybe a son. But I knew the two daughters real well, they were about my age. Part of, like Paul Couture, part of the local political group at the time, and I'm sure a strong supporter of Ed Muskie. I mentioned Paul Couture was a rough, gruff type individual, Bonenfant was just the opposite, a very nice, kind, affable individual.

BO: And, not being French I butcher these names pretty easily, Romeo . . . .

PD: Boisvert?

BO: Boisvert.

PD: Romeo I didn't know too too well, but former mayor of Lewiston. Always involved in local politics, was one of the names, it's one of the names that I remember when I was in high school as being a former mayor, and then got to know him a little bit when I was involved politically. He might have served on a couple committees with me, or I with him, but got to know him. A very nice, personal man, but involved, you know, in the political clique so to speak at the time, as most of the other people that you've mentioned so far.

BO: And Faust Couture?

PD: I did not know Faust Couture that well. I probably met him a couple of times, but I really can't tell you much about him.

BO: That's fine. Roland Landry?

PD: Rollo Landry was certainly intimately involved in local politics. He served at the county

level, and I forget exactly what. I think he was a commissioner, county commissioner for a number of years, always involved in local politics, was one of the few people that I could look down to because he was about five two, and I'd kid him about that. And a nice man, but good political insights. He usually would support, you know, the right candidates or the right group, and always managed to be with the winning side. You know, I think he was pretty astute politically.

BO: John Orestis?

PD: John Orestis, yeah, John Orestis was mayor of the city of Lewiston prior to my being mayor. I think he preceded Lil Caron. John and I were in high school together. John and I did a lot of things together politically. He helped to get me involved in the National League of Cities. And was probably much closer to Ed Muskie than I was, in that he was involved in a lot of the political fund raising, and I never got involved in the political fund raising, you know, part of politics. But John was always heavily involved in that, and he still is. And he was one of the people that I was with when we contacted Ed Muskie and went to see him at the State House.

BO: Really? He was your partner in crime.

PD: Yeah.

BO: That's great. Do you know if he still lives in the Lewiston area?

PD: John moved out of the Lewiston area. I think he's either in the Yarmouth or Falmouth area now. His wife recently passed away, oh, about six months or so ago. But he's not involved directly in politics now, he's usually behind the scenes, does a lot of fund raising. Professionally he runs a number of nursing homes throughout the state of Maine.

BO: All right, Hal Gosselin?

PD: Hal Gosselin was the father of one of my law partners, Paul Gosselin. And I got to know Hal Gosselin very, very well because he was one of those guys that was involved in the community, you know, that I remember as a kid growing up. And when I came back to the community at that point in time, when I was younger he worked at Bates Mill, and, I think he was one of the vice presidents. And then when I get back to the community he worked for the hospital, Central Maine Medical Center, and he was one of the vice presidents there. But he had a very engaging personality, and he was very complimentary of people. I know he used to write a dozen or so letters a week commending people as to what they did for the community or the state of Maine, or something like that. So every once in a while I'd get a letter from Hal Gosselin then call him up, give him a call, and thank him for the letter. And some of the letters were critical, too, you know. If you screwed up Hal would let you know too, but I'd call him up then too and ask him, you know, how he thought I ought to be handling the situation. But, always involved in the community; a good business sense.

But not as involved politically as some of the other people that you've mentioned, you know, or I

mentioned that were part of the political clique. Hal was always, you know, not directly involved, but certainly knew all these personalities and if he needed their help certainly could get it upon request if he wanted it, I'm sure. But not directly involved politically.

BO: Laurier Raymond.

PD: Larry Raymond. Larry Raymond was one of my law partners in the first firm I was with. That's, you know, the law firm of Marshall, Raymond, he's the Raymond. And he was a judge of probate for a number of years, and I think that's the only political office he held. But involved with a lot of local, state and national politicians. I know he was close to Bill Hathaway and got involved in a bunch of Hathaway's campaigns. Because I remember the first year I came to practice with the firm, he said why don't you take the day off today, tomorrow, it's election day, and go work for Bill Hathaway. I said, yeah, sure, you know . . . . so. And he had been involved, he'd made, you know, political contributions to Hathaway's campaign, and financial contributions to the campaign, and was involved with people like Muskie, George Mitchell, the Democrats that came through. So politically more of a fundraiser type, but had contacts with most of the people that you mentioned.

BO: And Georges Rancourt.

PD: Georges I did not know very well. I think Georges, I know he was city councilor and I think he might even have been mayor, but I did not know Georges Rancourt very well. I remember the name, you know, growing up. Even when I came back to practice law and got involved politically, he was out of the political circles at that time.

BO: And Ernest Malenfant?

PD: Ernest Malenfant was a mayor who was fairly elderly I think when I came back and didn't have too much, I didn't have too much to do with him but I, you know, I just remember growing up that he was mayor, one of the mayors of Lewiston.

BO: Are there any other memorable figures that . . . .?

PD: I'm sure in your research you're going to come up with the name Louis Jalbert. And Louis Jalbert, you know, when I talked about the political group at the time, Louis Jalbert was without doubt the leader of that group, and he was very influential in Augusta. And he sat on the appropriations committee and he was very dictatorial in regard to the way, you know, he did things, both in Augusta and locally. And if, you know, he wanted the legislative delegation to get behind an issue, usually they did. So, you know, they followed his leadership.

I can remember on a number of occasions where Ed Muskie was in town, Louis Jalbert was always there, and of course they'd always honor Louis by allowing him to say a few words, because he was very, very influential in local politics. And I had some political contacts with Louis Jalbert right up until the time that he opposed the University of Maine project. And it was kind of he and I that went head to head, and one of the reasons that he didn't support the

University of Maine project coming to Lewiston was the fact that he hadn't been involved in the group initially, and his personality was bruised. And as a result, once I found out, I tried to make it up to him, but at that point it was a little too late. So he kind of took me on in regard to that project and we had our shouting matches, which were on the front page of the newspaper. And there were times when it got pretty heated because I thought it was such a great project and for personal reasons he opposed it. And I can remember my daughters were very young and he said, one of the headlines was, "Mayor Dionne is a Liar." And my daughter read that on Sunday, you know, and that was Louis. That was, he was a very intimidating type guy and if you took him on, you know, you could, you had to expect that type of stuff. And my daughter read it, and she said, "Dad, this man is calling you awful names." So, for my daughters, Louis Jalbert's always been kind of a bogeyman. But I understand, you know, what he did before that and, you know, what goes around comes around politically. We organized a group to run, we organized a candidate to run against Louis, and at that point in time he had run successfully I think twenty different times for two-year terms. So he had been I think in the legislature for about forty years and our candidate beat him, and that was kind of the end of Louis Jalbert. But during the Ed Muskie era, you know, he was kind of the boss man insofar as politics was concerned for the Lewiston-Auburn, for the Lewiston area.

BO: That's an impressive story.

PD: Yeah, yeah, I know, that's an interesting story. And, you know, prior to the University of Maine issue, even though, you know, we were never close I always enjoyed his support because he would come to our law firm, I'd handle some of his cases. He was a big crony with Larry Raymond, and he would send a lot of clients our way. When I got elected mayor I'd get a call from him at least once a week trying to tell me, you know, how to run the city, and they would usually come at six-thirty in the morning as I was coming out of the shower, "Now Dionne, I'm going to tell you what to do." So, you know, we always had that love-hate relationship, but it came to an end with the University of Maine issue.

BO: Are there any other names that you (*unintelligible phrase*)?

PD: That's, that's the big one. John Beliveau, John Beliveau, Bob Clifford, two of the really dynamic mayors in Lewiston's history. Bob Clifford's now a law court judge and John Beliveau's a district court judge, and he was one of my former partners. And these two people were mayor when Ed Muskie was at the height of, well almost at the height of his political career, and I'm sure had a lot of dealings with him. And so those are two people that were probably as involved with Ed Muskie as some of the people you, some of the other people that you mentioned.

BO: Is there anything that we haven't covered already that you'd like to add, whether about Muskie, your own political involvement, the times, before we conclude here?

PD: No, I think you've done a very thorough job. As a matter of fact, you know, maybe broadcasting should be your career, you do a very good interview, you do.

BO: Thank you very much, I appreciate it.

PD: Yeah, yeah, I've done a lot of interviews and I can say you handled this one as professionally as most.

BO: Thank you very much.

PD: Did a nice job.

BO: Thank you very much, Mr. Dionne, we appreciate it.

PD: Oh you're very welcome, very welcome. Take a quick look, and I don't think, you probably

End of Interview