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Elwell, Eben oral history interview

Don Nicoll

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Interview with Eben Elwell by Don Nicoll, Stuart O'Brien, and Rob Chavira *Summary Sheet and Transcript*

Interviewee

Elwell, Eben

Interviewers

Nicoll, Don
O'Brien, Stuart
Chavira, Rob

Date

June 23, 1998

Place

Augusta, Maine

ID Number

MOH 029

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Biographical Note

Eben Elwell was born on January 20, 1921 in Brooks, Maine. His father was a farmer, and his mother a homemaker. Both parents came from active Democratic families, and participated in Democratic politics themselves. At the age of eight months, Eben contracted Polio in the same epidemic that struck President Roosevelt. He attended Morse High School of Brooks, and enrolled at the University of Maine. World War II interrupted his college career, and he went to Portland, Maine, to build ships. He returned to Brooks in 1946 and became active in town politics. He was on the board of selectmen, serving as the overseer, and also served one year as town manager. He made a living by collecting liens on area properties. He eventually was nominated for the school committee, where he served for six years. He became active on the Maine Democratic Committee, and eventually won a seat in the Maine Legislature. He brought forth education legislation that reimbursed school departments for interest on school building loans. He was also active in roads and agriculture, and served as minority leader. Eben sold insurance for a time, and was appointed State Treasurer. In 1966, he made an unsuccessful bid for the Democratic First District Congressional nomination. At the time of interview, he lived in Augusta.

Scope and Content Note

Interview covers the following topics: family history; polio; Waldo county railroads; Brooks history; Morse High School of Brooks; working at a boatyard during World War II; Returning to Brooks; collecting liens; chair of selectmen in Brooks; Smith and Hoover election; Brooks town manager; illegitimacy in Maine; Maine School Board; bussing; Ed Greeley; Maine School Bill of 1955; becoming Democratic; fraud in Augusta (William Runnels); being a Democrat in Brooks; reevaluation in education; Republican dissent from Cross; Ed Greeley in the 1954 campaign.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: June, 1998, we are at Eben Elwell's home in Augusta, 143 Cony Street. Don Nicoll, Tuck O'Brien and Rob Chavira, interviewing for the oral history project. Eben, we'll start out by asking you to give us your full name and the date and place of your birth.

Eben Elwell: My full name is Eben Littlefield Elwell, born in Brooks, January 20th, 1921.

DN: And you grew up in Brooks?

EE: First forty years of my life I spent in Brooks, born into a family of twelve children, the seventh son.

DN: Seventh, were you the youngest son?

EE: Youngest son, seventh. I had three younger sisters.

DN: And what was your father's work?

EE: He was a farmer. He'd had some training at Castine Normal School as a teacher, but he worked here in Augusta. At the time that he was married he came down here and worked in Augusta and worked for the gas company, gas and lights. And then about the time of, just before I was born, he went back to Brooks and bought a farm. The farm was near where he was born.

It was a farm that the family, had been in the family since the first settlers, and his father's name was Horatio, and his father's name was Ebenezer.

DN: So in a way you were named for your great grandfather.

EE: Well, indirectly, but I had a cousin who was named Eben for him, name was Eben Littlefield, and he was an active Democrat, was county attorney for Waldo county. He became, to my best knowledge, the first commissioner of labor for Maine, had an office in Portland, and I don't know if they gave it that exact title then. And my sister used to work for him after high school. I don't know what business college she went to. I don't remember. But she used to every night when they had closed the office, she took the newspaper with her -- they would have it in the office -- which was the New York World Telegram. And she'd put it in an envelope, put a stamp on it, addressed it back home. So we got the New York World Telegram a day late. In fact we used to get the Wall Street Journal.

DN: Now where, when was this that your sister worked for Eben Littlefield?

EE: It would be around '28, 1928. And I can first remember it during the, for the election of 1928, and of course having it been a New York paper, we got some rundown on Franklin Roosevelt as governor, carried those news. And then one of the things that you're going to be interested in, I'm sure, in my early childhood, when I was eight months old I caught polio in the same epidemic that Franklin Roosevelt caught it. He passed through Maine

DN: That was about 1921, right?

EE: Yup, August, he passed through Maine in that epidemic and came down with it at Campobello. And just coincidentally, I ran into a little while ago a person name Delano who caught polio that same time.

DN: At that same time?

EE: Yes.

DN: You were living in Brooks at the time?

EE: I was living in Brooks and the local doctor gave the first decision on it, but I went from there to the Eastern Maine General Hospital where they cut my Achilles tendon, which was a mistake, and then I went to the children's hospital in Portland twice, once for a bone graft, another one, I broke that leg, and by this time I was nine years old. So I have a brace on my leg now, which has got to be changed. Going to have it done tomorrow far as I know.

DN: You'd be interested in knowing that that children's hospital is now part of the University of Southern Maine. It's their outreach center and where their continuing education programs are housed.

EE: Right. Now, they had a Dr. Abbott and a Doctor Mahoney, and Abbott was the older man and had been in the profession, he had worked in the field longer. Dr. Mahoney was a younger man, very dedicated. He had appendicitis, he wanted to make another round around to see his patients, his appendix ruptured and he died. But I got real good service there. I went down, incidentally the first time I went down, I went down with Eben Littlefield, he'd commuted from (*unintelligible phrase*), he came home to see his brother there in Brooks. And another time I went down with a man who had worked for us on the farm who was in Boston. And another time I went down, my sister being down there, and they just put a tag on my coat and just told them, the conductor, if we went from Belfast to Burnham to make sure I got the right train to Portland, my sister was there to meet me at the train.

DN: Now when you went to Portland, you went to Belfast and then took the train to Burnham and changed there?

EE: No, the train came through Brooks, the railroad came through Brooks. Let me tell you, now that you've brought the subject of the railroad up, the railroad was built during the Civil War, at the time of the Civil War, and there was competition and it had to cross Maine Central. The name of the railroad was Belfast and Moosehead Lake, they were going up to Moosehead and had to cross at Burnham, the junction, and Maine Central, by the time they got to Burnham decided they didn't want them to cross. So they didn't allow it so they bought out the railroad and they had a junction there at Burnham. So when it came up by the farm where I was born, the predecessor there on the farm, man who lived there at that particular time, didn't want the railroad to come through. He fought it. They came through his pasture and they came up through what they call Long Bog, there's not much bottom in the bog. And after he finally gave up and, you know, can't win 'em, join 'em, he took a contractor, put the base in for the railroad, he put it in in the winter on the ice, when they come back the next spring all there was a dark streak in the bog where they'd put the gravel that had settled.

The town made a commitment to the railroad, the town went in debt to help finance the railroad and I have a letter from one of my great uncles who was in the Civil War and he told about the horrible town of Brooks for their debt that they'd accumulated and I happened to be in office when we made the last payment on that debt. I'll tell you about, how we come by the surplus which was set aside like a sinking fund, but I don't know if you want that at this point.

DN: We'll come to that later, okay? So you were sick as a child, as an infant, really.

EE: Well, I really wasn't physically sick other than my leg, and I got around fairly decent. Rita's got a picture of me when I was two years old, sitting on a cart with one leg in each hand so it wouldn't fall off and go under the wheel, my brother was hauling the cart. But I learned to walk the same time that Franklin Roosevelt learned to walk. I feel quite fortunate, now he's been gone fifty three years. So, no, I was healthy enough far as my body was concerned, but I didn't bounce around quite as much.

But my father had the blacksmith build me a brace, steel brace, and it was heavy to put on a boy's foot, my legs weren't that strong. So I used to get on the bus and go to school, but when it

come time to play scrub baseball I'd take it off and play scrub without the brace. And I had some limitations but I could throw good and I could hit good, so they took, you know, in scrub they choose up and I'd get picked about the third person down. So I never, I didn't go out for baseball or any sport when I was in high school, but when I was a senior one of the boys who was on the club, and we had a building team that year, asked the coach to try me out for catcher because they weren't too strong in that position. So I went out to try out and they put me in the game and I stayed there for the rest of the season. But it was quite a challenge, I looked down at first base at a long, long way, you know.

But in the winter time I cut wood for pin money so I stayed muscled up like Carlton Fisk over in New Hampshire. And I could swing an axe, and an axe weighs about twice as much as a baseball bat, and I would try to see how hard I could hit with that axe and I learned how to get the axe back and get a snap on it and get that extra clout into it. So the first time at bat I was scared and the adrenaline was flowing, the guy threw a high fast ball, about right there, and I stiff armed it, it went out. I got out, I drove it in the park, inside the foul lines, got onto first base, and the first baseman whose picture I've got here somewhere, that I hadn't met then, you know, one of the boys over at Albion. Anyway, he said, "That's going out, you don't need to hurry." So I was stopping at first base to see where the ball went and I saw the fielder run around back side of the fence.

So after that I figured I'm going to swing for the fence every time and I watched for them to make a pitch to put it in there and I drew half walks. And the guy who asked me to come out told me later that they had the on-base percentages for the club and I had the highest on-base percentage, and I thought I couldn't get to first base, you know, it's a long haul. But it's a good, you know, builds your courage up for any player, any athletics, but someone who's got a disability that can make the grade, so it helped me.

And I'm going down to a class reunion on Saturday and I told Rita, got a fellow that I caught when he pitched, and the last time I saw him, which was, it's been fifty-nine years since we graduated, and the last time I saw him which was probably twenty years ago, he come walking up to the car and I said to Rita like I did here, "I can tell you what he's going to say, he's gonna want to know if I remember a certain ball game." And he said, father speaks of it often, his father came to watch him play, and he, he had good control as a pitcher but we didn't have that strong a club, we got to about the sixth inning and he'd done pretty well, we put a man on base and I think this is it, so I walked out to the mound and I said, "Norm, make like I've given you the ball or something," take it back with me, so we had a home plate umpire, local umpire at the home plate, so there's a runner led off this base looking towards second, the first baseman looked at me and the umpire said, batter up, and I got the first baseman right there so that guy hadn't even looked, didn't even see the ball until after it hit the mitt. So his father thought that was good, it could get the pressure off the pitcher, you know. But he remembers that play and then I had a few more lucky breaks that I got. So they would say that I was tricky, and I got it in my reputation after I got out of high school, being tricky. (Laughter).

STU: Where'd you go to high school?

EE: Well, that's an interesting thing. I went to Morse High School. You know where Morse High School is? Well, there's a Morse High School in Bath, but there's a Morse High School in Brooks. They were given both, contributed by it by the same man, Charles Morse. Charles Morse was an ice tycoon. He sold Kennebec River ice down in New York City and one day he got a corner on it and he bought off the other companies and then he raised the price, doubled the price, became a millionaire overnight. But he made so many enemies that he tried to buy back some good will with his gifts. So we didn't need a high school particularly in Brooks, but we got one as a gift.

And when I went to the legislature, Rodney Ross, Jr., down to Bath, he was one of the leaders. And so we were chatting one day and he asked me where I went, oh, he saw in the, what we called the obituary book, descriptions of every member, that I had graduated from Morse High School. He says, "I don't remember seeing you there, I graduated that same year." So there were two and it was very well confusing. But I learned the day after hearing the conversation about building the school, something about the politics of building a school, come in handy later.

But they had a gift of the school and the chairman of the town official got the mail in and he had what you'd call what a rotary file where he'd throw the new mail on top and took the old mail out of the bottom. And they had so long a time to accept the gift and he got down about that time and somebody was there when he pulled the letter out, they went downtown and passed the word and people began to think that would be pretty nice to have a new brick school house and what it would do for the town. And then they began to compete on whose store it was going to be the nearest to. Hell with the kids. And they had an architect make a rendering for a certain street facing south, and they changed their minds afterwards and took the same plan up and faced it the other way against the sun. And then they, the site that they first were going to put it on was a, had a good base, ledge. The site they did put it on, the frogs used to sing there in the spring. So then they had the chairman of the building committee who got voted down on what he wanted and one of the . . . matter of fact one of my cousins, was on the job on the construction, he said that they, somebody told him that they didn't have anything under one corner of the building, it was on the sod and it would settle. He says, "I don't give a damn if she falls right over in to those pines." This is the way the feeling ran.

Now, they had a building given and they had several town meetings and fought about it, to, where to locate the school vis a vis the stores. And that come in, our knowledge of what was, how they went at it came in handy when Liberty, who also had a building given to them and wanted to build a gymnasium beside it, and they got the gymnasium half built and they got to squabbling and it's foundation is still there. And that was another town that give us trouble.

DN: Now when did this all occur?

EE: Nineteen thirty-three. I was in the fifth grade. And incidentally, the first year when they built the building, it had a wardrobe to put the clothes in, we had to put buckets in the wardrobe to catch the water coming down. And Jean Boucher took the contract to build the school down to Lewiston.

DN: Jean Charles?

EE: Yeah.

DN: I'll be darned.

EE: But that problem with the leakage was, they were late in the fall and I think the mortar chilled because I, so

DN: After you graduated from high school, did you go on to college or did you go to work?

EE: I went to the, started at the University of Maine and Rita had just had a 40th anniversary, 40th or 50th

DN: Must be your 50th.

EE: And they had the different members there and had pictures of the buildings on what they call Hungry Holler which is the, I don't know if you've been there, if you've seen it, not the university cabins but the Littlefield cabins, so we rented there, I forget what we paid for rent. I did the cooking, my brothers were there and another young fella from Gorham, then we'd go home on weekends and my mother would bake an apple pie and we'd pick up something to eat at the store and had a fella come up from down to Ellsworth, dug clams, and he'd bring us up a pint of quahogs, so we had a certain routine that we, we took our own fire wood with us, so it kept the expense down.

But it came right so that the war was forming up and some pretty good jobs opened down to Portland so I went down and went to the planning department in South Portland Ship, and went on and I became the supervisor of the planning department. Had a union. I was on the executive board of the union, had twenty-five thousand members. It was a union job, so I had a little bit of experience there.

DN: Now this was the shipyard where they built the Liberty ships during the war.

EE: Right, they had twelve ways, east and west yard, one toward Bath Iron merged with the South Portland Ship. So, my job was to see that things went on schedule and they're gonna lay a keel tomorrow morning, we had to know where all the steel was that they were going to have and if you got a piece of bad steel, which we would get now and then, a piece of laminated steel that they rejected, not suitable.

One night in particular I think of is, we had a piece of steel that was ten feet wide and thirty feet long with specs which meant we had 40.8 pounds to the foot, square foot, about twelve thousand pounds, so in the wintertime in a sleet storm, and I was inside in the brick office, brick building for an office, superintendent left and the first shift, I was on the second shift, got to have that steel in the morning, so I stayed on it and the guy, superintendent of material handling had to

bring it in from across town. Imagine a piece of steel weighing twelve ton, twelve thousand pounds, and you had to have it in a rack, like a card file, and they'd take a hold of it and put it through, onto it this way, pick it up, put it on a truck in a sleet storm. So next morning I got some flack, so all I said was, well you got your steel, right? That's what we wanted, so that was the end of that. But that was the way, what the job was, and usually things were going smoothly, there was just a lot of paperwork.

Three hundred thousand tons of steel that we were supposed to know where it was and know when it moved. And we had to, without a computer, had card piles that somebody reported on the card where it was, and then we would have to send a checker, an expediter out to verify what the record showed before they'd come to deliver that section to the ways. So

DN: You were there from when to when?

EE: I was there from September 1942 to 1945, came back in '45. And they were still trying to keep a run on everybody far as the labor was concerned, with the war effort. But I figured when they got back, down to Brooks I was my own boss. And I was eligible for unemployment insurance but I fought it philosophically, otherwise they were going to tell me what I had to do, they wanted me to go picking apples on a ladder. And so the guy, quite officious, matter of fact he ran against me for the legislature later, he told me that, where on the farm I was going to go and what I was going to do and I decided I wasn't going to, and never did any more about it.

But that was the year before I went into town affairs and they were changing, they had some problems in the town government. They had a lot of back taxes, real estate taxes and the town was in debt. It didn't have enough money the first week I went into town government to pay the school teachers. I went to the bank and they said, Eben, we can't loan the town money without co-signers, and we usually get so and so. One was a factory manager and the other one was the First National Store owner, and that was a canning factory. Then they said, we'll expect you to sign if you just built a new house. So I signed a note for thirty times what they were paying for salary, thinking that I'm going to collect those taxes.

They went back to the first year that they were putting liens on, they went from the old tax deed system into the lien, on a system of liens. So I checked with my predecessors and asked them what the story was on the liens. They said, well, "Art Bussey," who was the senior attorney in the county, "says, 'They're not worth the paper they're written on.'" And I said, "Did he tell you why?" They said, "No." Well, I said, "I looked them over and obviously they were put on good faith and I'm going to have to assume that they're all good until somebody breaks one."

So I took the biggest lien, and I had a stack about this high, put the biggest one on top, it happened to be a man who owned the property where I hunted, I'd see him early in the morning. I went to his house and I said, "Louis, I've got a lien here that says we own your property. We don't want your property, you got a problem." He says, "Eben we haven't got any problem," he says, "I just can't get out to the bank to _____ my Central Maine Power Company coupons." Of course, Central Maine coupons were pretty good then. I says, "You're telling me then you want a ride. When do you want to go?" He didn't have a car. So he said, "Eight o'clock Monday

morning.” We went down and he took his coupons and he asked me to wait while he went down this way, down the street to pay some bills, and down the other way, then went back and: “Gosh, that was easy.” And I began to look them over and started working my way down through and I got about two thirds the way down through, I said, “I’m gonna get every one of those, one way or another I’m going to collect every one of those liens.” And I had a theory that when you do a job, it takes about as much energy to do it on a compliance basis as it does on an all out basis to accomplish as much as you can. And I wanted to go into politics and I wanted a reputation so I got every one of those taxes and people that signed, or co-signed for the town, one of them was the Republican town chairman, the other one as I said was a factory manager, so when it come time for me to run for office, the Republican town chairman was one of my supporters.

DN: Now, you told me you ran, that you went into town government, you didn’t tell me what the office was.

EE: I was chairman of the town officials.

DN: You were the chairman of the selectmen? Board of selectmen? Okay.

EE: Which included the assessors and overseers of the poor. So I had to be involved in the assessing and I wanted to be the leader in the town, chief executive officer they call it now. And I was a young squirt, and I found that some of the guys that used to come to town meeting and polish the selectmen . . . the apple with the selectmen, making motions when they need them and all that, they got, their taxes weren’t quite so high as somebody else with the same property.

So one day, and I had a fellow in my class who was taxed for it, so one day they come up and the guy’s property was valued something like four hundred dollars, [*brief interruption*] and I said we’ve got to do better than that. And the guy come and I talked with him and I said your property’s worth more than that. He said no. I said, “Well look, I got my checkbook with me, I’ll give you a thousand dollars for it.” He said, “I don’t want to sell it.” I says, “You aren’t saying it isn’t worth a thousand dollars, so we increased it.” So when the tax collector went to collect the tax, he said, “I’m not going to let any goddamn bunch of boys run me out of town,” but he paid it. And, there was very few that we changed but be corrected and made a map, tax maps, to show where the different property was, had some that hadn’t been taxed at all because they didn’t know where the property . . . they’d get the wrong piece of property on a wood lot, something back in the woods.

So anyway, when we got all through, we had borrowed from the bank with the co-signatures, paid the teachers’ salaries. And when it come time the next year to borrow money, we got a letter from the bank saying that we could borrow more money than we had the year before, when we had co-signed and paid six percent. They offered to loan us more money without co-signatures at one and a half percent. And I’ll never forget, we had an old time Democrat, Clyde Holmes, Sr., not Clyde Junior, you knew Clyde Junior, Clyde, Sr., and he chewed tobacco. And when I went into the bank he had a grin across his face and the tobacco juice on his teeth, but he, you could see that he was happy to see somebody, see a Democrat doing a job, you know.

DN: You indicated your father was a Democrat. Had he been active in town affairs?

EE: No, no, he had a big family, see, I told you, I was one of twelve children, and he was a hard worker. But he, because of his friendship with Eben Littlefield, who was in politics, county attorney and a member of the state, under Brann, he kept in touch with him and they always talked politics when he come down. And so, but he did, following the New York World Telegram and then when we got the old Atwater-Kent radio we could get Roosevelt with the earphones on the radio, he stayed pretty closely involved there. And then my mother was always after me to follow Roosevelt because, see what he did. You know, you can't go out and do, try to cut wood, different things that the other boys do, so you gotta get into something that, where you use your head. And so I used to listen to Roosevelt's speeches and I just got carried away with the guy because he could say what he wanted to say, you know.

I was telling somebody the other day the difference between him and Bill Clinton, and I got nothing against Bill Clinton. But when Clinton went in, you know, the word was passed that you could roll him, and some people tried to, and currently try to. So when they went after Roosevelt, he, Eleanor was on the road all the time traveling, the boys were married and divorced and married and divorced and so, even his little dog was running around getting over the fence and mixing the breed on some of the other Scotties in the neighborhood. So the word got out and they'd run it all through the press. So he gets on to rebut it and he says, "I've heard the stories, the rumors," he says, "I want you to know I don't like it, Eleanor doesn't like it, my sons don't like it, and Falla¹ doesn't like it either." Well, this ridiculed them, you know, so this is the way he could stop people taking everybody down. When he got, in his inaugural, his first inaugural, he laid the picture out and you remember, about "Nothing to fear". But he said in that statement that there's nothing to fear but fear itself. He said that the money changers have been driven from the high seats in the temples of our civilization and those temples may now be restored to the ancient truths. And the measure of that restoration lies in the extent to which we apply social values more noble than mere monetary profit. So then when he comes up with this program and the Republicans, whom he said were the money changers and made the mess, he says they come back now and tell us, let us do it, we can do it better. And, trust us. He said, they say, cross my heart and hope to die, this is the way he would enunciate, you know, and, but it would, he'd lay it on so hard that everybody had to chuckle.

And what I wanted to say though, the general effect of what he did, the way he operated, was the politics of joy. He had humor, a bright outlook, he was a guy off his feet. And Winston Churchill said, "You walk into the room where he was and see that smile," he said, "It was like the first two drinks of a good bottle of champagne. But he had that, the bounce in his talk and people would be talking about it, farmers would, two or three days afterwards.

DN: You spoke earlier about reading the New York World Telegram that your sister sent and you talk about the speeches that President Roosevelt gave. Those were speeches and those were newspaper articles that you were reading at a fairly young age.

¹ Falla was the name of the Roosevelt family dog.

EE: When I was seven years old, I can distinctly remember, I was down in the field with my father, and they were talking about the election of Al Smith and Herbert Hoover. And my father was lobbying him for a vote. And I remember my neighbor saying, I'm just about discouraged, Joe. My father said, "Well, you should be ready to vote for Al Smith." He says, "I can't do it Joe, you know, he's Catholic." And that made a dent in my brain. How could we miss getting a better man than, we elected, Hoover, because a guy was Catholic. And I thought of it, even to up when Ed come to run. But to show you how Republican the area was, they, when we went to school, we had, some families, you know, they taught politics and they taught Republican, and we had this kid about fifth grade, and the other kid was singing, "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah," and he was singing, "Glory, Glory, Herbert Hoover." But, there was this, as partisan as it was, when it come time for me to run for the legislature, I didn't run for the legislature the first time around, as that job.

DN: Now you, let's back up and get the sequence. You came back to Brooks after the war, and when did you first run for selectman?

EE: The first year. I came back in April and then the next March, I

DN: March of '46.

EE: Forty-six, yup.

DN: And how long were you the first selectman?

EE: Three years, and then I went in a year as town manager. I recommended to the town that they change over to the town manager system, modified town manager system, with the intention that I'd get out of there. And then there began to be competition of who's going to be town manager. And they elected a board of people who were friends with me, and they hung on for me to stay, so I got one year at that.

DN: That was '49.

EE: That would be '49, yeah. Then in '49, well, through up, let's see, we had the surplus, but when I collected taxes then, we went from a deficit to having extra cash, so the school department, we had, we were in a school union of some five or six towns, and they started having overdrafts. And I said to them, "Look, the law says that you have authority to spend what money we give you and no more, and you have no more right to spend a dollar over that appropriation than somebody down street has, wants to walk into the office and do it himself." So I held up with that line, and we had arguments at town meeting about what was, how it should be run.

And the school superintendent, who was a young man from Aroostook, and usually we got inexperienced superintendents, named Gallagher, nice young fellow, but the school board had to help him out on making the budget and so forth. So we come down to this controversial meeting

and we were going to try to hold them in line, he gets up with a blackboard in front of the, and he knew that I was one of the guys making noises, you know, blackboard in front of the town meeting, put his budget on it and as much as said, shut up or put up. And I went up and borrowed his chalk, and he had six sections in the budget. Found an error in every one of them. Made him acknowledge it. The first one was that he had a bus driver and a janitor. The guy did both jobs. But they carried him in the books as janitor, whereas if he'd been carried as bus driver, the state paid half the bill. So I said, "Why don't you break that down the way it should be broken down or else put him all over as bus driver." I said, "There's so many thousand dollars involved as far as the subsidy is concerned. And each item, they'd overlooked, you know, they hadn't done their homework."

What happened was, how I knew the school budget. I built a house beside the current superintendent, and he was superintendent in nine schools. And he come home one day and set down on my lawn, leaned up against the light pole, he had all the payrolls from the town for the year, and he kept a running total on everything, and then, so he sat down, he showed me how the school subsidy formula worked. This come in very handy later. Ed, if he was here, he could tell you how. And so, I had that in my head and I followed it along and I knew the finances of the town, and school teachers didn't get much pay, you know. As I recall, I think the guy got fourteen dollars a week, junior high school principal, or teacher, but it was money, it took up more than half the budget, the school budget.

But knowing that they, and I debated the issue of tuition students, because our town had the building and the other towns around had to come in to go to school to it, but they, and their home town didn't provide transportation for the kids. Boys and girls at high school age had to hitch a ride with somebody going to work in Belfast or whatever, or some other person that had a car. Well, the result was that girls was getting into cars they'd rather not get into. We had the highest illegitimacy rate on the coast of Maine any place in the nation, back at that time.

DN: That's in, you're saying the coast of Maine generally, or?

EE: General, coast of Maine. And back when Gary [Elwell] was going to college and would bring kids home and lament about it, you know. Right now you look at the numbers and we're on the other end of the spectrum here in Maine. And I argue that it's because of the busses; they're picked up at the door in the morning, they're delivered back at night, they're picked up for their extra curricular activities and they're supervised from the time they leave the house until the time they get home. And so, nobody's thrown into a situation that they wouldn't want to be in. And I had, personalities, people that I know now, nice people, you know, foolish hearts, you know, but they got into problems. And, so that's one of the things I put the, give credit to the school district for.

DN: You were town manager for one year?

EE: One year, and then that year they wanted me on, put on the school committee after I'd straightened out that selectman, the budget on school. And so my cousin was on the board, and somebody nominated me for the board, school board. Now this is something, again, thankless

job at fifteen dollars a year, and you had the headaches of So I said, "I won't be a candidate against the incumbent," and, thinking that I had a good excuse, you know, my own cousin. He withdrew and wouldn't run so then I lost my excuse and I went on for six or eight years.

DN: What were you doing to earn a living while you were on the school board?

EE: Very interesting, very interesting question. I'll give an example to show you where I was. I made probably ten percent of what, well, I made less than ten percent of what I earned before being on the selectmen. And one day, along with being selectman, I was overseer of the poor. And I don't know if you remember the old pauper laws that they had back then where, if you had a person from your town go into another town and fall on for help, they would give them the help then they'd bill you for it. And we had this case where a First World War veteran had passed away and left the wife, fairly young wife, and she'd moved to Belfast and started having children.

And one day I went down to Belfast shopping, something for supper. And chief of police in his summer ducks, I guess you call them, with this gold on his hat and all, met me on the street and he didn't say hello. He said, "You know that Gibbs family you got down here," he says, "you better be getting a barn ready for them up there because I'm going to load them into a hayrack and ship them back to you." And I knew that they could, see. So, and it was my job to not let something like that ride and I had it in mind that I should have nursed that case along. So I knew where they lived, or she lived, and I went down to the house, and here she had the boy in the kitchen and a baby in her arms and a man there hanging on to pant legs, called him Daddy. And I said to him, "Do you think it's right for you to be living here and raising a family without getting married? He said, "No," he says, "I just never could get enough money yet to do it." "Well," I said, "don't worry about the money." And I went up to the mayor of the city of Belfast, named Hodgkin Buzzell, he used to be president of the Maine Senate, real strong voiced guy and opinionated, and, he was justice of the peace. But I knew him, I'd taken him to the fair with my dad and drove a car for him, my father didn't drive a car. And so I asked him if he could perform the marriage and he said, "Yes," but we gotta have a waiver of the five day law, and you'll have to get them to sign this waiver. So I went down and they signed the waiver. It was saying that due to an emergency, the emergency being a child being born of whom this man is the father, whatever the man's name was. So I go back up and, but on the way down he says, "Look, it's gonna cost twelve dollars and if they haven't got it, you gotta have it for them." Well, I had just about twelve dollars in my pocket that was going down street shopping for, to do the shopping. And we performed the, he performed the wedding, he sent me down to the sidewalk to get a couple of witnesses to cover it.

Well, I got headed for home and felt pretty good, you know, got that case off the town, and I allowed that the woman wasn't having babies over there by herself and probably the guy that I'd get would be a Belfast resident and that chief of police could work with him after that, you know. So I got home and Rita said, "Where's the groceries? Well, I spent the money I took in my pocket to go down to buy groceries on, the twelve dollars to," which you could buy your groceries for twelve dollars then. She said, "Look, it's one thing to be public spirited, it's another thing to be a public damn fool."

And this is about the role I was playing, you know. We had other cases like that, that happened to fall our way, so I got a hell of a lot of support from the town, one for collecting the liens which the old town, none of them had ever collected, and the other one for cleaning up the pauper thing. And I did it because I wanted to accomplish something and I'm, very frankly, I just wanted to establish a record that I could run on if I wanted to run for office.

DN: You were looking to run for office and you were on the school board and Rita was facing no groceries.

EE: Well, she cooked me dinner that night. We had to scurry around. I had two or three businesses that I ran, I bought a hundred acres of property that had a gravel pit on it, then I bought another pit over in Monroe and so I tried working other businesses. And I took a job, they come and hired me from an insurance company that was coming to the state, Concord Mutual, Concord General from New Hampshire, I built up about five hundred customers for them, and that got me around the district so I, I knew people. And what I did, I went about that in a businesslike way. I'd go down a street or a road and I'd stop at every house. And it's against the law to take anybody's insurance, if they've already got a policy you can't twist it, take away from the company it's in, but you can put in a little notebook when it expires, or when they have, and you come back on that week before that date, make a comparison for them. So I picked up a lot of insurance that way. In fact I got the, my competitor in town, I worked it around so I got his business. He come to me to buy his car insurance and I had a pretty good recommendation, especially from his clients. He'd buy his insurance from me, you know, why should he, but I wanted to tell you though about

End of Side One
Side Two

EE: the overseer of the poor then. But I wanted to tell you something that I forgot. When I'd go to school on the school bus, it took us an hour to go and come each way. And the biggest problem was, in the winter time it was colder than hell, sit there, you know, without moving. And so by comparison, the way things have changed since then, at least ninety-five percent of the kids in Maine can go to a, commute to college in the time it took me to go to kindergarten or first grade. That's the change that's taken place, as far as highway travel is concerned, with the modern busses and improved highways. But one day when I was about seven years old, I went to the post office for some reason and there was a lady there about thirty years old, very, very pretty lady, and very friendly. And she was married to a turnkey at the jail, and mind you, I've told you that Eben Littlefield was county attorney. And she had to be a Democrat in order to be in the post office. She knew my name, Eben Littlefield, and she beamed a look through the window and wanted to talk with me, and I got treated like I'd never been treated before. She could see a vote there, some twelve, fifteen years ahead, and you know the person, Phyllis Murphy. How about that?

DN: Oh, my. Phyllis was later state committeewoman.

EE: That was seventy years ago and I'm telling you, she was a beautiful lady. She was when she was older, you know. But she was the most friendly because she knew that I was named for the county attorney who was the ranking Democrat in the county then.

Now I want to tell you another one that I overlooked, too, as far as politics are concerned. The first year that I went on the board as selectman and I had a fairly good public relations thing going, they asked me if I would let them write my name in on the state legislative ticket as senator. Well, I wasn't ready to run for anything then, but they, I let them put my name on, I don't know why. So one day I was in the First National Store, shopping, and the guy who owned the store asked me what I thought about Eddie Greeley who was the incumbent senator. And I said, "Eddie Greeley is probably the most effective public servant in this county." And here I was supposed to be running against him. He told Eddie Greeley that, and Eddie Greeley became one of my best friends. When I got ready to run for the legislature, he come up for one of those meetings we held in the lodge hall, you were at at least one of them, and stood in the back and told people he was related to me. I haven't figured out yet how, but I was awful happy to have him say it, you know. So, that guy, when he coached me on how, what to watch for on bringing a bill in the legislature. He says, "You don't, you've got to have support, and don't start counting your supporters. Look for the guy that's gonna screw you." That's the word he used. He said, "He'll keep going back to the legislature." He had a different way, every time, every day of killing a bill we had.

DN: Now, what was the year that you were written in for the senate?

EE: When I was written in, I don't know that I was written in. Yes, I guess I was. That would be 1946, and I think that was the year I met Ed [Muskie].

DN: So you met Ed during that campaign?

EE: I went on the state committee that year, too. Guy [Twombly] and Phyllis [Murphy] wanted to get off and they put me on. So I met Ed in Hallowell, in the old Worcester House, and I don't know if he was chairman but he was leading the debate, the discussion. And somebody brought a bill in, Adrian Scolten who'd been a candidate for governor, brought a bill in for a clipping bureau where they were clipping newspaper items and putting them in an album for him. And he was running for the exposure that he was getting, he never expected to win and I guess probably didn't want to. So Ed took issue with it, would not go along. And he said, "Clip is the word, to the clipping bureau," that was his pun, you know, that's the way, that was his trademark. And I thought having seen him stand up there, run the thing the way it ought to be, I got, it really gave me some encouragement. So from time to time we bumped into each other. Ran in 1954, we had just a shade under ten percent of the legislature, and that's when I brought my school, then we went from ten percent to twenty percent, and that's when I brought the school bill in.

DN: You brought the school bill in when, '55?

EE: Fifty-four, yeah '55, but I wrote it in '54. I come down and visit the legislature in September and I was introduced to Bob Haskell, and, I guess it was Greeley that introduced us,

and he said, “He’s a Democrat.” Bob says, “We don’t say Democrat around here, we say Damn Democrat.” That was my greeting.

DN: Let’s, I want to have Rob ask you about

RC: We sort of glazed over your high school career and the one year at the University of Maine. But it’s really integral in terms of your political development. I’m curious, just ideologically what sort of, what were you going through at that time?

EE: Well, you mention high school?

RC: The end of high school.

EE: Yeah, but I, in my senior year in high school I was still, I had used Roosevelt’s speeches in the prize speaking contest, had one over to Colby, and used it at the intramurals, debated in high school. And then I had the class oration and I had this, it wasn’t one of his speeches, or one with the same outlook as he would give, you know. And so then when I went to the University I was started with the pre-legal course and I was what they called a special student, whatever. And so I took the debate course, what debate courses I could get and radio, and I So we had debates on local subjects. Brooks Brown was in my class, he was a senior and I was freshman. You know Brooks? And, of course he was in the legislature later.

DN: Yes, leading Republican, lawyer and lobbyist.

EE: Yeah, yeah, so, I forget your other question.

RC: Towards the end of your high school career you mentioned that you used Roosevelt’s speeches during prize speaking contests. What other sort of extra curricular activities did you do in high school, in your senior year or beforehand?

EE: Well, I had an hour ride from, in the morning and an hour ride at night from home so I had a little longer day, and we didn’t have a way to get home if you didn’t go on the bus. So I played baseball and took part in the intramural prize speaking between courses, between classes, and between schools, among schools. But I, that’s about the extent of my extra curricular activities.

RC: You say when you went to the University of Maine you were vehemently Democratic. At that age, what was so influential to you that made you?

EE: What made me Democratic? Well, the biggest thing that touched it off was the Al Smith election and electing somebody because they weren’t a Catholic. And that partisan politics just seemed to play such a heavy role in everything we did.

And, I’ll give you, and this is something that happened during my high school years and it’s something that’ll give you an insight into state government. Had a robbery in the state government and the accusation was two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and that was a hell

of a lot of money back then, it would have been equivalent to a couple million dollars today. And Barrows was the governor, Republican governor. And the man's name who was suspected was named Runnells, R-U-N-N-E-L-L-S, William Runnells. And we read about it in the paper and we got part of the information, which I got the whole story on later, and I guess the story will be a lot better if you tell it all in one piece than to break it up into two pieces.

But the man was controller of the state and being controller under the system that they had, they issued the checks in his department and they had a numbered system, everything was coded with a number. Very few people knew the codes. He could walk into an office and pass them a piece of paper and ask them to sign it and they didn't know whether it was debit or credit. He knew it. The treasurer issued the checks, mailed the checks which he had issued, and the checks come back from the bank and they went back into the controller's office. And if there was a check that come back address unknown, someone in there could say, too bad to waste that one, and they could endorse it, take it out to the bank and cash it.

But at any rate, they didn't have any proof in the beginning, so the governor called him into the governor's office and he put a book on the corner of the governor's desk, entitled One Hundred Ways to Embezzle. And they didn't call attention to it, but they made sure he saw it, he did see it, and he walked out of the governor's office through the council chamber, he had a big briefcase that people joked about because they, he changed, he was a bachelor, a fastidious dresser, he changed his tie several times a day, and when he got into the council office which was empty, he opened that up, pulled out a pistol and put it up there and pulled the trigger, and didn't make a go of it. So they rushed him to the hospital and the news hit the press and his mother heard the newscast. And she put two and two together and realized that there was a problem.

So she went to his room to see what there might be that the police would find when they come, and she found an album, ladies that he had dated, and they had one thing in common, they were all nude. She thought now, she recognized faces, individual faces, and she thought this was going to be bad for those nice people, so she took a pair of scissors and she cut all the heads off and destroyed their faces and left the bodies there for the police to find, the state police, local sheriff.

So they came and they looked at the album and laughed and guffawed a little and then they shook their head and, got no evidence. One cop, officer piped up, says, hell, I know that one, that's Big Red. So they checked with Big Red and asked her if she'd ever dated the state controller. She said yes, and they asked her where they went and whatever, she said they went to Boston for a weekend and, well, they stayed at the Hotel Statler. And so they called the Statler and they asked the desk clerk if he could check through the records and see if Mr. William Runnells ever had a room there. He says, "Oh, as a matter of fact, he has a suite of rooms there now." Here he was over in the hospital with a bullet through his head. And I got this from I think the attorney from Maine municipal, Frank Chapman, you know Frank? He was local in the town.

So they, the guy recovers and they put him in jail and they held their hearings and all and they

got him convicted for about fifty thousand dollars, leaving a couple hundred thousand dollars unaccounted for. One morning they went in to give him his breakfast and this time there was a pistol beside his body. He was dead. And they didn't know how he got the, who shot him or whether he had, somebody brought in the pistol and he did it himself, or whether somebody shot him through the window and threw the pistol in.

So then everything was opened up suddenly, they began to hold hearings and they called the treasurer in. And this old lady who was, worked for the treasurer at that time, told me this story. She says, I was asked to testify for Mr. Smith, and because he, quite embarrassing, you know, it looked pretty bad for him. She says, "I think I saved him." She says, "I testified that he couldn't possibly have been involved in any such intrigue, because he only came to work on Wednesday morning to get his paycheck, otherwise than that he was in Bangor." This was the system. You're not ready for the treasury yet, probably.

DN: No, we've got other things.

RC: All of these things are, you're describing as influential to your interest in politics, and you said that you took as many debate courses as you could and politics was really important to you. What were your aspirations? What did you want to do in particular when you were at U Maine, or what did you see yourself as doing?

EE: Well, I thought of a legal career, but stepped around what, money was pretty tight and I didn't get any scholarships, and what money I could earn in the winter time or during the summer and then go back and have in the fall. And things weren't too good on the farm so I didn't get help there outside of living at home and getting food on weekend. Mother baked pies, I said. But I had sort of thought whatever opened itself up, you know. And I talked with my mother about it and she encouraged me and wanted, she liked Roosevelt very much.

Now, Brann was governor, he broke the ice in Maine for one, in '32, but they roughed him up. Allowed he was a drunk and, in fact he came to town, I was about eleven years old and when he come into the hall somebody a little older than I said, "Oh, he's tighter than a teddy bear." His face was red. You know the name of the, of his chauffeur down to Lewiston. Maybe he's still alive. But he's much older than I am. He may not be though, but last time I saw him he looked pretty healthy. I forget his name. But at any rate he didn't carry legislative, enough support, though he got some, that was the last time that a Democrat from my district was elected, and Tozier from Unity was elected in '32.

DN: What was Tozier's first name?

EE: Lloyd.

DN: Lloyd Tozier?

EE: I believe, yes. I didn't know him well, but, so when we come to campaign up there, he was one of the people. But I'll, if you're ready for that, . . .

RC: Oh, I have just a couple more questions and then I'll let Tuck go in further in your later political career. I'm curious, what was the ultimate reason that you left University of Maine? Was it financial?

EE: Well, partly that and the war work was opening up and, we got married in '42, 15th of February.

TOB: How'd you two meet?

Rita: The 14th, dear, we were both very romantic.

DN: Ah, married on Valentine's Day.

TOB: How did you meet?

EE: How did we meet? In school. Well, let me tell you, while there's time that I remember, I was in church, it was on Memorial Day

TOB: Is this in Brooks?

EE: Yeah, and we had one church, Congregational Church, so everybody went to that, and I was asked to give Lincoln's Gettysburg Address for the ceremony and we had a minister who had been, he was an old timer and he'd been a minister during my wife's, my mother's lifetime, and she had a lot of respect for him. So she particularly wanted to see it, and so Rita and her mother were sitting in the front row or whatever, in the church, so that's where I first remember seeing her. But she told me afterwards that, what was it your mother said, "Who is that little Jewish boy?"

DN: Because his name was Eben?

Rita: I guess.

EE: But that's where we met, and then we knew each other through grade, through high school, and got married before I went to Portland. We had, well, lived with my sister first winter, then we bought furniture, which included this table. This table was in the World's Fair, physically, this same table, 1939, so it's become an antique while we've owned it. And the desk in there was, a man, we couldn't get an apartment because of the war, and a furniture salesman had an apartment and he was going to be moving and he said, if you buy my furniture, I'll just let you move in behind me. And I think the bank owned the building, I think that they, as long as they know that the rent's coming . . . so I sent Rita in to pay the rent the first time, took advantage of her

Rita: He wasn't going to take any hassle, you understand, I had to. He almost said he wouldn't take the check, and he said, "I don't like this, I don't like this sub-letting," but he took the check.

EE: So we got an apartment, which was hard to come by. We'd spent a couple of, I spent a week in the barracks down to the shipyard.

Rita: Did you forget that I spent a week there with you?

EE: Well, I spent more time and you spent part of your time back home.

Rita: Yes, you did, but I also spent a week in the barracks.

EE: So that's the sequence there. We lived on Meeting House Hill in South Portland, right by the church.

DN: Congregational Church.

EE: Yeah, and that's where, and the minister was named Guptill.

DN: Nat Guptill?

Rita: Yeah, Samuel.

EE: And his brother was my high school teacher, the one who,

Rita: Orville.

EE: Yup, that helped me pick the article for my class oration, and, I was out of, in high school I said I made excuses for not making valedictorian, but I did get voted "Most likely to succeed" the other class members. And we're having a class reunion Saturday, 59th class reunion. Not a very big class either. But I had a chance to learn, you know, about the tuition that the kids coming in, and one of the things that we debated in town meeting was about the value of the tuition students to a school structure. When you had a town that didn't, without school districts that we got now.

And I remember giving the school board a hard time because they were discounting tuition for the sake of building up their courses. They didn't make that point very clear, you know, that a student, because you couldn't, if you had five, three or four students in a Latin or French class, it wasn't very efficient where the teacher's concerned. Pick up a half a dozen more tuition students, you could justify that class. So when it come time at the town meeting, and they were running behind financially and they weren't keeping their numbers together, so I was trying to explain to the townspeople what the problem was. And they weren't too convincing, but they were taking in tuition students for less than our capita cost.

And I said it's like the guy who went away and got into the business of manufacturing pencils. He come home and he had a new car and you could see he was making money. So somebody asked him how he did it, well, he said you know, we found that we can manufacture pencils for

two and a half cents apiece and sell them for two and a quarter cents. The guy said, "Well how do you make a living doing that?" He said, "It's the volume that does it. That's the story of your tuition students, you get enough of them you'll be all right." Well, they had that saying. They put somebody on the school committee and one of the other guys, which he would be nitpicking, he'd say, "You're just still counting pencils."

But, one of the jobs that I had in town office gives a little humor, a couple of them as a matter of fact, that I'll try to get in. I had to issue the permits to carry concealed weapons, and one night, on a Sunday night, we had a fellow who got drinking and, guy who'd come home from the service and the man's wife was running the central office, telephone office, and he was up visiting and the husband got to drinking and he went up under the window and began to yell threats at them. We could hear it down the home where I lived because windows were open

Rita: Well, he yodeled just in case we didn't know something was going on, he was yodeling also.

EE: So when I went to the, the guy was holed up up there, but you know, that he was hollering at, and the town office was right across the street from where he kicked him out. So he saw me in there and he come down, and dodged right across the street and come in and asked me for a permit to carry a concealed weapon. I thought, I can't do this. So I said, "I'll tell you what Lester, you tell me who it is you're fixing to shoot, if it's somebody I think needs shooting, I'll let you have it." He turned on his heel and he went out and he went to my opponents, you know, thinking that they're critical of me. And they, one guy coined the name Little Caesar, because I wouldn't let the guy have a permit, and he was one of the top guys down to the American Legion, he was a professional sailor I guess he was. But anyway, nobody got shot, and, that was one of the items that I thought I'd, took some pride in to clearing.

*(Aside discussion between Rita and Don about food.)
(Phone interruption)*

DN: Razor or Raynor was his real name, R-A-Y-N-O-R.

RC: Crossman.

DN: C-R-O-S-S-M-A-N, was an auctioneer and a county commissioner and several other things in the Democratic Party up in Somerset county.

EE: Corinna, town of Corinna. You don't want that story now, right?

DN: No, I think there are others that

RC: Now, if you could for us just go over the chronology of from when you joined the selectmen in Brooks until when you ran for state representative in '54.

EE: Okay. I ran for representative in '54 first time. But I didn't let them write my name in for

the Senate in '46. And I put off running but I had met Ed and I started to tell you, we came down through the county to go to Campobello and on the way he come by a beached whale. And he, so when we I took my two cousins down and very few people were there, maybe at most half a dozen, but they, he made an impression on them so that they were inspired. And back when I did run for the legislature they were there with their car bringing votes in. For Ed and for me. So, I did another writing that I wanted to mention but maybe it'll come up later.

TOB: So the chronology of from the time you joined the selectmen in '46 until you ran in '54. You can just give us the years that you did certain things, when you were on the Waldo county committee, and

EE: Yeah, okay, that was the year that, it'd be, you say '56 that we had Stevenson up, that sounds right. All I did was just go around to try to get people to enroll. I was on the road with insurance and we'd talk politics and so I managed to get members.

But one of the cutest things was I used a telephone a lot. And it was the local telephone, Liberty Telephone, and the town clerk who was rank Republican, her husband was chairman, but he was friendly. She was rank. And there's some things that happened there. One thing was that she could, no one could call (*unintelligible word*) because they had to be itemized, she'd know the people that I called, and when she made up a new phone book one year, she left my name out of it. My little daughter, the kids at school mentioned it to her, you know, tears running down her cheeks. But this troubled her because I was doing the groundwork, you know, and making the calls and getting people up for the elections and all, and long before I ran for office.

So inasmuch as I had my name written in in '46, I told the members in the committee that I didn't want, that I wanted to run, but I didn't want to run on any such arrangement with write ins or people who just wanted their name in the paper. That anybody that wanted to run with me, I'd like to get some people to, otherwise I'd run alone. So I made an issue when they did get, run alone. I would say to people, "Is this good government? Do you want it? There are twenty big candidates about in the spring primary time among the Republicans," so they had a AMeet the Candidates" night, the extension service held it, held it down in Swanville. This would have been in the spring of '54, and I went down and on the way down Rita said to me, "Now, you don't want to get into an argument with Emory tonight." This is the guy that called me Little Ceasar, he had a booming voice and a hot temper, and he was in the legislature in the seat I wanted, but he was retiring and running for the Senate. So on the way down Rita says, "You ought to give him wide berth because you've got no quarrel with him, right?" I thought, "That's a damn good idea," but he sat beside me and the issues come up, the three Rs: reapportionment, reclassification of highways, and reevaluation of the towns.

The reapportionment of the legislature called for by the constitution, they weren't doing because they'd lose votes for the cities growing, and the rural area not growing. And reevaluation of the towns meant we got less money for schools, school subsidy. And then reclassification of highways, they could take a road that the state was maintaining, throw it back on the top.

So we were, happened to be, they happened to be debating the reevaluation and I got my charts

and I insisted that I wanted, that instead of having me come up one out of every twenty times, that you should have Republicans and Democrats, so every time a Republican spoke I got a chance to speak. So, came this issue of reevaluation and I said, "Now I want to make a point. I'm not blaming the legislature for passing a law that changed the rules on reevaluation, they didn't pass any laws, this was done in the executive department, it's right in the lap of the governor," and this guy pops up, bad? He says, "That's a lot of political gobbledy gook," he says, "it wasn't done by the governor, that was done by the bureau of taxation." And he realized he'd put his foot in and he sat down quickly.

I got up and smiled and made sure that everybody could see I wasn't mad, I says to him, "You say that that wasn't done by the governor but was done by the bureau of taxation. Now, we have three branches of government. We agree it wasn't in the legislative department, would you say it's in the judicial department?" He shook his head. And I said, "That leaves only one, the executive department, the governor is head of the executive department, and it's in his lap." He never said any more. So then Bishop comes in. He says

DN: This is Neil Bishop.

EE: Neil Bishop. And that's when the thing started, and he said, "I've got to agree with Mr. Elwell," he said, "Governor Burt Cross," he said, "you shouldn't expect too much from him for education, see, this reevaluation cut our subsidy." He says, "He isn't an education man, he isn't an educated man." He says, "They say he's a highway man, I'd say he's a highwayman." And he's got all the Republican candidates there. And they pricked up their ears on that one. Somebody said the state house ought to settle over a foot on that one. You see, he'd run for governor the year before, two years before, and he had his brief case and he made a splash and he got thirty thousand votes which is enough [of a] block to switch an election. So then he starts in, he says, "You know, I was brought up in a good Republican home and told to stay away from them Democrats because they're the rum party." He says, "as I got to growing up, I thought I saw some Republicans drinking rum." And he said, "And lately I found that they can drink just as much rum as any Democrat, and there's Fred Palmer right over there in the corner to prove it." That candidate for county commissioner, about three sheets to the wind and his face was red and he was laughing with them, you know. They were laughing at him, he didn't know it. So the thing really took off then.

So, but some of the meetings began to stir up some interest, so next morning with Guy and Phyllis, I was on his doorstep, but I said to them, "Now look, you're old time Democrats, he's a Republican at heart, so why don't you just let me go in." And I go to the door and knocked on the door and he come to the door and he said, "Well, we waste a lot of time in politics don't we?" Which is pretty clear. "Well, I guess we do, Neil, but I got some things I wanted to ask you about." And he, "Well, come on in." So we go in the bedroom where he had his briefcase that he'd used in the election two years before, under the bed, he pulled it out and it was all dusty and he dusted it off and opened it up. He started taking things out that he'd used in the campaign. He had a series of newspapers with the headlines on them. One of the said, Twelve Thousand Dollar Bribe Claimed, this was for the governor, the former governor. Wait a minute.

DN: That would have been Fred Payne.

EE: Yeah, and then another one, Papalous has Governor's Unlisted Number. Headlines, and there were three or four of them that were good things that, if you looked at them you'd remember, things would come back to you, you know, the things that you didn't like when you saw them the first time. So I set these to one side and somehow or another we got together with George Hale, who you must have driven with with Adlai Stevenson, right? George was an advance man for him in '52.

DN: He didn't come back though in '56. He wasn't in that trip, '56.

EE: Now wait, he wasn't in '56, but was in '52?

DN: I think, I remember Hale from '52, yeah, but not '56.

EE: Okay, that's when you, that, so they set up the tv station that year, so I worked it out with him, he was very much in sympathy with what I was trying to do, he gave us a half an hour for Bishop to go on tv. And we took an easel, that stand in the drug store with the newspapers on it, we put those newspapers with those headlines right where the camera would be on them. He didn't mention them, but all the time, that half hour, people were looking and remembering what was there. And it went over good. So then we got another half hour and they called it Special Events, and the next time we took a ballot, a big blow up of the ballot, and then we had the straight ballot voting, so if you put that

TOB: The big box?

EE: big box up the top, that took everybody down. And so Neil said, "Now if you're thinking of splitting your ticket, don't make that big 'X,'" he says, "you have to go down here and pick out all the names that you want to vote for," of course he had my name in there, and put the 'X' after their names. And he ran that by with a pointer, and he got people doing two things. One, they were thinking of first of all the mechanics of splitting your ballot and thinking of that they began to think well now maybe, do we want to split our ballot, and of course he's got plugs in for Muskie, and a Cross every now and then. And Ed in fact, we got, they had five thousand members of a Republicans for Muskie committee before that was over. Had Millett up to Palmyra, or not Palmyra, I don't know if it's Palmyra, near where Perry Furbush lives, I guess, Perry Furbush.

DN: Yeah, Palmyra, (*unintelligible phrase*) Millett.

EE: Oh, that's right, that's right. And then the county chairman, the Republican county chairman came with his, he presided over that meeting that I told you about.

DN: Now what was his name?

EE: Donald Swanville Thayer, Donald Thayer. And then we had the town chairman down to

Searsport, Searsmont, who was superintendent of schools, Louis Gray. And, who were some of the others? Well, the people around, basically we had to have these people to make noises, you know, so that we're covered. Then we had the guy who was in Rita's class in school and we all, she was a couple classes behind me, who wrote for the Kenn-, for the Republican Journal, he was editor of the Republican Journal. So I got about five hundred words a week in there and he liked the tone that I, you know, soft sell, so that the Republican paper could carry it, and I saw, in here I saw the editorial comment on something

DN: Oh yes, the Republican Journal.

EE: Yeah, and so to have the Republican Journal in Waldo county

DN: What was his name by the way?

EE: Russell Grace, but Al Nolan left down there and went to Vermont, and he's been on the governor's staff about ever since, whether they were Republicans or Democrats, he stayed as assistant or something on staff. I saw him back in, well we come down for, when his mother passed away, and, but I wanted to tell you about

DN: Excuse me just a minute, Eben, I wanted to make sure on one name. The Russell Grace you mentioned in connection with the Republican Journal, also known as Rusty Grace?

EE: That was his son.

DN: Rusty was his son?

EE: Right. Yeah. And so, Al's mother was the one who worked so hard for the Republicans and she used to, she worked that every day. She'd come down the street with a shopping basket, she'd have applications in there for voting, whatever. She would give people, she was soliciting, she'd give them a ride to church. If you wouldn't do it, she, you wouldn't get the ride. She'd bring voters in, haul voters in except once in awhile she'd take one, just by being in doubt she could switch it. I remember one day, one woman she brought in and she was laughing, she says, "Betty thinks I'm going to vote Republican," but she was going to vote Democratic of course, you know, she made a big deal of it. But, here's the way it worked in the town office as far as, in the woman's home, far as being registrar is concerned.

Came the 1948 election with Harry Truman, and things were pretty rank, people had their minds pretty well made up anti-Truman. These two guys that worked for me, lived on the farm, and they'd come in the night before, afternoon before or early evening, and wanted to know if they could get on the vote, if I thought they could get on the voting rolls, what they had to do. I says, "You get in tonight, but you be careful because if you don't say the right things she'll, you'll carry over and you won't get on at all. So just make damn sure she doesn't know that you're going to vote for Harry Truman because she'll find a way to stall you." So they go down and they come back and they're laughing, splitting their sides, and I said, "Apparently you got on the voting roll, how'd you work it?" He said, "We did just what you told us." And I said, "What did

you say?” “Well,” he said, “she was making some small talk and I said, A Goddamn that Harry Truman”, to the town clerk, and she said, Aoh”. After that she opened the book right up, he said. That’s how, I did that just to try her, and to be, you know, an upstart, that I liked to do because that’s part of the joy of politics, you know. So, we never did get the numbers up.

But let me give you an idea of the way she operated. I was an officer in the church, she was treasurer of the church, and they didn’t have much insurance, a thousand dollars on the church. So I said, “Hell, I’ll, what I’ll do is I’ll put some insurance on and call it a contribution. If I’d just done it and not charged them, it would have been a twisting, you know, a rebate, rebating.

So looked out, and by God they had a little fire in the church, in a waste basket, setting up against the wall and stained the paint on the wall. So I said to my brother-in-law who was a painter, carpenter and what all, “Why don’t you go down and take care of that?” He was active in the church. And he said, “Sure,” and he did. And he took a little paint and a paintbrush, he was no time at all in fixing that up. So, I said, “Now give me a bill because I can collect from the insurance company on this. “Oh, that didn’t, it took me a few minutes, I’m not going to put any bill on that.” I said, “I’ve got to have something for a bill.” “Well, call it ten dollars, I’ll take ten dollars.” So I run it by to the Aroostook Insurance Company, and took the check and I took it in to give to Fanny. She said, “We can’t, I’m not going to accept that, that’s not enough money for it. I’m just not going to accept the check.”

So I put it back in my briefcase, in my billfold, had it in the seat of my car, thinking well, I’m going to have to find a way to work that out. And I was calling on a guy to take his temperature far as the election was concerned, he says, “You know Fanny’s telling a story about you. She says that you took the check for adjusting the insurance on the church and put it in your pocket and never brought it back.” I says, “You want to come with me, and I opened up my billfold and there’s the check and that’s just what she says, it’s true, there it is. I don’t know what I’m going to do with it.” She was using that in the campaign, and that’s the level that they’d work on. It was rugged, you know, especially if he hadn’t said that to me, the guy come up and he told me, thought I ought to know.

DN: What did Ed Greeley do in the ‘54 campaign?

EE: Well, do you remember the story, I thought maybe you were behind it, putting the story in the Downeast Magazine, with the picture of Ed Muskie down there to Greeley’s pasture?

DN: No, I wasn’t behind that, but go ahead and tell the story.

EE: Okay, well one of the things, of course he came to our meeting, you may have met him at, when he was at one of the meetings. But I took Ed out because I wanted to get Republicans on record for supporting Ed. And Ed Greeley had said that he liked Ed and that he used to go in the house and listen to his speeches, and he said, you know, you’d see him in the Register the next day, it was called the Ahorse blanket”, every word punctuation, letter perfect. Of course, Ed could dictate that way, he could speak that way, but oftentimes people wouldn’t record it as he said it so we edited it every night to make sure that horse blanket didn’t get out without

everything letter perfect in there. And he says, "I used to go and listen to him speak," and he says, "I can remember when he would speak the people would turn around, up in the front, and want to hear him, listen to it but look at him when he's speaking. He'd get their attention." And he spoke very highly of him and I thought, well, it's not going to be hard to get him to come across, but he was chairman of the highway committee in the legislature.

So we come to a meeting one day, went to a town meeting, and he [Ed Greeley] said, you know, I went down to Augusta this afternoon, knowing he's having a meeting tonight, wanted to get some answers. And he said, "Went out, on the way down, going down to Augusta, they were painting a white line on the highway," he says, "When I come back they were tarring right on over it." That set his mood, you know. And he had something that he wanted for, money from the state, highway department. And David Stevens had been appointed by Cross for an efficiency man, hard nosed; and so he refused it. So Ed says, "What am I going to tell the people tonight down the town meeting?" "Tell them that son-of-a-bitch of David Stevens wouldn't let you have it." So, that's the way he talked, that's the way he operated, he was, you know, when it come time to allocate money And this is an example and it's a pork barrel. If we wanted some money for a road, we had a state highway running right up from Belfast to Moosehead Lake, right through Brooks and it was a road that had never been built through part of Brooks. So the guy who was chairman of the Republican town committee ran the First National Store and it affected his business, whether we had a good road through or not. And we were talking about it, he says, "I think that I could help, make a call," he says, "and get an in with the highway commission," he says, "they owe a favor," the chairman was Lloyd Morton. So I go down and I make an appearance for that road, and get a letter back. I didn't tell him I was a Democrat and he didn't tell him I was a Democrat but they were doing it for him, not me. And I got a letter saying that as a result of your conference we have awarded four hundred dollars.

Well, of course that was money in a little town back then, we could pass that letter around and get votes on it, you know, you'd accomplished something. Four hundred dollars the way I had it figured would build fifty feet of road on a state highway at the rate it costs to build state highways, which wasn't very effective. That was the pork barrel system. So when I went in the House, that was one of the things that I killed. I spent all winter, Dana Childs will tell you, I sat right behind him, he was floor leader, Republican floor leader before he became Democratic floor leader. And I rode them, and they put the, they changed the, they named the bill hardship money. They were going to pass it off, and I said, "Yep, it's hardship if you've got somebody that can't get elected without some help, you'll give him some hardship money."

TOB: Tape's about to run out, so we'll stop.

DN: We can reschedule

End of Side Two
End of Interview

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